SLOVENSKÝ NÁRODOPIS SLOVAK ETHNOLOGY 4 68 • 2020 ARTICLES sciendo

The Importance of Employment in Roma Social Integration: Looking Back at the Early Years of the Decade of Roma Inclusion

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.2478/se-2020-0018 ©Ústav etnológie a sociálnej antropológie SAV

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This article critically compares Roma experience of the key role of employment in the period of Communism with that during the following two decades. It draws on my experience as an ethnological researcher from 1969 onwards and also later as an investigator evaluating Roma inclusion programmes for the European Commission in countries seeking membership of the European Union. It comes to the depressing conclusion that the majority of Roma remain largely excluded from mainstream society in spite of their own considerable efforts to improve their economic and social standing, as well as various initiatives of the European Union and NGOs. This situation poses a threat not only to Roma themselves but to the stability of the countries in which they live.

Keywords: Roma, inclusion, exclusion, employment

How to cite: Guy, W. (2020). The Importance of Employment in Roma Social Integration: Looking Back at the Early Years of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. Slovenský národopis, 68(4), 311–323, DOI: https://doi.org/10.2478/se-2020-0018

WHY CONSIDER THE PERIOD OF COMMUNIST RULE?

This article mainly addresses the problem of the limited employment opportunities for Roma in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) during the early years of the twenty-first century. So, why might it be helpful to consider what happened in previous years? However, the continuing influence of a distorted view of the past – especially misrepresentation of earlier contributions by Roma to the economies of countries where they have lived and still live – is highly relevant. Specifically it lies at heart of prejudice that has often determined employment possibilities denied to Roma and conversely what roles have been thought appropriate for them. These widespread perceptions severely reduce the prospects of their future contributions.

On this issue an eminent Roma sociologist, the late Nicolae Gheorghe, made two highly significant comments. Firstly, that in the past the Roma labour force had been both a useful

and important resource in Eastern Europe and secondly, that the economic impact of their contribution had never been studied (Gheorghe, 1997: 159).

Other researchers saw Roma employment as a key factor for their social inclusion since unemployment was the main cause of Roma poverty (Ringold, Orenstein, Wilkens, 2003: 1). Furthermore, social relations between Roma and non-Roma were mediated through work. This is a more complex point based on the fact that Roma were never self-sufficient and occupying their own territory but have always lived as a minority in lands where others formed the majority. They made their livelihood by providing goods and services to the dominant non-Roma. Gheorghe (1997) argued that the social identity of Roma (in the eyes of others) derived from their marginal (pariah) employment status and this damaged identity was then used to confirm stereotypes and thus underpin their continued exploitation.

THE ROMA LABOUR FORCE UNDER COMMUNISM

Roma are often represented – and resented – as work-shy parasites, wholly dependent on the undeserved generosity and tolerance of host societies. However, before they lost their former jobs following regime-change after 1989, the employment levels of Roma were frequently equivalent to those of the general population.[1] The most frequent male occupation was that of unskilled labourer but it was commonly believed that these were artificial, worthless jobs invented by Communist regimes[2] where Roma didn't work hard but simply turned up to collect unearned pay, heavily subsidised housing and other benefits such as free hand-outs. In this way Roma were said to have expected the state to provide everything for them – in other words to have developed a dependency mentality which was seen as a major problem in employing them in the post-Communist market economy.

In contrast to these views it should be noted that, as labourers, many Roma men worked not in peripheral, insignificant jobs but in maintaining the national infrastructure – rail, road and telephone networks, in the construction industry as well as in factories, mines and steelworks.[3] In rural areas Roma worked in forestry and state and co-operative farms, feeding the population, but unlike previous peasant landowners they received little or nothing in recompense for their years of labour. In spite of having larger families than the majority population, many Roma women also worked, most commonly in agriculture, in factories and in the service sector.

While the extensive growth of the Communist command economies increased demand for unskilled labour, Roma were active in grasping these new opportunities. In many cases they sought more onerous work if it was better-paid rather than accept easier but less well-remunerated employment.

Research carried out for the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), among others, testifies how Roma took pride in their labour and worked extremely hard to better

1 A 1968 sociological study found that in Czechoslovakia employment rates for Roma were higher than for Slovaks (Machonin, 1969).

2 For example, Stewart writes of 'the creation of phantasmagorical "socialist" jobs for the Gypsies which disappeared as soon as consumers had any choice over what they purchased' (Stewart, 2001: 87).

3 One team of Roma labourers from a segregated settlement in eastern Slovakia, where I was living during my doctoral research in the early 1970s, had the unenviable job of stripping linings from blast furnaces and worked double shifts, i.e. sixteen hours a day. To meet production targets they had to start work as soon as the furnace walls had cooled sufficiently to allow them to enter but spoke of the unbearable heat and one displayed severe scarring from burns across his back (Guy, 1977: 514–515).

their situation, often at the cost of their health. In important respects their profile is characteristic of classic migrant workers, which indeed they often were in moving from rural to industrial areas for employment during the Communist period. Roma were economically rational in taking labouring jobs rather than remaining longer in the educational system. Manual work was more highly paid in Communist times and offered them the fastest means of accumulating savings, for example to build new houses in their home villages.

However a growing but relatively low proportion of these Roma had hopes of their children attaining higher status and encouraged them to pursue further education. Some from these further generations went on to achieve technical qualifications as skilled workers while a smaller number became university students.

EXPLANATIONS OF POST-1989 ROMA UNEMPLOYMENT

Many unskilled workers in Central and Eastern Europe lost their jobs after 1989 due to economic restructuring and land restitution to former owners. The pandemic unemployment suffered by Roma workers was particularly severe and has been comprehensively documented.[4] A common explanation of why Roma failed to find re-employment in new jobs was that they were unwilling to work, when not compelled by the Communist-ruled state, preferring an easier, idle life enabled by social support and child benefits. Furthermore Roma lacked basic educational qualifications and the skills required for new jobs in the more challenging world of post-Communist market economies.

However a key factor in explaining why Roma were usually the first to lose their jobs and the last to be offered new employment was discrimination (Weinerová, 1994). In cases where they were potentially eligible to fill vacancies, prejudice often excluded them. There is ample evidence of labour offices marking the names of Roma job-seekers in their registers with an 'R' and colluding with employers who stated that they were unwilling to even consider accepting Roma employees.

While it would be absurd to deny that Roma lacked requisite qualifications and skills for many new jobs this was hardly true of work of which they had rich experience – labouring. The closure of outmoded, rust-belt heavy industry was accompanied by a building boom as foreign capital moved in, creating a demand for new factories and offices, and previous restrictions limiting the housing market were removed. Research for the IOM found that Roma in Slovakia still worked as labourers but more usually in the informal or black economy, i.e. performing exactly same work as formerly but now marginalised, underpaid and beyond the protection of labour law.[5]

Motivation to work was not lacking. A 2002 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) comparative survey discovered that the main concern of most Roma was to have a job. When Roma respondents were asked: *Which of the following problems are seriously affecting you and your household?* the most common answer in all five CEE countries surveyed was 'unemployment' (UNDP, 2002: 31, table 4).[6]

4 See the following studies: Czech Government, 1997; Ladányi & Szelényi, 2002; van der Stoel, 2000; Ringold, 2000; World Bank, Foundation SPACE, INEKO, Open Society Institute, 2002; UNDP, 2002, 2005; Ringold, Orenstein, Wilkens, 2003.

5 '[T]here exists a demand for Roma labour; and … that demand is not irrelevant. The problem is, though, that Roma are being manipulated into the system of black labour, into the cheap labourers, and no efficient measures are being taken to prevent that manipulation.' (Vašečka, 2000: 181)

6 Countries surveyed were Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia.

EU INITIATIVES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION[7]

As governments toppled across the CEE region the European Commission (EC) swiftly established the PHARE programme in 1989.[8] The explicit aim was 'to provide financial support for the [former Communist] countries' efforts to reform and rebuild their economies'.[9] Almost a decade later, the EC refocused this programme on 'preparing the candidate countries … for EU membership' … [by funding] institution building and investment support' (EC, 1997).

Shortly after, in 2000, the European Council launched the Lisbon Strategy, which included the important goal of greater social cohesion. Until then, 'social policy received little attention, and … [European] Community institutions [had been] … provided with very limited powers in the social field', as the inevitability of social progress had been taken for granted (Atkinson, Cantillon, Marlier, Nolan, 2005: 29).[10] To strengthen the Strategy, the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) was introduced and then streamlined, requiring member states to make effective use of 'targets, benchmarks and indicators, [and] better links with economic and employment policies' (EPSCO, 2005). Peer reviews, a key element of the OMC, were based on the systematic evaluation of good practice, encouraging member states to learn from mutual experience (EC, 2005a). In 2005 there began an annual review – the *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion* (EC, 2005b).

The Lisbon Strategy was initiated by and directed at existing member states and had no direct link to the process of EU enlargement eastwards. Candidate countries in the CEE region were required to comply with what were known as the Copenhagen criteria of 1993 and build viable market economies, establish political democracies and adapt their laws and administrations to EU norms (the *acquis*). However, the emphasis was on 'the preservation of individual human rights and the building of a loosely defined framework for social policy making' and 'the fight against social exclusion did not form an integral part of the Copenhagen criteria reform agendas' (Potůček, 2006: 2).[11] Here, as in the formative period of the EU, economic issues took priority over social concerns.

As the pace of the enlargement process quickened, attention was increasingly drawn to the highly disadvantaged situation of Roma minorities in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia in Regular Reports on progress towards accession. In 2000, the European Council adopted a Directive, requiring equal, non-discriminatory treatment of persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin (European Council, 2000).[12]

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7 This section is based on a fuller discussion in Guy (2006: 1–4).

8 PHARE was an acronym for 'Poland and Hungary Assistance for Restructuring of their Economies' as these countries were the first two beneficiaries of this funding. 'In 1990 it was extended to include Czechoslovakia and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe'. PHARE <http://www.europa.sk/english/phare.html>

9 Ibid.

10 Since the 1957 Treaty of Rome, 'the founding fathers of the EU had expected social progress to evolve naturally from the economic progress generated by the Common Market' (Atkinson, Cantillon, Marlier, Nolan, 2005: 29).

11 Another instrument, the Council of Europe's (CoE) 1995 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, offered much stronger proposals for social inclusion for Roma. This was explicit in its demand for states to adopt 'adequate measures in order to promote, in all areas of economic, social, political and cultural life, full and effective equality' for their national minorities (CoE, 1995, Art. 4 §2). However, as a CoE convention, this could only be recommended to present and future EU members and although applicants signed and ratified it, this could not be required as a condition of accession, particularly since France and others ignored the convention maintaining that they had no national minorities to protect.

12 European Council (2000). Existing member states were required to implement this Directive by 19 July 2003, while candidate countries had until the date of EU accession (EC, 2002: 7).

In the same year an Enlargement Strategy Paper noted that, although in most cases plans had been adopted aimed at improving the situation of Roma communities, 'Roma continue to face widespread discrimination and difficulties in economic and social life'. The paper also demanded that 'programmes … [be] implemented in a sustained manner, in close co-operation with Roma representatives, and that appropriate budgetary support is made available in all [candidate] countries' (EC, 2002: 5–7).[13]

In 2002 candidate countries were invited to join Lisbon Strategy discussions but full participation came only with EU accession in May 2004.[14] Therefore, 'social policy moved to the top of the EU political agenda of enlargement as late as one decade after setting up the Copenhagen criteria of accession' (Potůček, 2006: 2). Nevertheless, as early as 2002, the EC had asked candidates to identify problems and policies to tackle poverty and social exclusion and Nation Action Plans on Social Inclusion 2004–2006 (NAPSI) were designed and approved in 2004. Like existing members, new entrants were able to draw on EU financial support from the European Social Fund (ESF) and structural funds, e.g. Regional Development Funds.

Soon after accession of the ten new EU members a new World Bank/Open Society Institute-promoted initiative was launched in February 2005,[15] the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015). This was proclaimed 'an opportunity … to include the Roma as full citizens in European societies' (World Bank, 2005) and participation was pledged by eight CEE governments,[16] while support was offered by many institutions including the EC, CoE and UNDP. A comparative UNDP study (2005), published just before the launch, provided an important new database on the situation of CEE Roma populations. As regards Roma, the Decade had important similarities to the Lisbon process and can be regarded as a parallel, complementary programme, but with the important differences that the Decade applied only to Roma and to CEE countries and, with the exception of the Roma Education Fund and some administrative support, no additional funding was provided by the sponsors.

THE ROLE OF EMPLOYMENT IN PROMOTING ROMA SOCIAL INCLUSION: LESSONS FROM PHARE

A 2004 study for the European Commission of the situation of Roma throughout Europe emphasised that 'employment is among the most essential mechanisms for securing social inclusion' (FOCUS, ERRC, ERIO, 2004: 24). Another comparative review for the EC – of PHARE Roma initiatives – praised their positive effect since 'more than any other assistance programme, PHARE is widely acknowledged as the lever of change' (EMS, 2004: 9)[17]. Nevertheless, given agreement between the EU, international organisations such as the World

13 Also in 2000 the UN Millennium Summit adopted eight Millennium Development Goals aimed at improving the situation of poor and marginalised social groups by 2015, reaffirmed at the 2005 Summit. Most, if not all, of these goals are directly relevant to socially excluded Roma communities, particularly those concerning poverty, education, gender inequality and health (UN, 2000).

14 For ten candidate countries including those already mentioned but with the exception of Bulgaria and Romania, which became members in January 2007.

15 The launch had been anticipated at a Budapest conference in June/July 2003 at which the latest and most comprehensive World Bank research study had been presented (Ringold, Orenstein, Wilkens, 2003).

16 Signatories to the Decade were Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro and Slovakia.

17 These were the same five candidate countries surveyed in the 2002 UNDP report.

Bank and Roma themselves on the primary importance of employment, it might have been expected that this would have been a main target in EU-funded PHARE programmes aimed at promoting Roma integration. However, to the contrary, the PHARE review found less than 10% of funding was devoted to employment projects (EMS, 2004: 6). This neglect of employment had been noted earlier by the UNDP.[18]

Among projects undertaken during the five-year period examined in the PHARE review, the range of vocational training initiatives was both limited in scope and often stereotypical (e.g. those involving men included woodworking and craftwork while those for women typically consisted of sewing and cooking lessons).[19] Meanwhile only a few projects offered training in IT and computer skills.[20]

Such practice reflects low levels of expectation and ignores evidence of Roma adaptability. After the Second World War large-scale entry of Roma into the mainstream labour market, including skilled factory work, required a high degree of flexibility on their part. However, the 2004 PHARE review found the types of vocational training to be unimaginative and usually offered in areas of high unemployment where trainee mobility was improbable. Consequently there was little likelihood of the training leading to jobs. On this point the UNDP (2002) found that job prospects were not improved by most vocational training but rather by better general education resulting in more transferable skills.

Although 'Roma participation [was] ... a core value of the Decade', being 'involved in every stage' (Decade, 2005), there was only limited Roma consultation and involvement in PHARE projects. The 2004 review found that these were commonly top-down and under-achieving initiatives, in contrast to those which 'promoted a "bottom-up" and participatory approach'. The latter were praised for adopting 'an approach based on good practice', 'although this proved difficult to achieve through PHARE' (EMS, 2004: II).

There was surprisingly little mention in PHARE-related documentation about Roma involvement and exploitation in the black economy or suggestion that governments take action to regulate this commonly continuing yet precarious source of Roma employment.[21] Instead, reliance on public works programmes was encouraged as a means of entry to the labour market – an approach endorsed by the UNDP provided the training was linked to potential jobs.[22] However, the FOCUS study and other research noted that such activities

18 '[E]mployment is a critical missing link in Roma integration policies' (UNDP, 2002: 80).

19 One unusually promising approach was creating jobs in the social economy where Roma were employed as mediators between Roma communities and local authorities, in health initiatives and also as assistant teachers. The UNDP thought this an 'area that deserves closer attention' since '[i]nvolving vulnerable groups in social economy enterprises not only provides employment but can have profound socialising effects as well' (UNDP, 2002: 37). Also see EMS for social economy initiatives with the proviso that 'this sector is not about volunteering but about real jobs' (2004: 21–22). Although providing valuable work experience, such schemes were sometimes criticised for creating short-term, parallel structures where Roma participants did not have a recognised status as employees or viable career paths.

20 The Hungarian *Roma Social Integration Programme* (HU-0002-01), implemented between 2001 and 2003, was an exception but it is worth noting that this element was relatively more successful than its adoption elsewhere in the programme of the standard practice of employing Roma on public works (Guy & Kovats, 2006: 11).

21 The UNDP estimated that of all Roma in some form of employment in Romania, those working in the informal sector amounted to 70% as opposed to less than 25% in the Czech Republic, while for Slovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria the proportion was about 40% (UNDP, 2002: 35, graph 13). The smaller-scale 2006 European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) survey of employment discrimination in the same five countries surprisingly produced a much lower average proportion of 16% (Hyde, 2006).

22 '[P]ublic works employment for Roma (and other disadvantaged groups) should be promoted – especially if they can be tied to job training or retraining activities' (UNDP, 2002: 38).

rarely offered targeted training opportunities and were ineffectual in leading to permanent employment.[23]

A strategy used in a number of PHARE projects was to employ Roma in the construction of their own infrastructure. However, this apparently promising approach was not without pitfalls. In Hungary, a plan to employ local Roma in constructing better access to their settlement foundered because the PHARE requirement for international competitive tendering in the case of large projects had been overlooked.[24] Meanwhile, a project in Slovakia highlighted the necessity for careful monitoring to ensure that the planned Roma participation was realised in practice[25] and there were correspondingly mixed results from an infrastructure programme in Bulgaria.[26]

The implementation of many active labour market policies (ALMPs), aimed at increasing employment opportunities for jobseekers, was criticised for failing to include Roma sufficiently[27] and also more generally for perpetuating dependency on social benefits rather than acting as an active labour market tool.[28] In Slovakia, these initiatives were characterised as 'a form of modern slavery' with payment rates at around half the statutory minimum wage or less. Indeed some activation programmes, financed by the European Social Fund (ESF), could function in a manner completely contrary to the declared aim, as when employers found it more profitable to dismiss their existing workers, replacing them by far cheaper labour from activation schemes (Oravec & Bošelová, 2006: 3). In such cases ESF-funded ALMPs actually served to bring about a loss of current jobs instead of increasing employment.

However, other ESF-funded projects have realised their aims where dynamic NGOs set up successful projects to train and find jobs for Roma, most notably the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG)[29] in Spain and IQ Roma Servis in the Czech Republic.

One inspiring example of a successful project is described below.

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23 '[I]n many of the existing Roma-specific employment programmes there is an emphasis on unskilled manual tasks with minimal or no training opportunities' (FOCUS, ERCC, ERIO, 2004: 24–25). Likewise 'public work programmes, which are the main active employment tool used throughout Hungary for the long-term unemployed, … do not usually provide sufficient skills or experience to enable participants to find work in the labour market' (Guy & Kovats, 2006: 11).

24 The contact was won by a non-local firm, which used its own non-Roma workforce. 'Despite requests that local [Roma] people be given construction work, [as originally intended,] only one subcontractor employed three or four Roma men for a day or two' (Guy & Kovats, 2006: 10).

25 Even though the employment of local Roma had been made a condition of the contract for infrastructure construction, only a few men were given casual work in a settlement in Central Slovakia. Nevertheless, in a settlement attached to a neighbouring village, Roma were included in the workforce including in supervisory roles. However, this only came about at the determined insistence of the mayor (Guy, 2003).

26 Most Roma receiving vocational training in locations with infrastructure works had not completed their course by the time work started, rendering them ineligible for planned temporary employment. In spite of this setback, after completing their vocational training several trainees were offered jobs by the training agency, the largest construction firm in Bulgaria (Guy, 2005: Executive Summary).

27 'ALMPs have so far failed to reach many Roma communities' (UNDP, 2002: 38).

28 Research in Slovakia for the Milan Šimečka Foundation found that 'after one year of implementation, only approximately 1% of all participants succeeded in finding jobs' (Oravec & Bošelová, 2006: 2).

29 The term 'Roma' is used to include to all Romani populations in Europe but in Spain the term used by these people to refer to themselves and their organisations is 'Gitano' (Gypsy), without any pejorative sense.

MESSAGES FROM THE 2006 PEER REVIEW (AVILÉS, PRINCIPALITY OF ASTURIAS, SPAIN)

The 2006 Peer Review of the *Municipal programme of shanty towns eradication in Avilés (Principality of Asturias)* examined a comprehensive scheme targeted at reducing the marginality of Roma (Gitano) inhabitants of a northern Spanish city. This impressive project offered many thought-provoking messages and examples of good practice to improve social inclusion but here only three of most important aspects are mentioned:

i) adopting an integrated approach, ii) building consensus, iii) countering discrimination.

The need for an integrated approach

Recognising that the multiple problems afflicting Roma are closely intertwined is crucial to the design and realisation of an effective strategy. The project reviewed was nominally aimed at the elimination of shantytowns where Roma lived but from the start it was realised that treating housing issues in isolation would almost certainly result in failure. Instead, a fully integrated approach was adopted, simultaneously addressing issues of employment, housing, education and health. Improving access to employment was seen as especially important since the shantytowns had arisen when Roma migrated in search of work, following the disappearance of their former occupations as a consequence of wider economic change. One successful programme, supported by the EU's Social Fund and operated by a national Roma NGO (FSG), was the *Acceder* employment initiative.

This wider perspective had often been adopted by CEE governments and acknowledged in Roma-related policy documents. At times it had also been incorporated into the design of specific PHARE programmes, seeking to tackle a range of related aspects in an integrated way. But these attempts generally proved unsuccessful, partly because the institutional capacity to coordinate and implement such complex projects had been lacking (EMS, 2004: 9).

Building consensus

The key turning point in this long-term project was the establishment of a working group, comprising municipal officers, technical experts, members of all political parties, concerned welfare organisations and Roma NGOs – both national in scope like the FSG and local groups including Roma women's organisations, as well as representatives of Roma families as beneficiaries (Agulló, Cabo, Capa, Rodríguez, Sánchez, 2004: 7; Avilés, 2002: 5; Fresno, 2006: 23; EC, 2006).

The involvement of all levels of government and the assent of all political parties avoided controversy over use of public funds to assist an unpopular section of the community. This was especially important in Spain, which has the most decentralised system of government in the EU with seventeen autonomous regions, and is also highly relevant for CEE countries where many formerly centralised competencies have been devolved to regional or municipal level. While there are numerous examples of government policies to integrate CEE Roma being blocked at lower levels there are also cases in the region where remarkable results have been achieved by local initiatives in unpromising contexts. An NGO project from Slovakia had won general support for pro-Roma initiatives including job-creation in a municipality where the overall unemployment level was 50% (Mačáková, 2006).

Countering discrimination

Achieving consensus and forming a working group representing all constituencies meant that there could be collective political will to support initiatives to bring about change.

When opposition was encountered in spite of public information campaigns, this was met with resolute action, such as insistence on the equal rights of Roma as citizens, and led to eventual disappearance of the resistance.[30]

In a situation of devolved powers, as in Spain and increasingly in Central and Eastern Europe, it is particularly important that national governments confront processes that deepen social exclusion by challenging regional or local authorities frequently implicated in such actions, which can either be illegal or at least contravene government policy. Prime examples of such inequitable treatment include employment discrimination. Steps ensuring a legally binding obligation to promote equality for disadvantaged groups are urged in place of inaction and lack of political will.[31] Anti-discrimination legislation is valuable but, in itself, insufficient to counter the kinds of systemic and institutional discrimination in the field of employment revealed by research for the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) (Hyde, 2006, 2007).

CONCLUSION: ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The 2005 UNDP report, *Faces of Poverty, Faces of Hope*, stressed the relevance of both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Decade of Roma Inclusion to the situation of Roma, being 'deprived of the benefits of transition' and 'poverty pockets and excluded communities … hidden within the national averages'. The decision to take part in the Decade was a pledge by participating governments of 'political commitment to close the gap in welfare and living conditions between the Roma and the non-Roma' (UNDP, 2005: 5-6).

However the Decade was far more than just 'an **opportunity** for countries to meet the MDG targets' (UNDP, 2005: 6). The title of the UNDP report conveyed far better the limited options for future development, presenting them as a stark choice.

Either there might be a growing segment of the population (even approaching 10%) – multiply disadvantaged, increasingly segregated and profoundly marginalised – who are unemployed, almost entirely dependent on social support and in very poor health, to the detriment of both national and local economies. Leaving aside their own predicament, this group would represent a threat to social stability, as had already been recognised by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as early as 1990.[32]

Alternatively, these citizens could become, instead, a significant, productive workforce – as indeed they had been formerly – contributing not only their creative capacities but, due to their youthful demographic profile, helping to support the ageing, non-Roma population.

The situation of Roma was earlier compared to that of migrant workers – in spite of their long centuries of continuous residence – when they moved to urban areas for jobs during the Communist period, providing necessary manual labour often to the detriment of their health. But they also resemble migrant workers in that they are popularly seen as an unwanted drain on state budgets and a threat to the majority population. Economists have challenged this view, pointing out the benefits of migrants' labour and tax contributions in countries with growing numbers of pensioners and arguing that migrants actually represent a resource. Roma, at present, are a wasted resource to their home countries but this could change.

30 Research in Slovakia found similar melting of opposition when an integrated kindergarten was introduced in spite of objections from non-Roma parents (Guy & Kovats, 2006: 12–13).

31 This was argued persuasively by the ERRC/ENAR representative at the peer review (ERRC/ENAR, 2006).

32 Then the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) but later changing its name to OSCE.

However, for the second option to be realised would require considerable and sustained investment as it is recognised that the reintegration of multiply-disadvantaged and excluded people (whether Roma or not) needs commitment of substantial, long-term financial support. This would also mean not just a strengthening of political will at every level but that the case should be made forcefully to the public to persuade them that there is no viable alternative.[33] Provision of necessary funding on such a scale presents a problem for governments with their changing economies competing increasingly in a global marketplace, and where there are strong pressures to cut costs if no immediate returns are perceived – as in the highly relevant area of social support. At present EU funds are available to promote social inclusion of the most vulnerable but this current state of affairs cannot be assumed to be permanent. It was noted at the 2006 peer review that recent EU entrants saw the financially-backed, social inclusion campaign as a new opportunity; older members regarded it as the last chance.

Postscript

Since 2007, the employment rates of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe have barely improved in spite of more recent initiatives. A 2018 report by the European Commission on the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 concluded: 'Effectiveness of the EU framework has been assessed as limited regarding progress towards the Roma integration goals. While there is some progress in the area of education, progress was limited in the area of health and lacking in the areas of employment and housing' (EC, 2018: §6).[34] One of the four EU Roma integration goals had been to 'cut the employment gap between Roma and the rest of the population' (EC, 2018: §2.1).

The employment situation of Roma aged 16 to 24 is particularly disturbing. 'The proportion of young Roma not in work or education or further education [NEET] is, on average, 63% … [in] comparison with 12% of the general population of the same age group in the EU-28'.[35] In the Czech Republic 'the share of [young] Roma not in work or education or further education is six times higher than that of the general population' (FRA, 2016: 10, 21).

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33 See the discussion of mainstreaming social inclusion (EMS, 2004: 29, §109–110).

34 The report mainly concentrates on EU Member States with the exception of Malta. 'The data on the living conditions of Roma [is] for the period 2011–2016 for EU Member States' (EC, 2018: §1).

35 Nine member states (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Spain, Greece, Croatia, Hungary, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia) were compared to the EU-28.

36 In some case on-line versions of documents are no longer available. Those listed under References were accessed 24 July 2020.

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