

BRIDGING THE GAP

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ROMA ACCESS
TO PUBLIC SERVICES
IN SLOVAKIA



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CONTENT

Preface // 6

Chapter One

The Situation of Roma in Slovakia
in the light of strategic documents
and development initiatives // 10

Chapter Two

The situation of Roma in Slovakia
in the light of research // 14

Chapter Three

The research methodology
on which this book is based // 38

Chapter Four

What the research participants said
in the focus groups // 48

Chapter Five

In-depth interviews with social actors
in the target municipalities // 66

Chapter Six

Roma perspectives on access
to services: Insights from
sample survey data // 96

Chapter Seven

Conclusion // 134

References // 144

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PREFACE

Across a broad spectrum of research into Roma communities, including studies on poverty, exclusion, and social inequality, one dimension has remained relatively underexplored: a comprehensive account of Roma living conditions with a particular emphasis on access to public services. While numerous works have addressed aspects of socio-economic marginalization, there is still a notable gap in systematic knowledge concerning how Roma, especially those residing in environmentally vulnerable and disadvantaged areas, are able to use and benefit from public services. This lack of information is especially pressing in communities located in areas at risk of environmental hazards, such as floods, where residents face not only material deprivation but also heightened exposure to environmental injustice.

The aim of this book is therefore to contribute to filling this gap by offering, on the basis of empirical research, a perspective on the interplay between marginalization, environmental risk, and access to services in the everyday lives of Roma. Our focus is on municipalities and Roma settlements situated in the Torysa and Topľa river basins, which are recognized as environmentally risky zones, particularly in terms of flood vulnerability.

In our research, public services are understood in a broad sense. They encompass not only core domains such as social services, employment support, health care, and education, but also everyday amenities and resources, including access to shops, restaurants, and other facilities, as well as municipal infrastructure more generally. By adopting this wider perspective, the book seeks to show how access to services—or lack thereof—intersects with socio-economic marginalization and environmental risk to shape the living conditions of Roma communities in these areas.

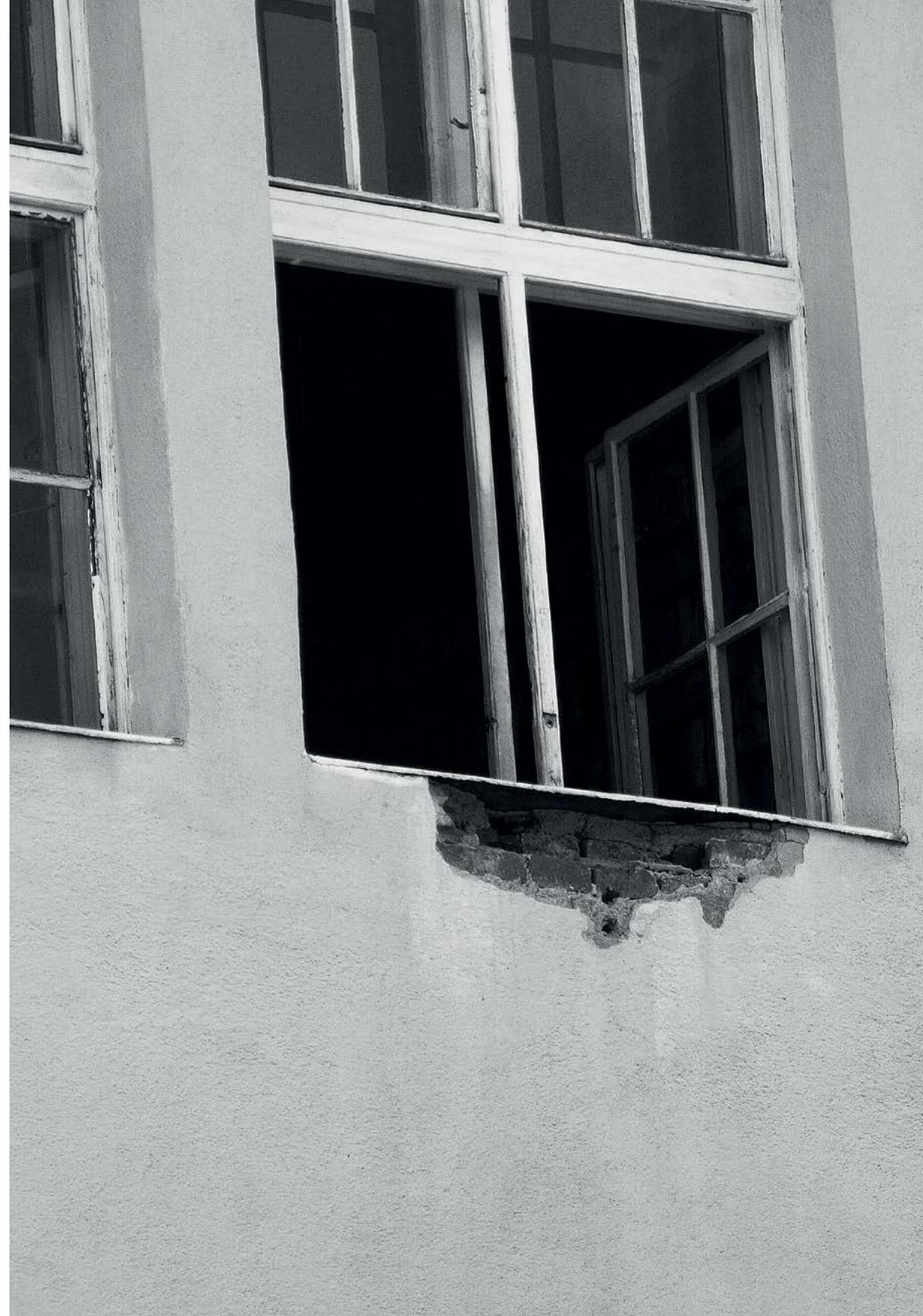
The research for this book was conducted using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Data were gathered in three localities through focus groups, individual interviews, and a questionnaire survey (see the Methodology chapter for details). The book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One provides an overview of the situation of Roma population in Slovakia in the context of strategic documents and various public policy initiatives. Chapter Two offers insight into the living conditions of Roma, drawing on existing research in areas such as education, health, environment, and employment. Chapter Three addresses the research methodology and describes the research process in detail. Chapter Four presents the results of focus group discussions

conducted with Roma participants. Chapter Five, continuing the qualitative analysis, presents the results of in-depth interviews with both Roma and non-Roma stakeholders, including individuals working in local authorities and public service sectors. Chapter Six presents the results of a questionnaire survey conducted with Roma households in three localities. This survey explored perceptions of living conditions, access to services, and experiences of discrimination related to these services. The book concludes with a Chapter Seven, which offers summary of key findings, synthesizing the results from both the qualitative and quantitative analyses.

Marginalized Roma settlements located in environmentally unstable areas—exposed to floods, landslides, or contamination—pose an especially urgent challenge for research. Their social status, demographic dynamics, and vulnerability highlight the need to better understand these communities within the broader context of strengthening societal resilience. This publication seeks to respond to that challenge by providing an analysis of the barriers faced by Roma, with a specific focus on their access to public services. At the same time, it aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to promote the social integration of Roma communities. We believe that the empirical data and findings presented in this book will serve as a valuable evidence base for the formulation of data-driven policies and interventions at the local, regional, and national levels.

8

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA



THE SITUATION OF ROMA IN SLOVAKIA IN THE LIGHT OF STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

► THE SITUATION OF ROMA IN SLOVAKIA IN THE LIGHT OF STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

The living conditions of the Roma population in Slovakia have, over the past three decades, become one of the key subjects of political debate and public policy intervention. They have also attracted significant attention from organizations such as the European Union, the Council of Europe, the United Nations, the OSCE, and various international non-governmental organizations. Numerous studies (e.g.: Repová & Vašečka, 2000; Radičová, 2001; Vašečka ed., 2002; UNDP, 2002; Mušinka, 2004; UNDP, 2006; Mušinka, 2012; UNDP, 2012; Friedman et al., 2009; Filadelfiová, 2013; Machlica et al., 2014a; Machlica et al., 2014 b; EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014; Rusnáková & Rochovská, 2014; Škobla & Filčák, 2014; Podolinská & Hrustič, 2015; Kusá, 2016; ERRC 2017; Bednarik et al., 2019; Belák, 2020; Markovič & Plachá, 2022; Filčák & Škobla eds., 2022; Findor et al., 2023) have identified the Roma as a group at high risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Strategic governmental documents such as the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPs/INCL) 2004–2006¹ and the National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion for the periods 2006–2008 and 2008–2010 have identified the Roma as the group most threatened by poverty and social exclusion. These documents highlighted that, beyond regional disparities in poverty, unemployment, average income, and indicators of education and health status, there are pronounced inequalities between the majority population and socially excluded and marginalized Roma communities. Members of these groups, for a variety of reasons, often lack sufficient opportunities for full participation in the economic and cultural life of mainstream society.

The Medium-term Concept for the Development of the Roma National Minority in the Slovak Republic: Solidarity—Integrity—Inclusion for the years 2008–2013 served as a strategic document that not only analyzed the existing situation of the Roma minority in Slovakia, but also outlined specific measures and interventions aimed at addressing the key challenges. It focused on main thematic areas such as education, employment, housing, and healthcare, while also incorporating cross-cutting priorities like anti-discrimination, gender equality, and the protection of human rights. The concept aimed to provide a more coordinated and effective approach to Roma inclusion through targeted policies and cooperation across sectors.²

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/nap_incl_2004_sk_en_version.pdf

² See: <https://hsr.rokovania.sk/12544/9-/>

In the last decade, in response to the complex situation of the Roma minority, the Government of the Slovak Republic adopted the Strategy for Roma Integration up to 2020³, which aligned with the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies.⁴ The Strategy up to 2020 focused on seven areas: education, employment, health, housing, financial integration, non-discrimination, and approaches toward the majority society—specifically, Roma integration through a communication initiative. Each of these areas, with the exception of the last one, was developed into an Action Plans.⁵

In the 2021–2027 EU programming period, the Slovak Government adopted the Strategy for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation of Roma up to 2030⁶ which consists of five priority areas, such as education, employment, health, housing, and combating anti-Roma racism and participation. This strategy consists of five priority areas: education, employment, health, housing, and combating anti-Roma racism and promoting participation. Action Plans for each of these areas were developed for the 2022–2024 period⁷ Moreover, Action Plans for the 2025–2027 period have been prepared by the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities⁸, which serves as both the coordinator and the National Roma Contact Point.

Many projects supporting Roma inclusion in Slovakia have been funded by the European Investment and Structural Funds, including both ‘soft’ projects and ‘investment’ projects. Soft projects focused on various support services for Roma communities, such as social field work, activities aimed at strengthening the employability of the Roma population (through active labor market policies), and other similar initiatives. Investment projects—particularly in the area of housing—produced the most tangible results in the last programming period. These projects typically focused on infrastructure development and housing improve-

³ An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020. Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. COM (2011) 173 final. Brussel, 5 April 2011.

⁴ Strategy 2020 to be found here: <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/strategie/>.

⁵ Action plans up to 2020 to be found here: <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/strategie/strategia-pre-integraciu-romov-do-roku-2020/>.

⁶ Strategy 2030 to be found here: <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/strategie/>.

⁷ Action plans 2022-2024 to be found here: <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/strategie/strategia-pre-rovnost-inkluziu-a-participaciu-romov-do-roku-2030/>.

⁸ See: <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/>

ment. During the 2014–2020 programming period, such investment projects were financed through Priority Axis No. 6: Technical Amenities in Municipalities with the Presence of Marginalized Roma Communities⁹, under the Operational Program Human Resources.

Projects under Priority Axis No. 6 aimed to contribute to the improvement of living conditions in municipalities with marginalized Roma populations. The objective was to ensure that Roma communities had access to adequate housing, safe drinking water, proper utilities, regular waste collection, and kindergartens. To support these goals, a number of public calls were launched, focusing on areas such as the construction of community centers and kindergartens, as well as roads, pavements, water supply, and sewage systems. Municipalities with marginalized Roma populations were eligible to apply for financial contributions from the European Investment and Structural Funds.¹⁰ Besides, there were open calls that aimed to support projects building the infrastructure that were launched through the Integrated Regional Operational Programme¹¹ while municipalities with Roma population could use these funding.

Many projects funded through EU investment and structural funds in the past decade focused on job creation, protected workshops, and social or “activation” enterprises aimed at employing and “activating” long-term unemployed Roma. However, the results largely fell short of expectations, given the adverse overall socio-economic conditions in many regions. According to some analysts, one of the most limiting factors to the success of these projects was the unfavorable economic structure of Slovakia’s eastern regions, combined with the insufficient quality of inter-ethnic relations between Roma and non-Roma populations.

⁹ See: <https://www.ludskezdroje.gov.sk/technicka-vybavenost-v-obciach-s-pritomnostou-marginalizovanych-romskych-komunit>

¹⁰ See <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/sekcia-europskych-programov/programove-obdobie-2014-2020/komisia-pri-mv-pre-op-lz-pre-po-5-a-6/?csrt=62374032154365032> and <https://www.ludskezdroje.gov.sk/technicka-vybavenost-v-obciach-s-pritomnostou-marginalizovanych-romskych-komunit>.

¹¹ See <https://www.mpsr.sk/index.php?navID=1036&navID2=1036&slID=67&id=9006>.

THE SITUATION OF ROMA IN SLOVAKIA IN THE LIGHT OF RESEARCH

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According to the 2021 Population, Houses and Dwellings Census—based on individuals' self-declaration of ethnicity—156,200 people identified themselves as being of Roma nationality, representing approximately 3% of the total population of the Slovak Republic (Census, 2021).

The Atlas of Roma Communities,¹² a sociographic study based on qualified estimates provided by municipal representatives, identified that the majority of the Roma population lives in neighborhoods, settlements, or “communities” located in 825 municipalities (Atlas, 2019). These neighborhoods can be spatially categorized as being located within the municipality, on its outskirts, or as spatially segregated areas. Of the total number, 194 neighborhoods are spatially segregated. Most Roma communities are concentrated in eastern Slovakia and in the Banská Bystrica region of central Slovakia. These regions have the highest number of segregated Roma communities, where multiple disadvantages and generational poverty tend to accumulate.

EDUCATION

There is a wider consensus regarding the need to improve the inclusion of marginalized groups into the schooling in order to secure them more chances to lift themselves out of poverty (Edgerton et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the unsatisfactory situation in all areas of education regarding Roma persists. Low level of Roma education achievement is considered one of components causing the Roma people are trapped in “vicious circle of poverty and exclusion” (Ringold, 2000; Kriglerová & Gažovičová, 2012; Rostas, 2012; Lajčáková, 2015; Balážová, 2015; Messing, 2017). This exclusion of Roma from mainstream education also creates tremendous costs for national economies (Marcinčin & Marcinčinová, 2009; Bodewig et al., 2014). The challenge therefore remains to ensure inclusive and non-discriminatory education for Roma children, which could have a major impact on their life chances.

¹² Atlas of Roma Communities (2004) and its updated versions from 2013 and 2019 to be found: <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/atlas-romskych-komunit/>.

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE

The importance of childcare provision is also emphasized at the EU level. The arguments in favor of childcare services are widely accepted, and most European countries are taking steps to ensure the availability of quality childcare. However, many Member States, including Slovakia, are still far from achieving a sufficient level of childcare provision. Much of the variation across Europe regarding early childcare services stems from different ideological traditions concerning the role of the welfare state, which in turn influences women's participation in the labor market (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Korpi, 2000; Kamerman et al., 2003).

To better understand these differing traditions within the context of social policy, a substantial body of literature provides typologies that specifically describe how countries cluster into different types of family policy regimes (see e.g., EGGE, 2009; Eurofound, 2014; Eurofound, 2015). Countries in Central and Eastern Europe, including Slovakia, tend to follow an approach characterized by strong state support for parental leave but weak support for childcare services for children under the age of three. According to a report by the European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment Issues (EGGE, 2009), the cost of childcare facilities often depends on parents' income, although the regulation of these fees varies by country.

In Slovakia, the historically used concept of nursery school was changed in the amended Act no.448/2008 on Social Services in §32 b to "child care facility for children up to age of three". Based on this, nurseries as a social service institution, provide institutional care for children up to 3 years usually in the form of full-day care, half-day care or several hours of care several days a week or every day (Bennet, 2012). In addition to nurseries, care for children under the age of three is also provided in kindergartens, which absorb the majority of children in this age cohort, whose parents seek such a service. Early childcare is perceived in Slovakia as a social service and not education process, even though some studies (see e.g. Heckman, 2011) emphasize benefits to society if children are educated from birth.

The potential for Roma children to succeed later in life—in higher education and in the labor market—is often diminished due to a lack of quality early childhood care services. It is therefore important to increase investment in early childhood care and to remove the barriers

that prevent Roma families from accessing these services (Bennett, 2012). Among the main factors influencing parents' demand for early childcare facilities are the overall economic conditions of the region, including parental employment status and household disposable income. Regional differences also play an important role in shaping demand for early childcare. There tends to be greater demand for childcare services in economically developed regions and districts, where unemployment is low and wages are relatively higher (Škobla, 2024).

PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

In relation to the successful adaptation of Roma children within the education system, one of the most frequently cited prerequisites in the literature is attendance at pre-school facilities prior to entering primary school. Pre-school attendance is viewed as a key opportunity for many Roma children from disadvantaged backgrounds to overcome skill gaps and developmental delays, thereby facilitating smoother integration into compulsory education and supporting their overall success in the educational process (UNDP, 2006; Kusá, 2016). Children's participation in pre-primary education in Slovakia highlights structural inequalities between Roma and non-Roma populations. According to recent research by Markovič and Plachá (2022), the participation rate of Roma children is more than 50 percentage points lower than that of non-Roma children. The low participation rate of Roma children remains a persistent and deeply rooted challenge.

With the amendment of Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (the School Act) in 2019, which came into effect on 1 September 2021, pre-primary education became mandatory for children aged five—those with one year remaining before entering primary school. The introduction of compulsory pre-primary education for all children over the age of five is expected to help reduce educational inequalities. However, one of the key prerequisites for the successful implementation of this measure is ensuring sufficient kindergarten capacity (Varsik, 2019). An analysis of existing capacities shows that kindergartens can accommodate a maximum of 91.3% of five-year-olds, assuming the number of younger children currently attending remains unchanged (Ibid, 2019). Recent research has concluded that kindergarten capacity gaps are largely dependent on population trends, which serve as predictors of future changes in the number of children aged 3 to 6.

These trends vary significantly in municipalities where a large portion of the population lives in marginalized environments (Polačková et al., 2023 b).

According to data from the Register of Regional Education (Register of Schools and School Facilities), maintained by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic¹³, there were 3,343 kindergartens operating in Slovakia in 2022. Of these, the majority—2,974 kindergartens—were funded by local self-governments, 255 were private, and 114 were affiliated with churches. A total of 806 kindergartens are connected to primary schools. In most municipalities that have a kindergarten, the facility is located in the part of the municipality inhabited by the non-Roma population (Polačková et al., 2023 b).

The assumption of missing capacities was modelled in two alternatives regarding whether there will be introduced or non-introduced legal entitlement to a place in a kindergarten a child aged three and over. If the entitlement is introduced, the conservative variant suggests that in 67 municipalities the capacity gap will be 3 or more kindergarten classes (the most critical situation is estimated for 13 municipalities), with the most serious situation projected in municipalities with a higher proportion of Roma (Polačková et al., 2023 b). Regarding the schooling of Roma children in kindergartens, almost a third (32%) of children aged 3 to 6 years from the marginalized Roma communities attended kindergarten while in the general population, this was 87% of children (Markovič & Plachá, 2022). There is also a difference in the length of stay in the kindergarten—children from the marginalized Roma environment attend kindergartens less and spend less time in kindergartens than children from the general population (Ibid., 2022).

The UNDP Report on the Living Conditions of the Roma in Slovakia (2012) reveals the reasons for non-attendance of pre-primary schools, based on responses from Roma participants in the survey. Some of the reasons cited include insufficient finances, parents' belief that the child was too immature for kindergarten, and the absence of a nearby facility. Other identified factors influencing Roma children's pre-school attendance include the lack of financial resources in families, "hidden" fees related to kindergarten enrollment, parents' lack of information about monthly and registration fees, changes in the family's socio-economic status (e.g., a mother receiving parental benefits after giving birth),

¹³ See: <https://www.svs.edu.sk/register.aspx>

or the lack of capacity to escort the child to kindergarten (for example, when a parent is caring for several young children) (Rigová et al., 2020).

Research by Markovič and Plachá (2022) indicates that the most common reason for non-attendance—reported by 64% of parents—was the absence of available capacity in pre-primary schools/kindergartens; 10% of parents explicitly identified this as the primary barrier. Interventions aimed at increasing pre-school attendance among Roma children should therefore focus specifically on overcoming these obstacles.

ROMA SPECIAL SCHOOLS AND SEPARATE CLASSROOMS

One of the key and long-standing problems in Slovakia in the area of Roma education is their disproportionate placement into special schools and special classes. This practice has been confirmed by numerous research studies. Friedman et al. (2009) reported that nearly 60% of all students in special schools in the 2006/2007 school year were Roma children. Furthermore, almost 86% of all children enrolled in special classes within regular primary schools were Roma (Ibid., 2009). A secondary data analysis based on the 2005 UNDP survey data showed that language strongly influences the likelihood of a child being assigned to a special school or a special class within a regular school (Brüggemann & Škobla, 2015). Roma children who reported Romani as their mother tongue were significantly more likely to be placed in special education than those who reported Slovak as their mother tongue (Ibid., 2015; Friedman et al., 2009).

According to the Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education (IIPe), in the 2010/2011 school year, pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (SEN) made up approximately one-third of all students in special schools. (In this context, the category of socially disadvantaged pupils is often used to refer to Roma children).¹⁴

¹⁴ See: https://www.cvtisr.sk/cvti-sr-vedecka-kniznica/informacie-o-skolstve.html?page_id=8868.

TARGETED SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR ROMA YOUTH FROM THE MARGINALIZED ENVIRONMENT

According to the EU Fundamental Rights Agency¹⁶ approximately 58% of Roma aged 18 to 24 leave school before completing their education, in contrast to only 7% of the general population. Many exit the education system without obtaining any formal qualification, or at most with only primary education (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016). According to EU SILC_MRK 2020, around 83% of Romani adults from marginalized communities have dropped out of education, typically achieving only primary or lower secondary vocational education, compared to just 10% of the general population (Markovič & Plachá, 2022). Those who do not complete the final (9th) grade of primary school—which corresponds to ISCED 2 A—face very limited educational and career opportunities.

For these individuals, the only option to remain within the formal education system is to enroll in two-year programs specifically designed for this purpose. While these programs represent the lowest tier of secondary education, they do not substitute for primary education. Instead, they serve as an alternative path that emphasizes practical skills over academic knowledge. Graduates can continue their studies only if they obtain an ISCED 2 A qualification by completing the “Second Chance” course. However, access to this course is limited for Roma, due to factors such as a lack of awareness about the program and the limited availability of schools offering it. Although it is possible to take the exam independently without attending the course (Act 245/2008), this practice is extremely rare (Rigová et al., 2021).

With regard to secondary education, remote vocational schools play an important role in the lives of young Roma, since a significant number of Roma youth in Slovakia attend them. The term remote vocational schools refers to branches of secondary vocational schools that

Special schools are typically intended for pupils with health-related disadvantages, yet healthy Roma children are often assigned to classes for students with a mild intellectual disability (Huttová et al., 2012). According to experts, the assignment of Roma children to special schools is a complex issue that can be addressed in multiple ways: through the reform of psychological diagnostic tests, institutional reform of the pedagogical-psychological counselling system, and, most importantly, changes to the financing and functioning of special schools themselves. A recent study by the Open Society Foundation (Ibid., 2012) outlines recommended measures in this context, aimed at promoting inclusive education for all pupils in Slovakia.

The segregation of Roma children in special education and their disproportionate placement in special schools was the reason the European Commission initiated proceedings against the Slovak Republic in 2015 for suspected violations of the Racial Equality Directive (EC, 2023). However, segregation of Roma children is also evident in regular schools, where so-called “Roma classes” are often created. Many studies have highlighted this practice (e.g., UNDP, 2012; Brüggemann, 2012; Brüggemann & Škobla, 2015; Farenzenová et al., 2013; Miškolci et al., 2017; Hall et al., 2019). According to EU SILC_MRK 2020, almost half of Roma children aged 6 to 15 in mainstream education have only Roma classmates in their classroom, while for one-quarter of Roma children, Roma pupils make up the majority of their class (Markovič & Plachá, 2022). The creation of separate classes and schools for Roma children occurs even in municipalities where such segregation is not justified by a high proportion of Roma residents. An analysis conducted by the Value for Money Division of the Ministry of Finance concluded that, in order to achieve a balanced distribution of Roma and non-Roma pupils in schools located in municipalities with mixed populations, it would be necessary to reassign nearly half of the Roma pupils to different schools (Hellebrandt et al., 2020).¹⁵

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

THE SITUATION OF ROMA IN SLOVAKIA IN THE LIGHT OF RESEARCH

¹⁵ See: <https://www.mfsr.sk/uhp/>.

¹⁶ See: <https://fra.europa.eu/en>.

operate in locations different from their main campuses. These branches, which are affiliated with the main school, may be situated in various Roma localities. As of 2018, 96% of remote vocational schools offering two-year programs were located in areas with Roma populations (Hel-lebrandt et al., 2020). Similarly, according to Hall et al. (2019), in 2017, as many as three-quarters of secondary schools offering these two-year programs were remote vocational schools situated in close proximity to Roma neighborhoods. More specifically, the Office of the Roma Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government¹⁷ based on data from the Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information¹⁸ indicates that in the academic year 2020/2021 as much as 39 out of 51 remote vocational schools' sites situated in the municipalities with Roma population, were placed in the Romani segregated neighborhoods or in their close proximity.

The number of remote vocational school sites has increased from 56 in 2015/20 (Balážová, 2015) to 68 in 2017/2018 (Koreňová, 2017). Some areas even have two school sites linked to different main schools (calculation based on Ministry of Education, 2024). One of the official aims of this policy was to increase the proportion of Roma students in secondary education and to support their entry into the labor market, thereby contributing to the social inclusion of Roma communities. However, these schools are often associated with low-quality education (see, e.g., reports of the State School Inspection, 2020; 2022),¹⁹ and at the same time trap graduates in low-paid jobs (Balážová, 2015). Remote vocational schools thus reinforce the social and educational segregation, providing very limited opportunities to build social capital outside their communities (Rigová, 2024).

It is essential to begin implementing measures to prevent the formation of exclusively Roma schools and classes. Steps should include providing bus transportation for children from Roma localities to other schools, developing desegregation plans at the micro-regional level, and adjusting school districts to ensure a more even distribution of Roma children across schools. Additionally, it is important to strengthen the competencies of teachers and professional staff so they are equipped to work with diverse student populations and foster a tolerant, multicultural environment.

¹⁷ See: <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/?csrt=15505127134791995063>.

¹⁸ See: https://www.cvtisr.sk/en.html?page_id=58.

¹⁹ See: <https://www.ssi.sk/>.

HEALTH

The health status of Roma from marginalized environments is generally worse than that of the majority population. Roma from these communities tend to have a significantly shorter life expectancy (see e.g., UNDP, 2005; UNDP, 2012; WB, 2012; Markovič & Plachá, 2022). Their poor health is influenced by a range of interrelated factors, with housing conditions proving to be one of the most critical. Many Roma live in inadequately constructed homes without electric or gas heating. Heating is often provided by burning solid fuels such as wood, which exposes residents to harmful emissions. These health challenges are further exacerbated by financial constraints. Poor Roma families often struggle to afford even basic medical expenses, including medication, specialist consultations, and transportation to healthcare facilities (see Belák et al., 2017; Belák et al., 2018). Health awareness and educational attainment are typically lower in these communities, further impacting health outcomes. Another contributing factor is limited access to running water.

Nutritional health is also closely tied to household income. Only 21.5% of Roma households consume raw fruits and vegetables daily, 23.8% consume dairy products daily, 34.3% consume meat and cold cuts daily, while 30% consume flour-based dishes or sweets daily (see Filadelfiová, 2013; Belák, 2020). These figures indicate that the nutritional value of the diet is very low, negatively affecting the overall health of residents in poor, excluded localities.

There are also significant differences in life expectancy indicators between the non-Roma and Roma populations. The Institute of Financial Policy²⁰ indicated that life expectancy at birth is, on average, six years shorter for Roma than for the non-Roma population (69.6 years compared to 76.4 years). The infant mortality rate (i.e., children under one year of age) among Roma is almost three times higher than that of non-Roma children (12.3 vs. 4.2 per 1,000 live births). The highest mortality rate of Roma newborns was recorded in the district of Trebišov, where, on average, more than 27 Roma children die before the age of one (Bojko et al., 2018).

²⁰ See: <https://ifp.sk/publikacie/>

SPATIAL SEGREGATION AND HOUSING

Housing conditions are one of the key indicators of living standards. Housing deprivation has major implications for the lives of household members in all possible aspects. All the studies and available data point to significant differences between the living arrangements of Roma and non-Roma in Slovakia (see e.g., Džambazovič, 2007; Pukačová, 2009; Mušinka, 2012; Szilvasi, 2016; Beňušková, 2019; Szolgayová et al., 2023). Although these localities serve as permanent residences, they are characterized by dilapidated housing and often lack basic physical infrastructure (Vašečka ed., 2002; Szilvasi, 2016). While official policies in the 1970s and 1980s, under socialism, attempted to dismantle settlements and provide inhabitants with standard-quality accommodation (mostly in apartment blocks), these policies did not fully achieve their proclaimed goals in practice (Stewart, 2012; Grill, 2015). With the restructuring of the economy in the 1990s, many Roma lost their jobs in state-owned industries and cooperatives, and their social and economic situation, including housing, abruptly worsened (Škobla & Filčák, 2024). Many Roma, having lost their jobs and income, moved out of the towns and found refuge in rural areas in settlements that offered sub-standard albeit relatively safe and inexpensive housing.

According to recent research, the most common type of housing for marginalized Roma is brick houses, where 62% of households live. Twenty-three percent of Roma households live in apartment buildings, and 15% live in non-standard types of dwellings (such as shacks, wooden huts, pre-fabricated modular cabins, and other non-standard dwellings). Only 54% of Roma households have legalized rights to their dwelling. Moreover, 88% of marginalized Roma live in households that are considered overcrowded according to Eurostat standards. At the same time, the average size of dwellings for marginalized Roma is half that of the general population (46 m² vs. 85 m²) (Markovič & Plachá, 2022).

Chronic diseases are an even more significant factor in the disparity between the health of the Roma and non-Roma populations. The most common chronic illnesses among Roma include cardiovascular diseases (29.7%), followed by respiratory diseases (14.3%), joint and bone diseases (14.3%), nervous system disorders (12.5%), and mental illnesses (10.4%). The incidence of cardiovascular disease among Roma is 2.5 times higher than in the majority population (*Civil Society Monitoring*, 2019).

Poverty and social exclusion significantly affect the quality of life of Roma seniors. The proportion of people over the age of 64 in marginalized Roma communities is three times lower than in the general population (5% compared to 18%). This finding, based on recent research, supports earlier studies and highlights the significantly lower life expectancy in Roma communities (71 years in marginalized Roma communities compared to 76 years in the general population) (Markovič & Plachá, 2022). The approximate share of older people in excluded Roma settlements is around 5.9%, while children account for 44.8% and adults for 49.3% (Belák et al., 2020). Because most Roma seniors receive very low pensions, they cannot afford to buy vitamins or healthy food, for example (Filadelfiová, 2013).

According to a UNDP study (2012), Roma are less likely to seek health care due to a range of factors, including low self-awareness and the belief that their health problems do not require professional help (33%). Another 22% of Roma believe their problems will resolve on their own, while 18% cited financial reasons (*Civil Society Monitoring*, 2019). As many as 18% of Roma respondents in the UNDP survey who did not seek health care when needed cited financial constraints as the reason, compared with only 1% in the majority population living nearby. High transport costs and additional fees may also limit access to health care for marginalized Roma (see e.g., Filadelfiová, 2013).

Even though Slovak legislation guarantees that health care should be provided to recipients in good quality and without discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, or ethnicity, the experiences of Roma women with reproductive health care indicate that state institutions need to take effective measures to ensure the consistent application of this legislation in practice. Many of the experiences described by women point to human rights violations, including repeated discrimination, segregation, and violence in gynecological, obstetric, and postnatal care (see also Belák et al., 2018). The forced sterilization of Roma women in the past and their compensation remain ongoing issues (see ERRC, 2023).

LAND SETTLEMENT PROBLEMS

Housing is one of the key elements needed for the successful inclusion of Roma and the improvement of their living conditions. Nevertheless, addressing the housing of the marginalized Roma population is complicated, as many of their houses within neighborhoods/settlements are located on undeveloped land. To this end, the Office of the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities²¹ has launched the Project for the Settlement of Unsettled Land, aimed at settling land on which Roma houses are illegally located. The goal of this project is to settle all the land in Roma settlements, specifically by enabling Roma inhabitants to obtain legal title to the land under their dwellings or by allowing the municipality to implement measures in the settlement that would contribute to the improvement of the inhabitants' housing conditions. The issue of settlement, however, is further complicated because the land may be owned by various interested parties, such as a railway company, a church, unknown owners, etc. According to Markovič and Plachá (2022), only 54% of Roma households have a legally settled relationship to their housing, whether in the form of a purchase contract, registration in the cadastre, or a lease agreement. In terms of housing ownership, significant differences can be observed between non-Roma and Roma households, with the share of Roma homeowners being three times lower (31% vs. 92% of households).

26

SOCIAL HOUSING

The construction of lower standard rental housing in the past two decades proved to be an option to help Roma out of unfavorable housing conditions, but it did not sufficiently address the issue of segregation, as geographically these locations were located outside of the municipality. Another problem was that these were substandard dwellings. Lower standard municipal rental housing for social housing is offered at below-market prices and its allocation is governed by the procedures set out in the law and lower level regulations. The main criterion for the allocation of social housing is the applicant's income. Municipalities

²¹ See: <https://romovia.vlada.gov.sk/urad/?cst=36908859548147090>

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

THE SITUATION OF ROMA IN SLOVAKIA IN THE LIGHT OF RESEARCH

usually establish the procedure for allocating social housing through general binding regulations (Szolgayová et al., 2023).

The costs of constructing social housing have been partially covered by subsidies from the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic. Lower-standard rental flats, which are more attractive to local governments also due to the higher cost coverage by subsidies, were intended as a tool for solving housing problems for the Roma. Although precise data are not available, it is assumed that many Roma households rent this type of housing. Apart from the problematic nature of the very existence of a double standard in social housing, which also predisposes Roma households to worse conditions, the sustainability of this practice is also questionable from a pragmatic point of view (Smatanová, 2019). Compared to the normal standard, these dwellings are smaller, which, in many cases, can pose a major spatial problem given the average size of Roma households compared to the general population. The legislation defines a lower-standard apartment as smaller (from 45 m² to 55 m²) and less equipped than a normal-standard apartment (from 56 m² to 60 m²) (Ibid, 2023).

Lower-standard rental flats are often just a space without any equipment, but with technical preparation for its later installation. Any future tenant, therefore, has to consider significant additional costs, such as for the installation of heating, a shower, toilet, or kitchen. Roma advocacy NGOs have repeatedly argued that the minimum standard of such housing falls short of the minimum standard of adequate housing set out in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights²² (*Civil Society Monitoring*, 2019).²³

27

SPATIAL SEGREGATION

Spatial segregation is generally defined as the spatial exclusion of individuals and groups, and it has a strong socio-economic dimension, particularly when individuals of the same socio-economic status live in the same area. Spatial segregation based on ethnicity has long been

²² See: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/cescr.pdf>.

²³ NGO Center for the research of ethnicity and culture (CVEK) and other NGOs. Monitoring report of the civic society on the implementation of the national Roma integration strategy in Slovakia. assessment of progress in key areas of the strategy.

a major structural mechanism through which ethnic minorities are denied equal access to opportunities in education, health, employment, and housing. Residential segregation also limits opportunities for the creation and development of social ties and contact between members of ethnic minorities and the majority population (Škobla & Filčák, 2016; Havírová, 2022; Džambazovič, 2007). A typical manifestation of the spatial marginalization of Roma is the emergence of remote Roma settlements—literally cut off from the rest of society in rural areas—as well as the formation of urban and suburban ghettos. Although there is no precise definition of the term Roma settlement, it can generally be described as an ethnically homogeneous area, segregated not only spatially but also socially. The creation of ethnically homogeneous areas shifts the perception of the problem from being a social one to an ethnic one (see e.g., UNDP, 2005; UNDP, 2013; Filčák et al., 2017; Rusnáková & Rochovská, 2014).

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

28 Housing affordability refers to the relationship between the financial situation of the population and housing prices, and it applies to both homeowners and renters. A phenomenon known as owner-poor is emerging, where a household or individual may own the dwelling in which they live, but the cost of maintaining the dwelling—along with other living expenses—makes it increasingly difficult for them to sustain an adequate standard of living (see Filadelfiová, 2013; UNDP, 2012; Markovič & Plachá, 2022). Another relevant concept is fuel poverty, which describes a situation where individuals or households lack sufficient financial resources to afford adequate heating and other energy necessary for household functioning (see e.g., Gerbery & Filčák, 2014; Pauhofová & Želinský, 2015; Kodousková & Bořuta, 2022; Dokupilová, 2024).

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Empirical data on the consequences of environmental pollution have become one of the strongest arguments highlighting the environmental disadvantages faced by ethnic groups. Many researchers have confirmed that the case of segregated Roma settlements in Slovakia

exemplifies a class- and ethnicity-based unequal distribution of environmental risks. These settlements are often built on unsuitable terrain—such as near waste dumps or in floodplains—because such locations are the only ones tolerated by the majority population. Roma settlements are frequently situated on land contaminated by industrial activity or in proximity to large municipal waste dumps (Filčák & Steger, 2014; Škobla & Filčák, 2016; Filčák et al., 2020; Filčák & Škobla, 2021; Filčák & Ficeri, 2021; Škobla & Filčák, 2024). Several types of environmental risk distribution can be identified in Slovakia, including: exposure to hazardous substances and chemicals, vulnerability to floods, lack of access to drinking water, exposure to contaminated water, and inadequate waste management (Solín 2012; Filčák & Steger, 2014; Jančovič et al. 2025; Filčák 2025).

WASTE PROBLEM

Waste and waste management have become some of the most pressing challenges for many municipalities in Slovakia over the last two decades. The increasing volume of waste, coupled with opposition from most urban residents to the construction of new landfills near their homes, has created a situation in which the burden of waste management can become discriminatory—disproportionately affecting lower social classes and disadvantaged Roma communities. This discrimination or unequal burden arises because these groups have weaker bargaining positions, lack decision-making power, and possess limited social capital and weak networks to advocate for their interests (Škobla & Filčák, 2016; Škobla & Filčák, 2020; Škobla & Filčák, 2024).

Waste and garbage are often thematized by the majority population and serve as discursive tropes to essentialize local Roma. It is commonly claimed that Roma cannot maintain cleanliness and are unwilling to clean their surroundings. However, an analysis of the relationship between the status of Roma and that of municipalities—as legitimate authorities—suggests that waste management policy can also illustrate structural oppression. What we often witness is a vicious cycle, reflecting the strategic use of subtle tactics to achieve goals aligned with populist agendas that benefit those in power.

Unpaid waste collection fees—often accrued under unclear or questionable circumstances—have become a primary source of debt for many

local Roma. This indebtedness then serves as justification for local authorities to withdraw standard waste collection services in settlements or village areas inhabited by Roma. As a result, the issue of waste management is frequently framed as an ethnic problem, used to highlight disorder and to stigmatize Roma (Filčák & Škobla, eds., 2022).

ACCESS TO WATER

The issue of inadequate access to water is a long-standing problem that has been the focus of attention of municipalities, the state and researchers (see e.g., ERRC, 2017; Filčák et al., 2017; Center for Policy Studies, 2018; Filčák et al., 2020; Filčák & Škobla eds., 2022). Access to quality drinking water is considered as a basic human right, a fact confirmed by a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly from July 2010 (GA/10967). Deteriorating social and economic conditions for some groups, where water becomes inaccessible and increasingly expensive (often because of water supply privatization. After 1.8 million citizens mobilized behind the first successful European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) Right2Water²⁴ and called on the EU to recognize access to safe water as a basic human right. According to ERRC²⁵ officials "denial of access to clean water is one aspect of a wider pattern of official policies and institutional habits that perpetuate environmental racism against Roma, forcing many to live in hazardous conditions that damage their health, endanger their lives and violate their fundamental human rights" (Rorke, 2023).

The report by the ERRC entitled *Thirsting for Justice* (2017) gathered data on several European countries, including Slovakia. The results indicate that, across Europe, significant numbers of Roma suffer disproportionately from the failure of public authorities to secure access to water and sanitation. Roma—especially those forced to live on the outskirts of villages or towns, or in segregated settlements—are often treated in a discriminatory manner by local authorities regarding the provision of these public utilities (ERRC, 2017). The ERRC report identified discriminatory practices by municipalities concerning access to water. For example, Roma settlements were often the only parts of

²⁴ See: <https://right2water.eu/>.

²⁵ See: <https://www.errc.org/>.

a municipality lacking water infrastructure, while other neighborhoods were connected to pipelines. As a result, Roma inhabitants often have to rely on unprotected river water (ERRC, 2017).

Some authors have identified barriers that hinder Roma communities' access to adequate housing and safe drinking water (Škobla & Filčák, 2014; Filčák et al., 2017; Škobla & Filčák, 2024). Even where access to public water systems is technically available, many Roma cannot afford to connect due to the associated costs. Several Roma communities only have access to water thanks to private donations. The ERRC concludes that many Roma households remain without access to water and sewerage due to persistent discrimination (ERRC, 2017).

The research entitled *Atlas of Roma Communities* (Mušinka et al., 2014) identified more than 150 Roma settlements in Slovakia where not a single house was connected to the public water supply, and more than 370 houses lacked a sewerage system. According to the recent EU SILC_MRK 2020 research, more than a quarter (28%) of Roma live in households without a connection to a drinking water source, relying instead on external sources such as a public well, a dispensary, a stream, or water from relatives or acquaintances (Markovič & Plachá, 2022). Only half of these households are connected to public sewerage. Regarding sanitation, 35% of Roma live in households that do not have a shower, bath, or flush toilet. Six percent live without electricity, and an additional 15% have insufficient or non-functional electrical connections. Almost half (47%) of Roma live in areas where they perceive pollution, dirt, or other environmental problems.

The rate of connection to utilities decreases with increasing spatial exclusion of the locality, while the incidence of pollution increases. Problems related to access to water supply and sanitation are often closely linked. Only 50% of Roma people live in households connected to a public sewerage system; 12% use a cesspit, 2% use a septic tank, and more than a third (36%) have no connection to any wastewater disposal system. The situation is worst in settlements located outside village or town boundaries, where 42% of the population lack any type of sewerage system. Sewage systems, together with an indoor source of clean water, are essential components of standard housing, and their absence presents a major problem for households (Ibid., 2022).

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Integration into the labor market, and the quality of that integration, is considered the first and most important prerequisite for the prevention of poverty. Employment or participation in paid work—and the quality of such activities—represents a fundamental source of income necessary for a household to avoid material or other forms of deprivation and exclusion. Conversely, insufficient work opportunities, both in terms of quality and quantity, increase the likelihood that a household and its members will fall into poverty (OECD, 2019). Esping-Andersen (2001) describes how the reduction in living standards due to unemployment translates into limited job search opportunities, as well as disruption of existing social contacts and the risk of social isolation.

Virtually all studies of Roma households in recent years have reached the same conclusion: they highlight the weak and insufficient employment opportunities for people of Roma ethnicity, primarily due to low qualifications and discrimination. These factors are perceived as the main causes of poverty and exclusion (see, e.g., UNDP, 2002, 2006; Vašečka, ed., 2002; Ringold, 2005; Mušinka, 2004; UNDP, 2006; EC, 2005; Ivanov & Trusaliev, 2006; Revenga et al., 2006; De Laat et al., 2009; UNDP, 2012; Škobla & Filčák, 2020).

CURRENT SITUATION OF ROMA ON THE LABOR MARKET

According to the survey only 23% of working-age people from the marginalized Roma communities are employed (either full-time or part-time) or in business, either as a company or self-employed (Markovič & Plachá, 2022). Differences in declared economic status can also be observed regarding the degree of spatial exclusion. In concentrations outside the municipality/locality, the share of employed persons of working age is lower and, conversely, the share of unemployed and inactive persons is higher than in concentrations on the periphery and inside the municipality/locality. Thus, spatial exclusion and related disadvantages can have a direct impact on the employment opportunities of people from marginalized Roma communities.

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

THE SITUATION OF ROMA IN SLOVAKIA IN THE LIGHT OF RESEARCH

More than a third (34%) of the working-age Roma population were receiving employment income at the time of the survey's data collection. For 17% of them, this amounted to less than €1,000 per year. Thus, in addition to lower employment rates, there is also a higher incidence of precarious and low-paid work among Roma. Approximately 12% of all regularly employed Roma, both men and women, work less than 30 hours per week. In comparison, only 2% of the employed general population work less than 30 hours per week. Among Roma working less than 30 hours per week, 71% said they would like to work more but have not been able to find full-time employment. Therefore, marginalized Roma are more likely to be employed part-time, but this is much less likely to be by choice compared to the general population (Markovič & Plachá, 2022).

ACTIVE LABOR MARKET POLICY (ALMP)

Almost half of unemployed Roma registered at the labor office participate in the so-called Activation Work Program (AWP), which is part of active labor market policy measures. AWP measures are the most frequently implemented initiatives aimed at integrating the Roma population into the labor market. According to IFP (Hidas, 2018), only about 8% of unemployed Roma were involved in active labor market policy (ALMP) measures other than the AWP, while among the majority population, it was about one-third of the unemployed. Although the AWP engages a significant proportion of the unemployed Roma population, research suggests it is ineffective, as it does not increase participants' employability or lead to meaningful employment (Mýtna Kureková et al., 2013; Grill, 2014; Polačková, 2024). Rather than serving as a tool for skills development, the AWP can be viewed more as a social protection measure than an employment policy, as it primarily provides basic income support for unemployed persons (Mýtna Kureková et al., 2013, Polačková, 2024).

Another of the ALMPs measures that has limited positive impact on the employability of its participants is REPAS²⁶ a program that focuses on improving work skills. It focuses on retraining courses rather than formal education (Hidas et al., 2018). However, a major issue for low-skilled

²⁶ See: https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/br/sluzby-zamestnanosti/re-pas.html?page_id=585962.

BARRIERS TO LABOR MARKET ENTRY

Several intertwined factors contribute to the relatively high unemployment rate among the Roma population in Slovakia. Many experts have studied this issue and identified various reasons that place Roma individuals at a disadvantage in the job market (see, e.g., O'Higgins & Ivanov, 2006; Pawera & Štefancová, 2013; Mýtna Kureková et al., 2013; Lajčáková et al., 2017; Satara et al., 2020, and many others). As the findings of research by the Institute of Financial Policy (Machalica et al., 2014) show, these factors include a low level of education among Roma and widespread discrimination against them in the labour market. The study revealed that Roma individuals have less than a 50% chance of being invited to a job interview compared to members of the majority population.³¹

Recent research conducted by the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra³² (APVV, 2023) indicates that the most common reasons why Roma are not employed respondents considered racism and discrimination (28%); lack of formal education, skills and experience was indicated by 17% of respondents, and lack of work and very few job opportunities was indicated by 13% of respondents, and another barrier such as transport and travel indicated 9% respondents.³³ It was found that only a small percentage of Roma (8%) living in segregated localities have been employed for more than five years. In contrast, 17% of Roma who live integrated within a village or town have held their current job for more than five years (APVV, 2023). This suggests that social and spatial exclusion are significant barriers to Roma gaining and maintaining employment. These findings support the representative research by UNDP (2012), which shows that labor market exclusion is correlated with the degree of spatial exclusion—meaning that the higher the level of location-based segregation, the higher the unemployment rate.

Slovakia is also characterized by regional disparities in employment opportunities, which is a long-standing problem. Lajčáková et al. (2017)

³¹ See: <https://ifp.sk/>.

³² See: <https://www.ukf.sk/>.

³³ APVV-17-0141 entitled *Analysis of barriers to access to employment opportunities for marginalised population groups: selected regions of Slovakia in socio-economic, geographical and socio-anthropological perspectives*.

or low-educated individuals is that, although participation in the REPAS program is funded by the government employment office, participants must cover transportation and other necessary expenses themselves. These costs are only reimbursed after the course is completed.

Additionally, many REPAS courses require applicants to have completed basic education, which is not always the case for individuals with low educational attainment. Applicants are also expected to find courses on their own, yet people with low education or from marginalized backgrounds often lack access to information or strategies for searching for such opportunities.

KOMPAS is another ALMP measure, aimed at individuals with low education and designed to help them acquire basic skills. However, KOMPAS operates on the same basis as REPAS and therefore faces the same limitations.²⁷

People without formal education face problems in the labor market, which is why the Ministry of Education²⁸ and its specialized agency the State Institute of Vocational Training²⁹ are trying to improve adult education. With regard to the acquisition of formal education for individuals with low educational attainment, they can participate in second-chance education programs to improve their qualifications and increase their chances of integrating into the labor market. Nevertheless, awareness of these opportunities is limited—both among the target groups (low-educated/low-skilled individuals) and among institutional actors, such as educators and education providers, including schools (Rigová et al., 2021).

The Council of Europe³⁰ notes that Slovakia is not yet effectively developing opportunities for vulnerable groups to access second-chance education (CoE, 2018). This type of education is also related to the current ALMP system. As of April 2019, a change in the law (Act No. 417/2013) allows unemployed persons registered at the Labour Office to receive an activation allowance if they participate in second-chance education aimed at completing primary school (Act No. 417/2013). This can be seen as a positive step.

²⁷ See: https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/br/sluzby-zamestnanosti/kompas.html?page_id=732676.

²⁸ See: <https://www.minedu.sk/>.

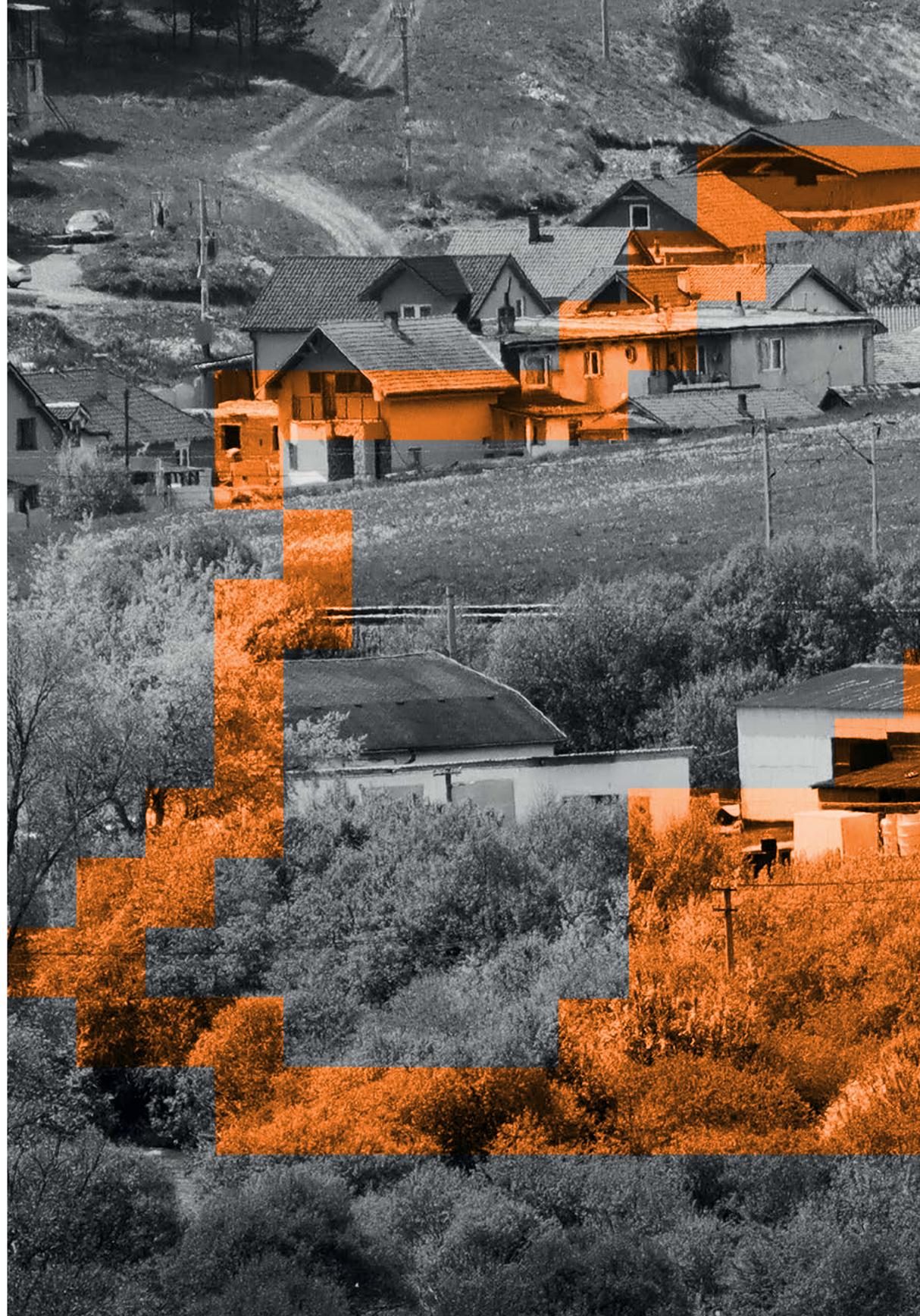
²⁹ See: <https://siov.sk/>.

³⁰ See: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/>.

point out that, in 2016, there were a significant number of job vacancies available in Slovakia, but many required specific skills—indicating a mismatch between the types of jobs available and the skills of jobseekers in the labor market. Relevant differences are also reflected in the infrastructure needed to access employment. Some regions or municipalities have underdeveloped public transport systems, meaning that bus or rail services are either inadequate or not adapted to the needs of potential workers—particularly Roma from marginalized communities (Horňák et al., 2023).

Research also highlights strong discrimination against unemployed Roma, which creates additional barriers in the labor market (Machalica et al., 2014). For unemployed individuals, the primary state service available is registration at the labor exchange office. However, Roma often face limited access to services provided by labor offices, such as various ALMP measures (e.g., self-employment support), as labor offices frequently discourage Roma from using them (Mýtna-Kureková, 2015).

Roma respondents have described labor offices as institutions that primarily monitor whether the unemployed are actively seeking work, rather than assisting them in finding employment. Some Roma reported that they were rarely invited to job fairs organized by labor offices and were often rejected by employers upon discovery of their Roma background—sometimes based solely on their surnames (ibid., 2015). This discriminatory practice poses a significant obstacle in both the job search process and access to employment.



THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ON WHICH THIS BOOK IS BASED

► THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ON WHICH THIS BOOK IS BASED

For the research on Roma access to public services, we adopted a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the subject matter. Within the qualitative component, we employed sociological tools such as focus groups and in-depth interviews to gather nuanced insights into the experiences and perspectives of the research participants. An important methodological note is that both the quantitative data collection and the focus groups and interviews were conducted in the same localities—specifically, the municipalities of Ostrovany, Prešov, and Zborov.

We considered whether to anonymize the locations where data was collected—that is, the towns and villages where interviews, focus groups, and survey data collection took place (see e.g. Škobla et al., 2016; Zachar Podolinská, 2024). Although we generally prefer intelligent data anonymization, we decided to retain the authentic names of the municipalities due to the importance of geographic and ethnographic context. This decision was reinforced by our awareness that we were not addressing controversial issues. On the other hand, we anonymized both the statements from the focus groups and the identities of the individual interview respondents.

DESCRIPTION OF MUNICIPALITIES AND DATA COLLECTION POINTS

Municipality Ostrovany

According to the Atlas of Roma Communities 2019 village Ostrovany has a population of 2,210, of which 1,856 are Roma (84%). The primary language spoken in the community is Romani. The municipality and settlement are connected to the following infrastructure: Water supply: About 80% of the settlement has access and 39% actually use it; Sewer system: About 80% of the settlement has access, and 26% actually use it; Electricity network: About 70% of the settlement has access, and 49% actually use it; Public lighting covers about 70% of the settlement; Gas: Approximately 2% of households use gas; Heating: Around 98% of the settlement uses solid fuels for heating, while 2% use electric heating.

According to data from the Center for Scientific and Technical Information Elementary School Ostrovany consist of: Grades 1–4: 11 classes with 227 students; Grades 5–9: 6 classes with 109 students, which amounts to total: 17 classes with 336 students. Staff consist of 21 teachers and 7 teaching assistants. Kindergarten Ostrovany consist of: Full-day classes: 2 classes attended by 30 children; Half-day classes: 2 classes attended by 32 children; Compulsory pre-primary education: 3 classes with 52 children. Staff consist of 6 teachers and 2 teaching assistants. Special Elementary School Ostrovany consist of: Grades 1–4: 1 class with 12 students (including 3 girls); Grades 5–9: 4 classes with 31 students (including 12 girls) which amount to total of 5 classes with 43 students (including 15 girls), while staff are 6 teachers and 1 teaching assistant.

Municipality Prešov

According to the Atlas of Roma Communities Prešov has 85,748 inhabitants of which 3,434 Roma (4%). There are two major Roma neighborhoods in the town—Taras Shevchenko Street and ul. K starej tehelni settlement. The latter is perceived as an inner town concentration. In K starej tehelni settlement 894 people live there in 176 flats belonging to the city. All apartments are connected to public water supply, public sewerage, gas and electricity. Electricity is officially used by about 70% of the dwellings, the remaining dwellings are officially disconnected from electricity due to arrears. The flats are heated by gas fired ovens.

Municipality Zborov

According to the Atlas of Roma Communities 2019, Zborov has 3,450 inhabitants of which 1,796 are Roma (52%). The Atlas records two concentrations in the municipality, in which 1,536 (85.5%) of the inhabitants live, the remaining 260 Roma live in the dispersion among the majority. In both concentrations Atlas records: 13 apartment buildings with 108 municipal rental flats 795 inhabitants; 22 legal family houses with 6 inhabitants; 5 illegal family houses with 37 inhabitants; 4 one-room dwellings with 15 inhabitants; 76 shacks with 523 inhabitants.

Both the village and the settlements are connected to: water supply which about 75% of the settlement can use it and 70% actually use it; sewerage system 100% of the population can use it and 50% actually use it; electricity network about 100% of the population can use it and

35% actually use it. About 50% of the area is covered by public lighting, about 10% of an area can use gas and 5% actually use it about and about 95% of the settlements are heated with solid fuel and 5% are heated with electricity.

Primary school with kindergarten Zborov has in 1.–4. grade 12 classes with 231 pupils. In grades 5.–9. it has 13 classes with 242 pupils. This amounts to total of 25 classes with 473 pupils. School has 40 teachers and 10 teaching assistants. In the Kindergarten it has 7 full-day classes attended by 125 children. Moreover 66 children attend compulsory pre-primary education in 5 classes. There are 15 teachers in the Kindergarten. Ostrovany Special Primary School in total has 7 classes with 53 pupils (25 girls). There are 8 teachers and 4 teaching assistants.

FOCUS GROUPS INFORMATION

Ostrovany

The focus group in Ostrovany took place on October 31, 2024. It was the first focus groups conducted within this research. It was organized by a local Roma who works as a teaching assistant at the local elementary school and is also pursuing higher education. All participants were Roma from the local community, with a total of 8 respondents (5 women and 3 men). Characteristics of the participants were as follows:

- Woman (35+): Homemaker, husband works informally doing odd jobs. They have six children and are expecting their seventh. Lives in a poorer part of the community and belongs to the lower social class.
- Woman (35+): Homemaker, husband works informally. They have ten children and are originally from Jarovnice. Lives in a poorer part of the community and belongs to the lower social class.
- Woman (40+): Homemaker, husband works for Strabag on construction sites. They have nine children, one of whom is an adult. Originally from Prešov, with roots in Hermanovce and Prešov. Her father is half-Roma, and her mother is non-Roma. Lives in Ostrovany with her Roma husband.
- Woman (30+): Homemaker, husband works informally. They have four children, two of whom work for Imuna, and one studies at PU (University of Prešov).

- Woman (35+): Works as an assistant at the local elementary school, previously worked as a TSP (field social worker) assistant at the municipal office. Homemaker, husband works informally. They have six children.
- Man (40+): Works as an assistant at the elementary school.
- Man (under 20): Works in construction. Uneducated and participated very little in the discussions.
- Man (25+): Works as an assistant at the elementary school. He has a bachelor's degree and has been living in Sabinov for two years. Active in the Apostolic Church, currently studying externally at PU in elementary and preschool pedagogy.

Prešov

The focus group took place on November 14, 2024, organized by a local assistant. Eight respondents participated (4 women and 4 men), all Roma from the local community. This community was formed by merging two larger communities in Prešov initially relocated from rental apartments to nearby housing on Sabinovská Street and later from the Pod Hrádkom area in Solivar. The Pod Hrádkom area was considered more socioeconomically disadvantaged—a perception that persists until these days. Representatives from both areas participated in the focus group. Characteristics of the participants:

- Woman (35+): Homemaker who used to live in the Dorka Church shelter. Now lives with her husband and four children in Stará Teheľňa. Belongs to a socially disadvantaged group.
- Woman (25+): A young widow with two children, recently began working as an assistant at a community center, focusing on children.
- Woman (40+): Health assistant, active in the local Apostolic Church.
- Woman (25+): Unemployed, on maternity leave, part of the local disadvantaged group.
- Man (40+): Older man, officially unemployed, works informally.
- Man (under 20): Younger man (son of the older man), officially unemployed.
- Man (65+): Retired.
- Man (25+): Employed.

Zborov

The focus group in Zborov took place on November 18, 2024, organized by a local activist with whom an individual interview was also conducted. There was a limitation due to the focus group coinciding with the first day of social benefits distribution, making it challenging (according to the coordinator) to gather enough participants. Eventually, the focus group consisted of 7 participants (3 men and 4 women), all Roma from the local community. Characteristics of the participants:

- Married couple (40+): The man works as a laborer on a castle restoration project under a state project. His wife works as a shopkeeper in their grocery store within the community. They live in a family house and belong to the local upper-middle class.
- Siblings (40+): A man and a woman. The woman has her own family, while the man does not. They live in a local shack, are unemployed, and work sporadically (mainly the man). The woman participates in activation work.
- Man (55+): Unemployed, registered at the labor office. His children are adults. Lives in an apartment block.
- Woman (45+): Unemployed, registered at the labor office. Her children are adults. Lives in a row house.
- Woman (about 30): Mother on maternity leave. Lives in the community in a house.

The respondents represent various social groups within the community. The employed married couple belongs to the local upper-middle class, the older siblings belong to the lower class, and the rest belong to the middle class. Educationally, none of them have a high school diploma.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

In the following paragraph we list the entire list of respondents with their occupational and demographic characteristics, which are assigned codes so that the answers can be identified for the reader. Code R5 was assigned to a subset of respondents because this was a collective interview and it was not possible to identify individual responses and assign them to a specific author. This is not a disadvantage, however, because the respondents represented one and the same institution, and demographic characteristics did not differentiate between them.

Individual Characteristics of Respondents and their Codes

- R1: Teacher's assistant at the local elementary school in Ostrovany. A Roma individual from the settlement, currently studying at university. Age: 20+.
- R2: Mayor of Ostrovany, a Roma individual serving in their second term. Born in the village, holds a university degree in physical education and special pedagogy. Age: 40+.
- R3: Principal (55+) and teacher at the local elementary school in Ostrovany. A non-Roma individual with years of teaching experience. Resides in Šarišské Michaľany and previously taught at the elementary school there.
- R4: Municipal office worker in Ostrovany. A non-Roma individual working at the office for 20 years. Born and raised in Ostrovany. Age: 50+. Single, childless. Teaches religion at the elementary school alongside another office worker, who is her former classmate.
- R5: Representatives of Prešov Real, a management company for rental housing in Stará Tehelňa:
 - Manager, a non-Roma individual with a legal background. Age: 40+.
 - Head of the financial department, a non-Roma woman. Age: 35+.
 - Another head of the financial department, a non-Roma woman. Age: 30+.
 - Head of the housing management department, a non-Roma individual with a legal background. Age: 40+.
 - Housing management department staff, a non-Roma individual with a legal background. Age: 35+.
- R6: Mayor of Zborov, serving a second term. A lawyer by profession.
- R7: A Roma woman, age 35+, who moved to Zborov after marrying there. Works as a community worker in the Community Center (KC), has completed secondary school, and is currently pursuing her high school diploma.
- R8: A Roma woman, age 50+, working as an assistant in the local kindergarten (MŠ) and as an Omama in Zborov. Very active in her community, resides in the settlement, and lived in a shack for many years.
- R9: A Roma woman, age 25+, member of MOPS in Zborov, works as an assistant in the KC and coordinates public service programs (VPP). Lives in a modular unit to which she added a bathroom. A trained hairdresser currently pursuing her high school diploma in Bardejov.

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ON WHICH THIS BOOK IS BASED

- R10: A non-Roma man, age 30+, manager of the municipal enterprise in Zborov. Born and resides in Zborov.
- R11: Vice-mayor of Prešov, a non-Roma man, age 40+, with a university degree in religious studies. Married to a Roma woman.
- R12: Municipal office worker in Ostrovany, a non-Roma woman. Age: 50+. Lifelong resident of the village, with over 30 years of service at the office.
- R13: Teacher (45+) at the local elementary school in Ostrovany, a non-Roma woman. Experienced educator, previously taught at a special school in Ostrovany and later at an elementary school in Šarišské Michaľany.
- R14: TSP (field social worker) in Ostrovany, a non-Roma woman. Age: 30+. Resides in Sabinov, holds a university degree.
- R15: Another TSP in Ostrovany, a non-Roma woman. Age: 45+. Lives in a village near Sabinov, holds a university degree.
- R : Assistant TSP in Ostrovany, a non-Roma woman. Age: 40+. Resides in Ostrovany. Her husband is a former police officer. Holds a bachelor's degree.
- R17: Assistant TSP in Ostrovany, a Roma woman. Age: 25+. Resides in Ostrovany.
- R18: KC coordinator in Prešov, a non-Roma woman. Age: 35+. Holds a university degree in social work from the Orthodox Faculty at Prešov University. Originally from a nearby village, Abramovce, where she worked as a social worker.
- R19: Head of the social department at the municipal office in Prešov, a non-Roma woman. Age: 45+. Holds a university degree, resides near Prešov, and previously worked in NGOs in the social services sector.
- R20: A Roma woman, age 65+, worker at the KC in Prešov. Active in the Apostolic Church.
- R21: A Roma woman, age 30+, worker for Healthy Regions (Zdravé Regióny) in Prešov. Active in the Apostolic Church.
- R22: A non-Roma woman, age 50+, working as a TSP in Zborov for five years. Resident of Zborov.
- R23: Another TSP in Zborov, a non-Roma woman. Age: 50+. Seven years of experience as a TSP, also a resident of Zborov.
- R24: A Roma man, age 50+, coordinator for Healthy Regions. Former two-term municipal council member. University-educated and has lived outside the settlement among non-Roma in a house almost his entire life.

- R25: A non-Roma woman, teacher at the MŠ in Zborov. Age: 50+. Resides in another village and does not teach Roma children. The interview with her was the least informative, as her knowledge about Roma came mainly from indirect sources, highlighting the general lack of direct information among those not in contact with Roma communities.
- R26: Head of the KC in Zborov and manager of Bašta, an independent cultural hub in Bardejov. A non-Roma man, age 45+, with a university degree in special education and years of experience. Took up the role at the KC in March 2024.

Quantitative Sample Survey

The survey was conducted over a short period, essentially within one week, across all three locations. In each location, the survey was primarily conducted by Roma individuals from the local community who actively work there in various helping professions. All interviewers underwent detailed training (separately for each location), during which we thoroughly explained the entire research, its objectives, and applications, as well as reviewed the entire questionnaire.

During these training sessions, we worked with the interviewers to divide the respective location into distinct sections to ensure proportional representation of the entire community. The interviewers allocated households within the community among themselves to avoid duplication and to ensure that the households were as evenly represented as possible both territorially and socially.

All 15 interviewers across the three locations had prior experience conducting various surveys and questionnaires. Six of the interviewers were also participants in focus groups or had been individually interviewed as part of previous phases of the research. This ensured they were well-informed about the purpose and structure of the research. Financial remuneration, especially during the pre-Christmas season, served as a significant motivation for completing the questionnaires quickly and accurately. A total of 186 questionnaires were completed using a random data collection method.

The data collection in Ostrovany was conducted from December 17 to 19, 2024, by five interviewers (three men and two women) from the local community. All are active in various activities within the Roma community. Three of the interviewers are university students.

In Zborov, the data collection was conducted in two phases. Fifty-four questionnaires were completed between December 13 and, 2024, and eight more on December 23, 2024. Five interviewers (three men and two women), all Roma from the local community, carried out the survey. Four work in various helping professions within the municipality, while one is employed outside the community. Two interviewers have completed or are pursuing higher education, while the others have completed secondary education with a high school diploma.

The survey in the Stará Tehelňa locality in Prešov was conducted from December to 18, 2024. Five interviewers participated, three of whom were Roma and two non-Roma. Two interviewers live directly in the locality, but all work there in helping professions. Two interviewers have higher education, and three have secondary education with a high school diploma.

WHAT THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS SAID IN THE FOCUS GROUPS

All participants in the focus groups were of Roma ethnic background. It is crucial to highlight that the selection process for the focus group participants was not directly controlled by the researchers. Instead, this task was delegated to the researchers' field assistants, who were responsible for identifying and inviting participants. All participants in the focus groups were of Roma background; however, due to the indirect nature of the selection process, we lack detailed information whether they were representative of the broader Roma population. Consequently, our focus group analysis is contingent on the decisions and judgment of the field assistants regarding participant selection.

WHAT VIEWS DID THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS IN PREŠOV HAVE

A focus group conducted in the Stará Tehelňa segregated urban locality in Prešov highlights a range of pressing issues, particularly unsuitable living conditions. The gallery-style housing, characterized by communal external corridors, offers little privacy. The high population density and social diversity exacerbate tensions, as residents come from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Moreover, the building was poorly constructed from the beginning, contributing to a range of structural and maintenance problems.

Housing and Hygiene

The communal housing setup in the settlement has amplified existing challenges, particularly those related to limited personal space, noise, and hygiene. Residents often feel constrained by the lack of privacy and the diversity of lifestyles and behaviors within such close proximity. One participant highlighted the difficulties associated with gallery-style living, where multiple households share common spaces:

M: "Gallery-style living is not suitable because there are so many different kinds of people here. Some are like this, some are like that, and some are completely different—I don't even know what kind of creatures they are. Unadaptable people live here. In Prešov, they think of us as 'osadníci' (settlers)."

▶ WHAT THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS SAID IN THE FOCUS GROUPS

Tensions have worsened since Roma residents from another locality were relocated to Stará Tehelňa. While this move aimed to address housing shortages, it has inadvertently heightened conflicts among residents due to differing habits and behaviors.

One of the most pressing concerns raised by participants is the widespread infestation of pests such as cockroaches and bedbugs. These infestations have created a significant burden for residents, who frequently spend their limited resources on pest control and replacing damaged household items. A woman participant described the relentless nature of the problem:

(W): “We live here with cockroaches and bedbugs—a lot of them. Exterminators come, spray the place, and promise to return in two weeks, but it never ends. You throw out furniture, and still, they are everywhere, even outside on the asphalt.”

Residents thus have resorted to daily cleaning routines, constant pest control measures, and replacing furniture to manage the situation. However, these efforts often feel futile, as infestations return within months.

As (M) asserts: “People work but spend their earnings on buying new beds, wardrobes, and sprays. Yet, even after cleaning every day, the pests return within months. We check our children’s schoolbags daily and shake them out because you never know where these things might hide.”

Key Concerns were overcrowding and limited personal space exacerbate tensions and create an unsuitable living environment. Participants expressed a strong desire for improved housing conditions and better management services. They emphasized the need for coordinated interventions, such as regular and effective pest control measures, to address the root causes of these issues. Additionally, many residents called for housing solutions that ensure greater privacy and foster a more harmonious coexistence among the community’s diverse members.

Housing Maintenance and Oversight

The maintenance of municipal housing in Stará Tehelňa is grossly inadequate, leaving residents to shoulder the burden of repairs despite their consistent payment of rent and utility fees, which are intended to cover maintenance. This neglect is most evident in the delayed or ignored requests for basic maintenance, such as replacing broken windows, repairing damaged doors, or addressing structural issues. For example, many windows in the housing units are outdated, improperly

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

WHAT THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS SAID IN THE FOCUS GROUPS

sealed, or entirely non-functional, leading to extreme discomfort during adverse weather conditions. One resident described enduring nearly a year without a functioning window, during which rainwater frequently entered their apartment, causing water damage and further deteriorating living conditions. Despite this, the municipality or housing management often fails to act promptly, leaving tenants to either live in sub-standard conditions or pay for repairs out of their own pocket.

(M): “In the summer, you can’t even open a window. It’s hot and stifling. They’ve never replaced the doors since I’ve lived here—everything is out of our pocket.”

Another respondent confirms this perspective (W): “The windows were old and nailed shut for 20 years. For nearly a year, I didn’t have a functioning window. When it rained, water poured inside, flooding the floor. And yet, they still expect us to pay full rent.”

Similarly, doors that have not been replaced in decades pose both security and safety risks. Weak, broken, or ill-fitting doors fail to provide adequate protection, and residents are forced to invest their limited resources into repairs or replacements. For families living on tight budgets, these additional expenses often come at the cost of other essential needs. This lack of maintenance fosters a sense of frustration and neglect among the residents. They feel that their contributions to housing fees are not reciprocated with basic services, further eroding trust in local governance and the housing administration.

(M) explained: “You can’t sleep at night because of the noise. Kids are blasting radios, and when welfare payments come, it’s chaos—drinking, fights, music blaring all night.”

Noise levels in the area are extremely high, particularly at night, due to gatherings, loud music, and public drinking during welfare payment days. This environment disrupts the lives of those who work shifts or have school-aged children.

Employment and Social Stigma

Residents of Stará Tehelňa face significant stigmatization due to the area’s negative reputation. This stigma hinders their ability to secure employment. Employers often discriminate based on their address.

As (M) indicated: “At one company, the worker looked at my ID and as my permanent address he saw Stará Tehelňa. He immediately said, ‘Oh, sorry, we don’t hire people from there.’”

Many residents report that job offers made over the phone are retracted once they appear in person and their address is revealed. Some employers cite fabricated reasons, such as full staffing, while others only hire temporarily, further limiting opportunities. (W) described:

“There are 176 apartments here, housing around 1,300 Roma. When people try to find jobs, they face constant rejection. Over the phone, they might say yes, but once you arrive, they tell you they’re full or only hire on a trial basis.”

Social Integration

Participants suggest that fostering better integration between Roma and non-Roma communities could play a pivotal role in promoting mutual adaptation, reducing social tensions, and challenging long-standing prejudices. They believe that creating mixed residential areas, where families from different ethnic and social backgrounds live in close proximity, could encourage greater understanding and cooperation. (M) explained: “They should mix Roma and non-Roma families in housing blocks—maybe four Roma families per entrance. That way, people would adapt. But they don’t give us this chance because they see us as ‘Gypsies.’”

Integration, according to participants, involves more than just physical relocation; it requires deliberate efforts to create opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and shared experiences. For instance, they advocate for placing Roma families in mixed housing units alongside non-Roma families, emphasizing that such an arrangement could help individuals from both groups overcome stereotypes.

Paraphrasing statement of one of the participants, living together could lead to positive influence and behavioral adaptation, where individuals who are initially less accustomed to structured social norms might gradually adjust to the expectations of the broader community. Moreover, integration initiatives could extend to shared public spaces such as schools, community centers, and workplaces.

Participants believe that exposure to diverse perspectives in educational settings and cooperative work environments could dismantle barriers, foster empathy, and highlight commonalities rather than differences. Ultimately, the participants envision integration as a two-way street, where both Roma and non-Roma communities contribute to creating an inclusive society. By promoting shared living spaces and opportunities for meaningful interaction, they believe that mutual trust and respect can grow, laying the foundation for long-term social integration.

• BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

Conclusion

The issues in Stará Tehelňa are multifaceted, spanning poor housing quality, hygiene concerns, and systemic discrimination. Addressing these challenges requires improved housing maintenance and targeted anti-discrimination measures to enhance opportunities and quality of life for residents. Such efforts could break the cycle of social exclusion and empower the community.

WHAT VIEWS DID THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS IN OSTROVANY HAVE

Participants in Ostrovany reflected mainly on the community changes over recent years and on the life of the Roma and their interactions with non-Roma. Over the past decade, significant changes have been noted in various aspects of daily life and communal living.

Cleanliness and Waste Management Services

A notable improvement has been the cleanliness of the settlement. Public spaces are cleaned more frequently than in the past. As one Roma respondent expressed: Woman (W): “I enjoy living in Ostrovany. The place is clean and orderly now.” Another respondent shared a broader perspective: Man (M): “Life among the Roma community, whether in the settlement or the whole village, has been like a rollercoaster—sometimes better, sometimes worse.”

Regular garbage collection has become a routine, with a garbage truck coming every two weeks and a large container available weekly. However, challenges remain, as one respondent observed: Man (M): “Still, there’s a lot of waste—people often throw trash on empty lots.”

This reflects the ongoing need for changes in waste management practices and increased awareness within the community about maintaining cleanliness and proper waste disposal.

• WHAT THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS SAID IN THE FOCUS GROUPS

Employment services

Integration into the labor market, and the quality of that integration, is widely recognized as the cornerstone for poverty prevention. Employment provides not only a critical source of income to meet basic needs and prevent material deprivation but also fosters social inclusion and community engagement. Conversely, insufficient job opportunities whether in terms of quantity or quality, heighten the risk of poverty and exclusion for households and individuals. The focus group discussion highlighted significant improvements in employment within the local Roma community in Ostrovany over the past decade.

According to the participants, the employment rate in the community has seen a remarkable increase recently. (M): “Ten years ago, maybe 2% of people had jobs. Now, around 85% are employed, mostly in construction across Slovakia.”

This shift represents a dramatic transformation with the majority of working-age individuals now contributing to their household incomes through paid employment. Construction jobs has emerged as a primary sector of employment for Roma men from Ostrovany, providing stable opportunities for Roma workers and enabling greater financial security for their families. The focus group also highlighted a significant cultural and social change: the increasing involvement of women in the labor market. As one participant noted: Woman (W): “Even women have started working. They no longer want to stay home but aim to be independent.”

This shift marks a departure from traditional gender roles within the community, reflecting a broader desire for empowerment, self-sufficiency, and active participation in the household’s economic stability.

The Role of Active Labor Market Policies and Measures

The increase in employment can be attributed, in part, to targeted development and labor market policies aimed at supporting Roma inclusion. Active labor market policies (ALMPs), such as training programs, job placement services, and subsidies for employers, have played a crucial role in addressing unemployment risks for vulnerable groups. These measures have borne fruit in Ostrovany, providing pathways to employment for individuals who were previously excluded from the labor market.

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

WHAT THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS SAID IN THE FOCUS GROUPS

The implementation of community-specific initiatives, such as construction skills training and local employment drives, has been particularly effective in integrating Roma workers into the national economy.

While the progress is visible, challenges remain. The quality of jobs, job stability, and equal treatment in the workplace require continued attention. The socio-psychological impact of exclusion, even among the employed, can still pose barriers to full societal integration. As it was suggested by focus group participants, to sustain and build upon these gains, employment strategies must continue to address strengthening educational and vocational training and tackling workplace discrimination and promoting equitable working conditions.

The improvements in employment among the Roma community in Ostrovany illustrate the transformative power of inclusive labor policies and community-driven initiatives. By fostering greater participation in the labor market, the community has taken significant steps toward reducing poverty, increasing financial independence, and enhancing overall quality of life.

Education

Education is universally recognized as a vital pathway for breaking the cycle of poverty and social exclusion. The focus group discussions in Ostrovany underscored the importance of improving educational inclusion for Roma children, emphasizing that access to quality education provides them with better opportunities to build brighter futures. In recent years, tangible progress has been made in expanding educational infrastructure in Ostrovany to better serve the Roma community. The establishment of local kindergartens also has reduced barriers to access.

Elementary School Ostrovany nowadays consists of 17 classes, serving a total of 336 students. Kindergarten Ostrovany includes two full-day classes with 30 children and two half-day classes with 32 children. Compulsory Pre-Primary Education comprises three classes with 52 children. This recent expansion has significantly eased the burden of travel for families. As one participant noted (M): “We now have our own school and kindergarten, accommodating up to 100 children. Before, kids had to commute to Šarišské Michaľany.”

Additionally, the development of a community center and other initiatives, such as a planned school’s gymnasium, has enriched the community’s educational and social infrastructure. Another participant (W):

“We’ve got a new community center and other projects, like a planned school gymnasium.”

Despite these improvements, the Roma community in Ostrovany continues to face significant challenges in education such as low educational achievement. The historically low levels of academic success among Roma children remain a major barrier to breaking the cycle of poverty. Factors such as limited parental education, language barriers, and insufficient early childhood education often hinder their progress.

Need for Inclusive Teaching Practices

As coming from the focus group discussion, while the infrastructure has improved, the schools and kindergartens are often lacking adequate resources, such as teaching materials, specialized support staff, and extracurricular programs, to fully meet the needs of the pupils. Culturally responsive teaching methods and the integration of Roma heritage into the curriculum are critical for fostering a sense of belonging and engagement. As one respondent highlighted, the involvement of Roma pedagogical assistants is essential for bridging cultural gaps and providing support.

56

Conclusion

To build on these gains and address challenges, a complex approach is necessary to secure pre-primary education programs to reach all children in the Ostrovany Roma community. From the discussion also pop up the need to encouraging greater involvement of parents in their children’s education through intensified communication with schools. This intensified communication can possibly also foster a stronger support system at home. Also, establishing initiatives to support Roma students can which reduce dropout rates, was mentioned by one participant. Participants agreed that continued investment in facilities such as the planned gymnasium, can create a more stimulating educational environment.

The progress in education and infrastructure in Ostrovany have manifested the community’s efforts to improve opportunities for Roma children. However, addressing the deep-rooted educational disparities will require sustained investment and a commitment to inclusive policies. By ensuring that all Roma children receive fair education, Ostrovany can pave the way for a more equitable future.

• BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

WHAT VIEWS DID THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS IN ZBOROV HAVE

Life in the village is perceived by the focus group participants as generally unfavorable. Focus group members feel that activities are primarily organized for non-Roma residents. Suggestions for building housing for successful Roma families highlight potential benefits like reducing overcrowding, fostering ethnic integration, and inspiring Roma families through positive examples from non-Roma neighbors.

Access to housing

The housing situation has worsened over the past 5–10 years, particularly due to difficulty purchasing land locally. Land being sold to non-Roma or Roma from other villages rather than locals. In the village it is impossible to buy land and if it is even free they sell it to non-Roma or Roma from other villages, not to locals.

As noted one participant (W): “ It’s for the worse, not for the better. It’s gotten worse that we, the Gypsies, still have problems with not having a place to live. With housing, with living together. An example, if I can speak for myself: I wanted to buy a plot of land among the whites and the mayor said there is still no land and we have more land here and he kept saying there is no land because this is occupied, he already bought this, he already bought this, he bought this, he bought this, and still nothing. And when I went to buy a house again, also down on the Short Row, where the gajas live, he wouldn’t sell to me again, because he would rather sell his house from a foreign village than to us gypsies from Zborov. There are a lot of old people here who, when they die, the young ones sell the houses and go away. But not to our people, to the Zborov people, but to strangers.”

Another participant indicated (M): “The mayor doesn’t want Roma there; he prefers to keep them isolated. We wanted to buy land among non-Roma, but the mayor claims it’s unavailable, despite plots being sold to outsiders.”

Another problem discussed were poor conditions in low-standard housing, which quickly deteriorate. Participants perceive the lower

• WHAT THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS SAID IN THE FOCUS GROUPS

57

standard flats as not suitable because they are of a lower standard, they are not enough and they wear out quickly. As one participant put it (M): “Low-standard housing feels like barns for animals rather than homes.”

Infrastructure and Self-Built Homes

The self-help housing project is viewed positively, but are critical of it because it is built close to the settlement and there is no asphalt access road, only a muddy one. New housing estate is built in poor location close to the settlement where there is a lack of basic infrastructure like paved roads.

W: “Mayor helped our gypsies to take such a loan, and to make themselves a house. Self-help construction project DOMOV. Into such dirt, into such mud, such beautiful houses they built and again they live where they are. Just across the street, 5 meters away and into that dirt again.”

Another noted: (W): “Beautiful houses were built, but they’re still surrounded by mud.”

58

Perception of the local government

The mayor is viewed negatively due to favoritism towards non-Roma and lack of investment in Roma housing or infrastructure. (M): “The mayor built apartments for non-Roma but not for Roma... he promises help during elections but delivers nothing.”

Having their own representatives in the local government or in the position of mayor is perceived positively, even if they are skeptical about asserting themselves in the council.

(W): “If we have another mayor, will he behave differently? He won’t.”

(W): No, we [Roma] don’t even have deputy representative in the council. This won’t even pass... once there was a Roma candidate, we voted for him too and he still didn’t pass. There is envy among us Roma as well. Roma rather vote for a gadje. We help them to build houses and roads and everything, but we only have a mayor who doesn’t give a damn about us”.

• BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

Social Integration and Living Preferences

Participants expressed a strong desire for integration and improved living standards, prioritizing cleanliness, dignity, and mutual respect over ethnicity. Discussions revealed a shared aspiration for a better quality of life, with participants emphasizing that their primary concern was not about living exclusively among Roma or non-Roma but about achieving and maintaining a standard of living that reflects equality and mutual respect.

Regarding their vision for the future, many participants highlighted the importance of clean and well-maintained living environments, regardless of the ethnic composition of their neighborhoods. Several expressed a preference for living in mixed communities with non-Roma, while others envisioned independent Roma communities that uphold the same standards of cleanliness, safety, and opportunity as those of non-Roma neighborhoods. This underscores a shared commitment to integration without compromising cultural identity or pride.

One participant explained (M): “We want to show we can live as well as non-Roma.”

Another emphasized the importance of mutual respect in creating harmonious communities (W): “It doesn’t matter if it’s Roma or non-Roma neighbors, as long as there’s mutual respect.”

These sentiments reflect a broader commitment to dispelling stereotypes and demonstrating the ability of Roma communities to thrive under equitable conditions. While some participants expressed a preference for living standards comparable to non-Roma communities within predominantly Roma neighborhoods, others preferred dispersed living arrangements that allow for greater integration and interaction with non-Roma. Across all preferences, the emphasis remained consistent: dignity, equality, and respect are the foundations of the living environments.

Employment

Employment opportunities have improved for women in the past 5–10 years, with some women finding work locally or abroad. However, discrimination in the labor market remains a significant barrier, particularly during hiring processes. Stories of bias and prejudice were shared during discussions, reflecting the challenges women, particularly those

• WHAT THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS SAID IN THE FOCUS GROUPS

59

from marginalized groups, continue to face. One participant shared a poignant example involving her daughter, a trained chef-waiter. Although she initially secured a job, her experience at work was marred by discrimination. The participant recounted:

(W): “I have a daughter, a chef-waiter she is trained. And she went to work. And she was there with a friend, she’s a little bit white, a little bit. She went there for a week, and her friend told her: Mirka, don’t be angry, you’re so pretty, you have such a complexion, but it’s a little bit like you’re Roma. And she told her that she is Roma, she is not ashamed of it. Hey, really? The next day she came to work, the supervisor came in: Well, unfortunately, you can’t anymore. And she worked there for a week. He fired her.”

Another participant echoed similar sentiments: (W): “My daughter also was dismissed from a job after revealing she was Roma.”

Such stories highlight how stereotypes continue to limit opportunities for women, particularly those from Roma communities.

Participants also observed disparities in the types of jobs available to women and men. While some young Roma women are employed as cleaners in schools or hotels, many men are engaged in labor-intensive jobs. Employment dynamics often reinforce traditional gender roles, with men seen as primary breadwinners. One male participant noted (M): “Men dominate labor projects, leaving fewer opportunities for women.”

While progress has been made, these accounts underscore the ongoing struggle for equality and the need for inclusive policies and social practices to ensure fair opportunities for all.

Education

The school system has come under criticism for a lack of effective integration, with the majority of classes now dominated by Roma students. Many non-Roma families transfer their children to other schools, perceiving the local school environment as less suitable. This shift has exacerbated segregation within the educational system, which participants described as a stark departure from the past, when schools were more integrated and promoted mutual interaction among students of different ethnicities. One male participant reflected on his own experiences of mixed schooling:

(M): “We were mixed in the same class together, half Roma, half gadje. They didn’t make a distinction between the Roma and the gadje. We

studied together, we were in the gym together, we had the dressing room together. We had everything together. Now they make a difference. Now a gadjo doesn’t even sit down with a gypsy on the bench or at lunch. They have a split lunch—the gadje eat on that side and the Roma eat on the other side.”

Participants expressed disappointment in how the school environment has shifted from one of integration to one of division. Non-Roma students increasingly avoid contact with their Roma peers, and even shared spaces such as cafeterias and gymnasiums have become segregated.

Another participant highlighted the trend of non-Roma families avoiding local schools altogether (W): “Non-Roma parents avoid local schools because of the high number of Roma students.”

This migration of non-Roma families to other schools not only deepens segregation but also negatively impacts perceptions of the local school. Many participants remarked on how the lack of diversity and interaction has contributed to growing tensions and misunderstandings between the two groups. Another participant lamented the changes, pointing out the broader social implications (M): “In the past, classes were mixed; now, they’re mostly Roma.”

Participants also overwhelmingly agreed that the lack of integration in the school system perpetuates stereotypes and limits opportunities for Roma students to develop meaningful relationships with their non-Roma peers. They emphasized the need for deliberate initiatives to promote inclusivity within schools, such as encouraging diversity and ensuring equal treatment for all students, regardless of their ethnicity. The current state of segregation in schools was widely seen as a symptom of larger societal divides, with several participants expressing a desire for the school system to become a space of unity and respect.

Healthcare services

Local healthcare services are generally perceived as positive, with participants praising the care and attention they receive within their immediate communities. However, regional healthcare facilities, particularly in Bardejov, have drawn significant criticism for discriminatory practices, especially within maternity wards and pediatric departments. These services were described as highly inequitable, with Roma women often facing substandard conditions and treatment.

Participants specifically highlighted the poor state of gynecology and children's wards, which are seen as deliberately neglectful toward Roma patients. The facilities designated for Roma women were described as severely inadequate, with unclean environments and uncomfortable sleeping arrangements, contributing to feelings of humiliation and exclusion. One participant vividly described the conditions in the children's ward:

(W): "But even in the children's ward, there is disastrous. It's impossible to sleep there—the dirt, the mattresses—it's meant for Roma, Roma women. It's like for rats. Our women prefer to sleep next to the bed on the floor. And if you don't have the money for that superior room, where are you going to sleep? I wouldn't sleep on that mattress."

Participants also noted the financial barriers within the healthcare system. Roma patients are often required to make upfront payments for essential services, including emergency care and room upgrades, creating further inequality. For those unable to pay, access to care becomes severely limited:

(W): "Even normally you go with the little one to the reception, and if you don't have the money, they don't take you and leave this little baby to cry. You pay for the emergency room. He asks beforehand if I have money; if I have money, we go talk; if I don't have money, unfortunately."

Segregation within healthcare facilities was another major concern, particularly in maternity wards where Roma women are often placed in separate rooms. These wards were described as poorly maintained and lacking basic amenities, reinforcing a sense of marginalization.

(W): "In Bardejov, Roma women are treated poorly and placed in separate wards."

Despite these challenges, participants acknowledged that the presence of good doctors or nurses can greatly improve their experience. When medical professionals treat Roma patients with care and respect, the situation becomes more bearable, though such instances were described as rare (M): "Good doctors and nurses make a difference, but they're rare."

Overall, the healthcare system's treatment of Roma patients in regional facilities was seen as emblematic of broader societal inequalities, with participants expressing frustration over the combination of discriminatory practices, financial exploitation, and inadequate facilities.

Waste Management

Participants described the waste management situation in their settlement as dire, emphasizing that the accumulation of garbage has reached catastrophic levels. They expressed frustration and concern over the lack of effective waste collection services and the resulting decline in cleanliness and livability. Many felt that the current situation is worse than in the past, despite advancements in housing and infrastructure. One participant reflected on the past, contrasting it with the present conditions:

(M): "The settlement is filled with waste; it was cleaner even when we lived in huts."

The sheer amount of garbage in the area has led to a strongly negative perception of the settlement's environment.

Participants pointed out that even under more rudimentary living conditions in the past, the community maintained a greater sense of cleanliness and order (W): "Disaster. If something could be done about it, it would be necessary, really. Before, for example, people lived in shacks, but it was cleaner than now."

The lack of adequate waste collection services was identified as a key issue. Participants noted that irregular or insufficient garbage removal has resulted in significant waste buildup, creating unsanitary living conditions and contributing to a sense of neglect within the community. They stressed the importance of addressing this issue to improve their overall quality of life.

In addition to health and hygiene concerns, the presence of waste throughout the settlement affects the community's morale and their relationship with neighboring areas. Many participants expressed a desire for better infrastructure and regular garbage collection to restore cleanliness and promote a more dignified living environment.

Main concerns raised include lack of regular waste collection services, accumulation of garbage leading to unsanitary conditions. In the opinion of participants all this has negative impact on the community's morale and health.

Participants agreed that improving waste management would significantly enhance their quality of life, emphasizing the urgent need for municipal or governmental intervention.

Conclusion

This summary of the focus group offers an overview of the key challenges and aspirations faced by the Roma community in Zborov, providing insights into the specific areas that impact their daily lives. Central to the discussion were issues related to housing, where concerns over the quality and availability of affordable housing persist, alongside a desire for better living conditions and access to basic services and infrastructure. Participants highlighted the continued struggles with inadequate housing, overcrowding, and substandard facilities, which significantly affect their quality of life.

Integration emerged as another prominent theme, with many Roma participants expressing a strong desire for greater inclusion in mainstream society. While some Roma individuals report positive strides in integration, others continue to face barriers such as discrimination, social exclusion, and limited access to resources. There is a collective aspiration for equal opportunities in employment and education, with a shared belief that greater access to these opportunities would facilitate upward social mobility and long-term success.

64 In the realm of employment, the focus group revealed a persistent challenge of finding stable and well-paid jobs, exacerbated by discrimination in the labor market. Participants voiced the need for better job and increased access to employment opportunities, as well as efforts to reduce stigmatization based on ethnic background.

Additionally, the focus group revealed critical reflections on the relationship between the Roma community and local governance particularly regarding waste collection. While some participants acknowledged the efforts made by local authorities, many others felt that their voices were marginalized and that there was a lack of meaningful engagement with Roma communities in decision-making processes.

• BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA



IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH SOCIAL ACTORS IN THE TARGET MUNICIPALITIES

► IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH SOCIAL ACTORS IN THE TARGET MUNICIPALITIES

In the following sections, we present the results derived from the detailed analysis of individual interviews conducted as part of the research. These findings are systematically structured to align with our primary areas of investigation, ensuring a clear and focused examination of the key themes and issues identified. Particular emphasis is placed on the use and perception of public services, as this constitutes a critical component of the research. The insights are categorized based on thematic relevance, encompassing various aspects of public service provision, accessibility, quality, and the overall satisfaction of respondents. Additionally, the findings shed light on how different demographic groups—including Roma and non-Roma individuals, municipal officials, and other stakeholders—experience and interpret the availability and functionality of these services. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the intersection between public service delivery and social inclusion, highlighting disparities, challenges, and areas of progress within the communities under study.

THE THEME OF EDUCATION

Having an elementary school in the village is undoubtedly a positive aspect that brings several benefits to the local community. It eliminates the need for long commutes to other villages and provides easy access to extracurricular activities, fostering a well-rounded educational experience for children.

As respondent R6 emphasizes: “Education has improved. A new kindergarten, a community center.” This sentiment is shared by many residents, as the presence of the school is seen as a valuable asset to the community. Respondent R1 further explains: “Having a school in our village is a positive thing. Definitely. First of all, there’s no need to commute to other villages. Now we have a school nearby, and it’s possibly the most modernly equipped school in the area. The children have their school, they can attend clubs after school, and they can form close relationships with the teachers.”

This proximity to school enables children to engage more fully in the learning process and to form lasting bonds with teachers and peers, a factor that contributes to a positive and supportive learning environment.

The local school is viewed very positively within the community. It is perceived as a place that knows the challenges faced by its students and works to address them. A notable feature of the school is that all assistants are Roma, as proficiency in the Romani language is a requirement for their employment. However, there are no Romani teachers due to a lack of qualifications, which highlights a barrier in the educational system for Romani people seeking to enter teaching professions.

R1 shares a positive perspective on the work being done in the school: “I work very well here. I view my work very positively because we understand the disadvantages Roma children face when entering elementary schools. We are here to fill that gap, motivate, educate, and guide them. The school has seven assistants, all of whom are Roma. The mayor set it up so that if you want to be an assistant at our school, you must speak Romani.”

The integration of Roma assistants helps bridge the cultural and linguistic gap, ensuring that Romani children receive the support they need to succeed in school.

Respondents generally view compulsory preschool preparation as an essential step in preparing children for elementary school. They agree that clear rules should be established, particularly regarding attendance, to ensure that children acquire the necessary skills for school, such as language proficiency, motor skills, and good habits. The local elementary school maintains excellent attendance rates, largely due to the efforts of the assistants, who are proactive in ensuring that children attend regularly. If a child doesn’t come to school, the assistants will visit the community to bring them back. Personal communication with parents is emphasized as a key factor in maintaining high attendance and fostering a strong connection between the school and the community.

R6 notes: “Some of the state’s positive policies include compulsory preschool attendance,” indicating that such policies have played a role in encouraging better educational engagement.

Challenges in Education

Despite the positive developments, challenges still persist, especially in the form of segregation in education. In the village of Ostrovany, for example, there are only about 45 non-Romani school-age children, and they attend schools in neighboring villages. Local schools are often

avoided because they have Roma children enrolled, creating a divide between the two groups.

R2 expresses frustration: “The school has open doors for everyone. I honestly don’t understand why our citizens in the village send their children to schools in neighboring villages, which are poorly equipped and in disrepair. I laugh at them. I say, ‘I have everything here for free. You want it? You have computers, internet, a state-of-the-art kitchen worth €300,000. It’s done. I’m also building a gym... It’s the best it can be.’”

Thus, despite the high quality of the local school’s facilities, there is a persistent reluctance among non-Romani families to send their children to a school with a significant number of Romani students.

A Romani respondent (R7) from Zborov highlights the issue of prejudice in schools, particularly toward Romani students. She asserts that teachers hold significant biases against Roma children and view them as inferior. If given the choice, she would send her children to another school to ensure better and higher-quality education. She shares her experience: “I don’t just think, I know there are prejudices against Roma here. Roma are always treated as... the last. Even when we go to school in the morning with the kids, I see Roma children standing outside while non-Roma children are already inside the school, brought in earlier by their mothers. Some of those mothers work as teachers there. It feels like Roma are being humiliated. I hope you understand me.”

This experience of exclusion and humiliation is deeply felt by many Romani families and reflects the ongoing challenges in addressing discrimination in educational settings.

Language Barriers

One of the most significant barriers to education for Romani children is the language barrier. A teacher from Ostrovany (R1) notes that: “The main problem children face in school is a language barrier. Kindergartens don’t help much in this regard, primarily due to the low attendance of Roma children.”

Many Romani children enter the education system with limited proficiency in Slovak, which can hinder their ability to engage with the curriculum and succeed academically.

Romani teaching assistants (R8) from Zborov, also acknowledge the language issue. She, however, expresses concerns about schools where

Romani is used as the primary language of instruction. While she understands the importance of preserving the Romani language, she argues that it is not sufficient for the children's long-term success in Slovakia, where the Slovak language is essential for social integration and future opportunities. She remarks: "In real life, the Slovak language is essential, and there are significant differences between Romani dialects."

This emphasizes the challenge of balancing cultural preservation with practical language skills that are necessary for the children's future success in the broader Slovak society.

These language barriers and ongoing segregation in education underline the need for continued efforts to ensure that Romani children receive equal opportunities for educational success. While there are positive aspects, such as the presence of Romani-speaking assistants and compulsory preschool, there is still much work to be done to address prejudice, ensure access to quality education, and bridge language gaps.

70 OPINIONS ON ACCESS TO MEDICAL SERVICES AND AMENITIES

The availability of services in the villages where data was collected varies significantly, creating disparities in living conditions and access to essential resources. Some villages are well-equipped with services and amenities, while others are notably lacking in basic facilities, such as healthcare and recreational spaces. The city of Prešov, as a regional hub, naturally offers a more comprehensive range of services, but the situation in surrounding villages is more mixed.

Zborov, one of the villages in the study, is relatively well-equipped in terms of essential services.

Respondent (R6) highlights some of the key facilities available to the local population: "We have a health center with two general practitioners, a dentist, a pediatrician, an internist, and a gynecologist. This center serves 14 villages. There are also shops like Jednota COOP, which is the largest, a CBA store, and two or three smaller shops. We have four taverns. Weddings and social events are organized in the cultural center. We follow the principles for renting municipal property, and it works well—Roma weddings in the hall are a completely normal thing."

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH SOCIAL ACTORS IN THE TARGET MUNICIPALITIES

The health center in Zborov serves not only the village but also neighboring villages, making it a vital resource in the region. The availability of various healthcare professionals ensures that residents can access necessary medical care without having to travel far. Additionally, Zborov offers a range of retail options, from larger stores to smaller, local shops, ensuring that residents can meet their daily needs. The presence of taverns and a cultural center also provides spaces for social gatherings and community events, contributing to a lively local atmosphere.

In contrast, some villages like Ostrovany are struggling to meet the needs of their residents, especially in terms of healthcare. Ostrovany, which has a significant population of children and elderly people, lacks essential medical services, making it a pressing issue for the community. Despite the village's size and its proximity to the town of Šarišské Michaľany, Ostrovany does not have a general practitioner, a pediatrician, or other essential medical professionals. Mayor (R2) explains the gravity of the situation: "We've considered building a health center—we have so many small children here, but also a lot of elderly. There are 5 seniors in our village."

The lack of healthcare services in Ostrovany means that residents often have to travel long distances to access medical care, which can be especially challenging for the elderly or those with limited mobility. Additionally, Ostrovany lacks key cultural and recreational facilities that contribute to the overall well-being of the community. The village does not have a cultural center, a multifunctional sports field, or a gymnasium for its elementary school, which limits opportunities for social interaction, physical activity, and community events.

71 THE PROBLEM OF SEGREGATION IN ACCESS TO SERVICES

The issue of segregation also appears in the context of local services. In Ostrovany, for example, while there are stores within the Roma community, social segregation is evident. One of the most prominent examples of this is the local tavern, which remains divided into separate sections for Roma and non-Roma residents. Roma residents, according to some reports, are seldom seen in the non-Romani section of the tavern, reinforcing the division between the two groups. A local resident

VIEWS ON SMALL BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT

In all municipalities we have been informed about a noticeable rise in entrepreneurial activity among the Roma community, contributing to improved employment levels and better economic conditions. Many Roma individuals have taken the initiative to start their own businesses, and this has had a positive impact on both their personal lives and the local economy. An educator from Ostrovany (R1) reflects on these positive changes, noting:

“Things are changing—many aspects. In Ostrovany, people have started their own businesses, and it’s beautiful to see how their lives are improving. Another positive aspect is that these entrepreneurs are employing people from the village. Many of them work in construction, traveling across Slovakia and even to the Czech Republic or Croatia. The local business owners hiring people have reduced unemployment and improved lives. They now earn enough to afford vacations and trips.”

This statement highlights the empowerment that comes with self-employment, as many Roma individuals have not only become business owners but have also created job opportunities for others in their communities. This has significantly reduced local unemployment and improved the quality of life for many people. For example, workers in construction and other trades are now able to travel for work, and increasing their earning potential, which, in turn, allows them to enjoy better living conditions, including vacations and other forms of leisure.

The mayor of Ostrovany (R2) confirms this positive trend, emphasizing the efficiency of Roma workers and the rise in local employment:

“Our Roma are very efficient in their work activities. Many are musicians, but the majority are laborers. Every man wants to be a builder, work with wood, or become a logger. Out of the 500 unemployed individuals we once had, we’re now down to about 0.”

This reduction in unemployment is a significant improvement and reflects the broader shift in the community, with many individuals seeking to build stable, productive lives. However, while the trend is positive, the mayor acknowledges that not all sectors of the population have

(R1) describes the situation: “We have a tavern that closes at 8:00 PM. It’s still divided. Now, the space for Roma has been reduced because they play darts or something there. Roma aren’t allowed in.”

This division has been discussed at higher levels of village administration, though the local government claims that it has limited control over the issue due to the tavern being run by a private operator. The tavern space is leased from COOP Jednota, and the local administration has expressed that the segregation is not their responsibility. Respondent (R2) states: “When I found out about it, I called COOP Jednota directly. They said, ‘We only lease the space, they pay the rent, and the rest doesn’t concern us.’”

Despite this claim, the situation highlights ongoing issues of segregation within the village, particularly in spaces that are meant to be communal and inclusive.

A staff member from the local office (R4) provides additional context on the situation, recalling that in the past, the tavern was explicitly divided into separate spaces for Roma and non-Roma customers:

“I haven’t discussed this with anyone, so I can’t confirm if this is the case now, but I remember in the past it was divided. There were two rooms—one for non-Roma, and one for Roma. If they wanted to mix, they could, but generally, it was segregated.”

This past segregation is a clear reflection of the social divisions that continue to exist within the community, and it highlights the deep-rooted nature of ethnic and social segregation in certain public spaces.

The differences in the availability of services between villages such as Zborov and Ostrovany illustrate the challenges faced by rural communities in Slovakia. While some villages have access to comprehensive services, including healthcare, retail, and social spaces, others are left struggling with basic infrastructure needs. Additionally, the issue of segregation in local services—such as the division of the tavern in Ostrovany—demonstrates that social divisions and prejudices persist in these communities, often affecting the quality of life for minority groups like the Roma. Addressing these disparities requires not only investments in infrastructure but also a concerted effort to promote social inclusion and equality across all aspects of village life.

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH SOCIAL ACTORS IN THE TARGET MUNICIPALITIES

benefitted equally. Although a significant portion of the Roma community is now employed, challenges still remain, particularly for certain demographic groups.

Despite the improvements in employment levels, unemployment remains a significant issue in many villages. The local government official from Ostrovany (R4) points out that while some individuals have found work, much of it is either informal or undocumented, further complicating the situation:

“We still have a lot of unemployed people, but some are working. Many women commute to Prešov; I see them when I’m at Kaufland. Men also work, but it’s questionable whether they’re officially employed or working under the table. For example, construction firms here employ workers, but some still work informally. Even so, they’re working.”

This highlights the prevalence of informal work, which, while contributing to the local economy, often lacks the stability and benefits of formal employment. Without official contracts, workers are not entitled to benefits such as healthcare, pensions, or job security, and their working conditions may be substandard. Informal employment can also make it more difficult for individuals to escape poverty and improve their living standards in the long term.

Unemployment is particularly challenging for certain demographic groups, such as women over 50 and the younger generation. The mayor of Zborov (R6) identifies these challenges as structural issues that need to be addressed:

“Roma women over 50, without education, are almost unemployable. Increasing the minimum wage year after year makes it even harder for them to find work. For men, it’s easier—if someone wants to work in construction, they’ll find a job. But the younger generation is a concern. Many rebel, and parents struggle to control them. This generation is going in a problematic direction, with societal issues that worry me.”

The mayor of Ostrovany (R2) also acknowledges that while opportunities have increased for Roma men, women, particularly those over 50, still face significant barriers to employment.

“Most Roma are employed, either locally or abroad. Today, if someone doesn’t have a job, they either have bad luck or don’t want to work. For women over 50 without basic education, finding a job is tough. But for a man willing to do construction, there’s no problem at all.”

The mayors’ view reinforces the gender divide in the local job market. While men can often find work in physically demanding sectors such as construction, women, especially older women without education, struggle to find employment opportunities. This disparity highlights the need for targeted policies and interventions to support women, particularly those in vulnerable age groups, in gaining skills and access to stable employment.

The concerns about women over 50 are valid, as this demographic often faces significant barriers to employment due to a lack of formal education and skills. For many women in this age group, job opportunities are limited, and rising wages, while positive in some contexts, can actually make it harder for them to find affordable work.

The issue of the younger generation is also a source of concern, as many young people in the Roma community are rebelling against traditional norms and facing difficulties in adapting to the expectations of the wider society. This can lead to social instability, as parents struggle to control their children and young people become disconnected from educational and professional opportunities.

LACK OF JOBS FROM A ROMA PERSPECTIVE

A Roma respondent (R8) offers a different perspective on the current job situation, noting that despite the improvements, finding work remains difficult for many in the community:

“Finding a job is still very difficult. Many people have to go abroad. Around 300 people from our community are working abroad. My son had to go to Germany to work with his wife. The closure of local factories has left us with few options for employment, leading to poverty.”

Roma respondent’s perspective emphasizes the persistent struggle faced by many Roma individuals, particularly in the wake of the closure of local factories, which had previously provided a source of stable employment. The economic downturn in certain areas has left many with no choice but to seek work abroad, often leading to family separation and financial instability. The desire for better economic opportunities is

a driving force behind migration, but it also creates social and emotional challenges for families.

Roma woman (R8) offers a poignant observation about the broader social consequences of job scarcity, particularly in relation to family dynamics: “The situation is deteriorating. Lack of job opportunities causes families to break apart. Parents leave for work abroad, start new relationships, and their families here are left behind. This instability is devastating for children.”

This comment underscores the social costs of economic instability. When job opportunities are limited, many individuals are forced to migrate for work, often leading to family separation. This instability can have lasting negative effects on children, who may experience emotional distress, a sense of abandonment, or disruptions in their education. The breakdown of family structures due to migration for work can create long-term challenges for the next generation.

The rise in entrepreneurship among the Roma community and the decrease in unemployment are positive developments, yet significant challenges remain. Informal work, however, continues to be prevalent, and certain demographic groups—particularly women over 50 and young people—face considerable obstacles in finding stable, formal employment. Migration for work, while offering economic relief, often results in social instability and family fragmentation.

THE SITUATION REGARDING SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND RELATED INITIATIVES

In municipality Zborov social enterprises have become a pivotal tool for providing local employment opportunities, especially for Roma residents. These enterprises not only contribute to economic development but also serve as a platform for skill development, community integration, and infrastructure improvement. Social enterprises are increasingly seen as a way to empower marginalized communities and bridge the gap between them and mainstream society.

The local social enterprise, Zborstav, has made significant strides in employing Roma individuals and improving the village’s infrastructure. According to the mayor (R6), the social enterprise is a resounding success, especially in terms of local employment:

“Our social enterprise, Zborstav, employs 14 people, with 70% being Roma. The enterprise constructs buildings, housing, and other projects for the village. It’s an excellent solution since the work is managed locally, avoiding the need for public tenders.”

This locally managed model not only creates jobs but ensures that the economic benefits stay within the community. By bypassing complicated terms of public tenders, Zborstav avoids external competition, allowing the village to retain control over the projects and employment opportunities. The mayor’s endorsement highlights how local social enterprises can address both economic and social challenges, creating a sustainable model for community-driven development.

A Roma respondent (R9) corroborates the positive impact of Zborstav, noting that the enterprise employs a significant number of Roma workers who are paid fairly by the municipality: “Zborstav employs several Roma workers, and they’re paid properly by the municipality. The cooperative also employs a few people.”

This reflects the enterprise’s commitment to providing equitable employment opportunities within the Roma community. The fact that the municipality directly supports these workers ensures that they receive fair wages and benefits, which strengthens the economic stability of Roma families.

The director of Zborstav (R10) further elaborates on the enterprise’s activities, particularly its focus on construction and skill-building: “Our primary activity is construction, with over 90% of the work done for the village. We’ve built preschools, apartment buildings, and more. It’s a great tool for local conditions.”

The emphasis on infrastructure development in the village and surrounding areas not only addresses pressing housing needs but also creates a visible, tangible impact on the local community.

Beyond just providing jobs, Zborstav has invested in skill-building and vocational training. According to the director, the enterprise also supports workers in gaining new skills that can enhance their employability in the future:

“We have a plumber training another worker, who after two years has gained enough expertise to take on private projects.” This commitment to skill development ensures that workers not only contribute to the enterprise but are also equipped with the necessary expertise to advance in their careers, whether within the enterprise or through external opportunities.

The work done by Zborstav has significantly contributed to improving the living conditions of Roma settlements, particularly in terms of infrastructure. The enterprise has focused on vital improvements such as road construction and drainage systems, which are crucial for ensuring the health and safety of residents. The mayor’s statement reflects the broader impact of the enterprise: “It’s a great tool for local conditions.” These infrastructure projects are essential in improving the quality of life for Roma families, as poor living conditions often contribute to social exclusion and stigmatization.

Looking ahead, the social enterprise has ambitious plans for further housing construction, which will continue to address the housing shortage in the village. These efforts are a testament to how local initiatives can provide long-term solutions to community needs while also offering employment and skill-building opportunities for marginalized groups.

Even in larger towns, such as Prešov, there is a growing interest in adopting similar social enterprise models. A city representative (R11) highlights the challenges faced by larger urban centers in implementing such initiatives:

“A major challenge is creating a social enterprise and finding employment systems within Prešov’s industrial park. Improving living standards is essential, as many wish to leave their current housing, which lacks comfort and fosters social tensions due to overcrowding.”

Prešov, as a regional hub, faces a different set of challenges compared to smaller villages, particularly in addressing overcrowding and improving living conditions. The city’s industrial park presents an opportunity to create social enterprises that could not only provide employment but also improve the local infrastructure and living standards. The desire to improve living conditions and reduce overcrowding is a key motivator for considering social enterprises in Prešov. By introducing more accessible employment systems and social initiatives, the city could help alleviate some of the socio-economic pressures that are currently affecting disadvantaged communities, including the Roma population.

► IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH SOCIAL ACTORS IN THE TARGET MUNICIPALITIES

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Social enterprises like Zborstav in Zborov are demonstrating the potential of community-driven initiatives to empower marginalized groups, create local jobs, and address pressing infrastructure needs. The success of Zborstav shows that by integrating local residents—particularly Roma—into the workforce and providing opportunities for skill-building, these enterprises can contribute to both economic and social progress. Additionally, the growing interest in social enterprises in larger towns like Prešov indicates a broader recognition of their potential to address urban challenges. Incorporating social enterprises into broader community development strategies could offer a sustainable model for inclusive growth, one that provides not only immediate benefits but also long-term opportunities for Roma and other marginalized groups. As more towns and villages explore this approach, social enterprises may become key drivers of positive change in both rural and urban areas.

HOUSING SITUATION IN VILLAGES AND SETTLEMENTS

The housing situation in Roma settlements remains one of the most pressing issues facing Roma communities, marked by inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding, and insufficient access to basic amenities. These challenges exacerbate social exclusion and poverty, creating significant barriers to upward mobility and a dignified life for many Roma families.

DIRE LIVING CONDITIONS IN ROMA SETTLEMENTS

In Zborov, one of the villages included in our sample, the dire conditions in the Roma settlement are starkly highlighted by a community center worker (R7), who describes the extreme lack of basic services:

“Those living in shacks have it extremely tough. They lack basic amenities like water, toilets, or even a proper place to wash. I don’t live in luxury

myself, but I couldn't endure such a life. It's heartbreaking. Children live barefoot, even in winter—barefoot and inadequately clothed.”

This account underscores the everyday struggles that Roma families face in settlements that lack even the most basic facilities. The absence of clean water, sanitation, and suitable shelter means that residents, especially children, are exposed to health risks, poor living conditions, and stigmatization. For many, these conditions are compounded by a sense of hopelessness and a lack of opportunities for improvement.

A Roma respondent from Zborov (R8), highlights the severe shortage of housing for Roma families in Zborov: “There is a clear lack of housing for Roma in Zborov. Some Roma families live in apartment buildings outside the settlement, but non-Roma families often move out, leaving these buildings entirely Roma-occupied. Roma who work abroad and save money sometimes buy older houses outside the settlement.”

This quote reveals two critical issues: first, the lack of adequate housing within the settlement itself, and second, the challenges faced by Roma families who only working abroad and saving substantial amount of money, may be allowed to buy houses inside the village.

80

Local Government Efforts to Address Housing Shortages:

Despite the critical housing shortage, local government officials are actively working to address these challenges. Zborov, while struggling with a severe lack of housing, remains one of the largest per-capita landlords of rental housing in Slovakia (R6):

“Our village, per capita, is the largest owner of rental housing in Slovakia, with 56 housing units per 1,000 residents. We build new apartment buildings every year. Additionally, we are implementing the Domov project, which supports self-help housing construction. Currently, nine homes are under construction, and we plan to complete and approve the first houses in the spring.”

These efforts, including the construction of new apartment buildings and the self-help housing project, demonstrate the local government's commitment to addressing the housing shortage. However, despite these efforts, the demand still far exceeds the supply, with approximately 120 additional housing units needed in Zborov alone. The mayor's initiative to support self-help housing construction through the Domov project is a positive step, but it also highlights the ongoing challenges of meeting the growing demand for adequate housing in the Roma settlement.

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

LAND AVAILABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

A significant barrier to improving housing conditions in Roma settlements is the lack of available land for new construction. In many villages, the settlements are already built on all available land, and further expansion is not possible. In the case of Ostrovany, an educator (R1) explains:

“In the Roma settlement of Ostrovany, there's simply no room left for expansion. The settlement has already spread as far as possible. The mayor has considered acquiring land under the nearby forest, but private owners are unwilling to sell or trade their properties.”

The issue of limited land availability is further compounded by the challenges of acquiring land for development. Despite the local government's efforts to negotiate with neighboring villages and identify unused agricultural land, progress has been slow. In some cases, private landowners are unwilling to sell or trade their properties, creating a significant hurdle for the development of new housing.

The mayor of Ostrovany (R2) elaborates on the ongoing efforts to secure land for the expansion of housing in the Roma settlement:

“We've identified potential land near the former agricultural cooperative and discussed a possible land exchange with the neighboring village of Ražňany. While we have a good relationship with their mayor, some of their demands were unacceptable. Additionally, the church owns a key piece of land, but negotiations with them have been incredibly difficult. Even after traveling to Košice, I couldn't get past their financial officer's office.”

This statement illustrates the complexities of securing land for housing development. While negotiations with neighboring villages have been initiated, obstacles such as unreasonable demands and unwillingness to sell have hindered progress. Additionally, the church, which holds significant land in the area, has proven to be a difficult partner in negotiations. Despite the mayor's persistence, including traveling to Košice to meet with church officials, the lack of cooperation has slowed the development of much-needed housing.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH SOCIAL ACTORS IN THE TARGET MUNICIPALITIES

81

The housing challenges faced by Roma settlements in villages like Zborov and Ostrovany reflect broader systemic issues of inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding, and a shortage of land. While local governments are making some efforts to address these issues through new construction projects and negotiations for land, the solutions remain limited. Addressing the housing crisis in Roma settlements will require a multifaceted approach that includes not only the construction of new housing but also the securing of land, the improvement of infrastructure, and the promotion of social integration.

Overcrowding remains one of the most pressing issues in Roma settlements, where living conditions have become increasingly unsustainable. The high density of households living in often inadequate and overcrowded spaces contributes to numerous social, health, and infrastructural problems. The municipality recognizes that addressing overcrowding is essential for the well-being of Roma families and the broader community.

To mitigate overcrowding and improve the long-term sustainability of housing in Roma settlements, local governments are focusing on land consolidation and the legalization of housing. By regularizing land ownership and securing legal property rights for Roma families, municipalities aim to create more stable living conditions and pave the way for future housing development.

A municipal employee in Ostrovny, R4, comments on the ongoing initiatives: “The settlement is heavily overcrowded, which is unsustainable in the long term. We’re currently working on a project for simple land adjustments and the legalization of plots within the settlements.”

This Ostrovany project seeks to address the issue of informal housing, where many Roma families occupy land without legal ownership or clear property rights. By working on land consolidation and ensuring that plots are properly registered, the municipality hopes to provide a foundation for future housing development and create a clearer path for Roma families to secure legal ownership of their homes.

Challenges in Resident Participation

Despite the municipality’s efforts to regularize housing and improve land management, the level of engagement from Roma residents has been inconsistent. Some families have successfully navigated the bureaucratic

process, regularizing their homes, obtaining building permits, and securing property rights.

R4: “Some residents have sorted out their land and housing—three or four families legalized their homes, obtained building permits, and secured property rights. However, most have ignored the process, leaving the majority of plots unregistered and unresolved.”

This lack of participation poses a challenge to the overall success of the land legalization initiatives. While a small number of families have made progress in securing legal ownership of their homes, the majority of families have not engaged with the process, leaving their properties in a state of legal ambiguity. This lack of participation could be attributed to several factors, including limited access to information, a lack of trust in governmental initiatives.

Self-help initiatives for house construction

Amid the challenges of overcrowding and the slow pace of formal land legalization, self-help housing construction has proven to be one of the more successful approaches to improving living conditions in Roma settlements. This initiative involves Roma residents taking an active role in building their own homes with the support of municipal resources, such as building materials, technical expertise, and financial aid. Self-help housing not only addresses the immediate need for more housing but also fosters a sense of ownership among Roma families. The collaborative nature of self-help housing projects has been well-received, and the initiative has had positive outcomes in several villages. It encourages social cohesion, as residents work together to build homes, and provides an opportunity for Roma families to gain skills and knowledge that can benefit them in other areas of life.

Despite the success of self-help housing and ongoing efforts to legalize plots and consolidate land, the issue of overcrowding remains a significant challenge in Roma settlements. Municipalities must find ways to engage Roma families in the process of land regularization and property ownership.

HOUSING IN THE “URBAN GHETTO” STARÁ TEHELŇA IN MUNICIPALITY OF PREŠOV

The Stará Tehelňa area in Prešov functions as a small urban ghetto. While its establishment in the early 2000s aimed to address housing shortages, the solution has been imperfect. However, the location offers proximity to city services, being centrally situated. Over the years, a new generation has grown up in the area, which now comprises 176 housing units accommodating approximately 1,300 residents. Vice Mayor (R11) reflects on the decision to build Stará Tehelňa:

“There were certain expectations, and while not all aspects of life in the area are ideal, the location is deeply integrated within the city and close to the center. It has been home to a community for over 23 years. Despite its challenges, the decision to build here wasn’t entirely wrong.”

The housing complex suffers from significant wear and tear, overcrowding, and a poor architectural design that exacerbates problems. For example, shared utility systems mean blockages in the plumbing can flood lower floors, while the open-corridor (pavlačové) design lacks privacy and functionality for the large families residing there. A respondent from the housing management company (R5) emphasizes the need for a complete reconstruction of the building but points to financial constraints and public resistance:

“The entire building needs significant reconstruction, but we lack funds. The public opposes investing here again, saying, ‘It will just get destroyed again in a year.’ These apartments, as residents themselves say, are ‘used up.’”

Overcrowding is severe, with 8–10 residents per unit and, in extreme cases, up to people in one apartment. Most families are law-abiding, but approximately 20 problem households contribute disproportionately to issues like non-payment of rent and damage to communal spaces. Official from (R5) housing management company explains the difficulty of evicting problematic tenants due to ‘legal protections’: “The law protects them, particularly families with children. Evictions

require a court order, which can take 1–3 years. These families know this and exploit the system.”

Problem families do not pay for utilities, so the distributor disconnects them and they connect to the black or common areas (R5):

“And then they also rebel because some of them are aware, they also have all kinds of these, what do they call their people, with whom... and they can’t kick you out there are children and they then feel so, so unthreatened. Next either they don’t pay, they destroy property, mailboxes. Sometimes they used to go to the post office, they wanted to, set up. If I went through how much money was invested in that, they’re destroying it themselves. There was a demand that it be cancelled, that they would go again, even so it was done and it’s been done over and over again.”

Some tenants who don’t pay for utilities resort to illegal connections, sometimes tapping into communal areas. Such actions further strain resources and create tension among residents. Vandalism, including the destruction of mailboxes and communal spaces, has been a recurring issue despite efforts to address it.

Linking Housing and Employment

Several respondents highlight the connection between housing issues and unemployment. Roma respondent (R9) underscores the impact of job scarcity on housing:

“Employment is a major problem here. Some people want to work, but there aren’t enough jobs in locality. Better housing options, like rental apartments or temporary housing, could improve lives. For example, my mother’s home is overcrowded, with about 12 people, including my siblings, their spouses, and children. If the municipality provided housing, it wouldn’t be so cramped.”

Future Development Plans

In the urban environment of Prešov, the problem with the construction of new rental apartments or shelters is the same as in rural areas—it is the absence of land. The only available—mainly for political reasons—land is in the same locality where Roma already live. The challenges in Stará Tehelňa mirror broader issues in Roma housing across Slovakia.

Moving forward, a combination of housing improvements, legal reforms, and employment opportunities will be critical for creating sustainable solutions.

The city is exploring options to improve living conditions while managing limited space and resources. Proposed initiatives include: Renovating existing housing units and facilities; Building additional units in the same area, as land scarcity makes new developments elsewhere unfeasible; Creating different types of housing for “better” and “problematic” tenants, acknowledging the need to address both groups; Supporting infrastructure like waste collection areas, playgrounds, community centers are also being considered, with technical and legal preparations underway for grant applications.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN ROMA SETTLEMENTS

86

Infrastructure in Roma settlements and communities has undergone some improvements in recent years, particularly in essential services such as water supply and sewage systems. The mayor of Zborov, R6, emphasized the importance of infrastructure projects, noting that the initiatives have aimed to benefit not only the Roma community but all residents of the municipality. These projects include the construction and renovation of key facilities such as roads, a healthcare center, schools, kindergartens, sports amenities, a football field, and a community center. Despite these accomplishments, financial constraints hindered the municipality’s plans to construct additional rental apartments, as soaring costs forced them to abandon the project:

“All engineering networks are present in the settlement—water, sewage... Even in the shacks, most are connected to water and sewage systems, despite being illegal constructions. Roads have also been built there, which I see as very positive.”

Another local representative (R10) echoed these sentiments, highlighting the shared nature of the new infrastructure:

“In recent years, new roads in the settlement have been completed. These are not exclusively for Roma; they are shared amenities. The

healthcare center was renovated, doctors are available for all residents, and investments have been made in the school, where most students are of Roma origin. Sports facilities, including the football field, have also received funding to make them more appealing.”

From the perspective of the Roma community, the progress in infrastructure is acknowledged and appreciated. A Roma respondent (R8) shared her observations about the positive changes, particularly the availability of water, sewage, and improved living facilities in rental apartments and newer homes. However, she also highlighted a significant barrier—poverty:

“Infrastructure is accessible to almost everyone, but due to debts, many households cannot actually use it. Bathrooms are available in rental apartments and newer houses, which is a positive development. However, older houses and shacks lack these facilities.”

This disparity underscores the complex interplay between infrastructure improvements and socioeconomic challenges. While the physical infrastructure has been upgraded, financial constraints, debt, and persistent poverty often prevent residents from fully benefiting from these advancements.

MUNICIPAL WASTE MANAGEMENT

Municipal waste management continues to be a major issue for many local governments, with challenges stemming from the large volume of waste generated, high collection costs, and widespread non-payment of fees. This combination exacerbates the problem and puts a strain on municipal budgets. Respondent (R2) elaborated on the difficulties municipalities face with waste management:

“Waste is one of the toughest problems. We’ve been seeking solutions, and one of the first things we did was ensure more frequent municipal waste collection. Every household received a waste bin, and if it got damaged, we replaced it. We charge a fee of €17 or €20 per household, but the cost to the municipality is €80,000 annually, while we only collect €10,000 in fees.”

This discrepancy creates an ongoing financial burden on local governments, which struggle to balance the cost of waste management with the actual fees collected from residents.

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH SOCIAL ACTORS IN THE TARGET MUNICIPALITIES

87

The situation in Zborov highlights the challenges faced by Roma communities in particular. Waste collection is provided twice a week in Roma settlements compared to once every two weeks in the non-Roma areas. Despite the more frequent service, there are still significant issues with unpaid waste disposal fees (R6):

“In the Roma area, waste is collected every week. In our part of the village, it’s every two weeks, and that’s enough. Unfortunately, they rarely pay for the service, even though it’s provided to them. Our approach is to ensure that if they want something from the municipality, they must first settle all their outstanding payments. This is our only leverage.”

This strategy, however, is not always effective, as many Roma residents continue to evade payment responsibilities, further exacerbating the financial strain on the municipality.

Roma respondent (R9) shared concerns about the cleanliness and waste management practices within the Roma community. Despite the increased frequency of waste collection, the situation still shows little improvement due to a lack of personal responsibility for cleanliness:

“The waste situation in the settlement hasn’t improved much. Our residents are careless. They leave trash like papers or other garbage outside their gardens and don’t bother picking it up and putting it in the bin.”

This lack of care reflects a broader cultural and behavioral issue, where some residents are either unaware or uninterested in maintaining cleanliness in their surroundings. As a result, even though municipal efforts have been made to improve infrastructure, these efforts are not always fully utilized.

R9 also acknowledged the municipality’s actions, such as the construction of roads and the provision of waste bins, which have contributed to slight improvements in cleanliness:

“The municipality built roads and provided bins and containers. This has helped somewhat. In some areas, it’s cleaner—not entirely clean, but less messy than in others. Comparing the situation before and after the introduction of containers, it’s much better because residents in the settlements now have somewhere to dispose of waste. But sometimes the bins are overflowing.”

While there has been progress, the problem persists, particularly due to overflowing bins when exceeds the available waste disposal capacity.

Municipal waste management requires the provision of waste bins, regular collections, and improved road access are not enough to address the underlying issues of waste disposal. To further improve waste management in these communities, it is crucial to implement a multifaceted approach. Local governments must also explore ways to address challenges that hinder proper waste disposal. In conclusion, while infrastructure improvements have been made, the municipal waste management system faces significant challenges, including financial deficits, unpaid fees, and insufficient community engagement. Comprehensive solutions that address both practical and behavioral issues will be essential to creating sustainable waste management systems.

GENERAL LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE LOCAL ROMA

The respondents generally hold a very positive view of the recent changes within the local Romani community. According to them, the transformation is evident across multiple areas—housing, attitudes toward work, access to education, and more. The example of the village of Ostrovany stands out as a clear illustration of this improvement. Residents note a significant shift towards a better overall societal level, highlighting a more prosperous and stable community compared to previous years.

R3, a respondent who has been working closely with children in the community, expresses a deep sense of satisfaction with the progress made since their involvement began in 2000. They note that over the span of nearly two decades, a remarkable transformation has occurred: housing has improved, people have adopted a more progressive view on education, and attitudes toward work have shifted:

“When I can compare, I actually started here with these children—working with these children since 2000. And when I compare that period from 2000 to today, 2024, everything has changed: housing, a different view on education, a different view on work. It’s clear that the people in Ostrovany are moving towards improvement.”

This perspective reflects optimism about the progress made in the community, with a particular emphasis on the evolving mindset that

underpins these changes. While the mayor (R2) acknowledges the positive impact of many projects aimed at improving the living conditions of the Romani community, they also recognize that there is still much to be done. Despite the efforts—such as the creation of schools, infrastructure improvements, and the provision of basic services—the mayor expresses frustration that not all members of the community have benefited equally. One of the core issues, according to him, is generational poverty, which continues to hinder long-term progress for many Romani families. While some individuals have managed to break free from poverty, attend higher education, and achieve upward mobility, this remains the exception rather than the norm. The mayor believes that generational poverty remains a persistent and formidable obstacle:

“I perceive the life of the Romani people... to tell you the truth—I had such rosy glasses. We created a kindergarten, a school, built a canal, a road, water, created living conditions, and the life would improve. But as I see, some things don’t change. They don’t change because of generational poverty. Unfortunately, I have to say it: generational poverty takes almost everything from you. We can’t literally get out of some problems...”

On a more positive note, the municipal office worker (R4) perceives the situation in the village in relation to the Romani community as generally favorable, especially when compared to other nearby settlements. However, she is cautious in their optimism, acknowledging that there are still families and parts of the community that are struggling. While there has been noticeable improvement, particularly in terms of housing and living conditions, the situation is far from ideal. She emphasizes that, despite some remaining challenges, the community as a whole has made progress:

“Compared to other settlements, I would say that we are at a high level because of how the settlement looks. Of course, there are also areas where it’s poorer. And because they live in a somewhat better environment, it seems to me that compared to previous years, it has improved. The settlement used to be divided into the settlement itself and those who were behind the ditch. We still have some shacks, but that cluster is much smaller than it was.”

This observation shows that while there are still signs of poverty and hardship, the improvements in infrastructure and living conditions are tangible, particularly when seen in comparison to the past.

Lastly, the mayor of Zborov acknowledges that while the situation of the Romani community in the village is still not ideal, there has been

improvement. They view their efforts as part of an ongoing process of work that brings gradual but significant change. A particularly encouraging development is the presence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that focus on social work and community development. The mayor sees these organizations as a valuable asset in their efforts to improve the lives of Romani people in the area. They also support government initiatives such as mandatory preschool attendance, recognizing that early education can be a powerful tool in breaking the cycle of poverty. The mayor’s perspective reflects a belief in the potential for continued progress, especially if these external partnerships and initiatives are harnessed effectively.

In sum, while the situation is far from perfect, the overall trend is one of positive change. From improvements in housing and infrastructure to the gradual shift in attitudes toward education and work, the local Romani community is clearly making positive strides. However, challenges like generational poverty remain significant.

COEXISTENCE BETWEEN ROMA AND NON-ROMA RESIDENTS

The general consensus among respondents from the majority community is that coexistence with the Romani population has significantly improved since the 1990s. While challenges persist, the overall relationship between the two groups is described as more harmonious and stable than in the past.

Respondents from the local administrations emphasize that interpersonal relations within the village, particularly between Romani and non-Romani people, are generally seen as normal. This positive shift reflects a broader sense of community and mutual respect that has developed over time. In Ostrovany, local leaders view the relationship between the Romani and non-Romani populations as smooth and largely free of conflict. When issues do arise, they are typically contained within the Romani community itself, rather than spilling over into tensions between the two groups.

R12: “I would say that in most cases, it’s like a normal situation where people greet each other, walk past each other, just a regular life. They

are also neighbors because we already have 4–5 Romani families who either bought houses or are building one—they bought land. A neighbor can be a Rom, a non-Rom, so it functions without problems. Honestly, I haven't dealt with any thefts here at the moment, and I hope it stays that way."

This statement reflects a growing integration of the Romani people within the broader community, where the distinctions between Romani and non-Romani neighbors are not as pronounced as they might have been in earlier years. The absence of major issues such as theft or open conflict suggests that the village has made substantial progress in fostering peaceful coexistence.

A municipal worker (R4) also affirms that the situation has improved over time, particularly compared to the tensions of the 1990s:

"From my perspective... it has improved, I don't perceive any problems like theft or conflict, no. In the past, there were issues back in the 90s when people started taking up farming, each taking their own plot of land. There was a huge problem with potatoes being stolen. Back then, it was really intense."

92 The mayor (R6) shares a similar view, affirming that relations between Romani and non-Romani people are mostly free of problems. The mayor acknowledges a spectrum of relationships, from idyllic scenarios where neighbors treat each other equally, to more transactional interactions where material goods are exchanged pragmatically. However, the mayor also points out that some individuals from both communities remain less willing to engage with one another:

"I think they are normal—ranging from idyllic, where neighbors don't make a distinction... to pragmatic, like 'I need to get rid of some stuff, so I'll give it to the Romani person...' But there are also those who wouldn't even offer a Romani person a glass of water. And there are also Romani people who wouldn't offer our people a glass of water either."

Regarding crime, the mayor of Zborov reassures that there is no significant increase in criminal activity linked to the Romani community. Instead, most crime is reported to occur within the Romani community itself, often related to family or personal disputes:

"Thank God, we don't have any violent criminal activity, like people going after each other. The youth worries me a bit because they tend to intimidate and threaten—mainly the older generation. In terms of talk,

it's a bigger problem than in reality. And Romani crime mainly happens among Romani people, within their own community. It's more related to family disputes or similar issues."

This statement underscores that crime, when it occurs, tends to be more about intra-community conflicts rather than inter-community issues. The mention of intimidation by the youth indicates some challenges with respect to generational tensions, particularly with the older generation, which could potentially undermine the otherwise stable coexistence.

Romani respondent (R8) provides a different perspective, focusing on the younger generation's behavior and minor thefts that often go unnoticed by others. She specifically mentions the lack of respect younger Romani individuals show towards the elderly, such as discarding trash or stealing personal belongings:

"The young people, the disrespect towards the elderly... They'll throw a piece of paper, and they see that I noticed. Or, for example, we have a wooden fence, and they'll come by, take the trash can, and throw it away or throw a stone at it... Or the kids go outside to play, and my grandchild comes to tell me, 'Grandma... they stole my motorcycle or my scooter.'"

In conclusion while the overall picture of coexistence between Romani and non-Romani people has improved significantly since the 1990s, there remain some tension, particularly within the Romani community itself. Generational divides, minor crimes, and the persistence of certain biases indicate that problem is ongoing.

SEGREGATION AND PARTICIPATION

Segregation in housing continues to be a significant issue in certain communities. Rental apartments are strictly divided between Romani and non-Romani categories, a practice that has persisted due to both local government policies and pressure from non-Romani residents, who are the dominant voting group in the village. This practice reflects a deeper societal divide, with many non-Romani individuals unwilling to live in proximity to Romani people, reinforcing the segregation across different aspects of life. As Mayor R6 explains, the issue is more about societal practice than formal policy:

“How many Romani people live in the white apartment buildings? Zero. And how many non-Romani people live in Romani apartment buildings? Also zero. This is not politics, it’s practice, because non-Romani people simply don’t want to live with Romani people... and vice versa, I would say. One day, this will come, with each day we get closer to that day—but we’re not there yet—where you would get an apartment next to a Romani person, and everyone would be happy and satisfied. Unfortunately, that’s not the case. There are prejudices. I have 10 apartments, and I place one or two, maybe three people there... but the others will tell me they won’t live there. They’ll say I built an apartment building for Romani people in the middle of the village. Voters make it clear to me. Personally, I’m in favor of construction, that things improve, and over time, we’ll move towards a situation where it will naturally come together.”

The division extends even to areas such as burial practices. In Zborov, the cemetery is physically divided into separate sections for Romani and non-Romani individuals, further emphasizing the segregation within the community. This division is a stark symbol of how ingrained the societal divides are, even after death. R6:

“If we were to have an inspection at the cemetery, you would see it. The Romani section, the non-Romani section. Romani people are in one corner, and the entire cemetery is for the majority, and they stay in that corner and don’t want to leave.”

While such segregation remains prevalent, some Romani individuals, like respondent R8, are cautiously hopeful about the possibility of integration in the future. However, she believes that this integration will always face challenges due to deep-rooted prejudices. According to her, no matter how much progress is made, Romani people will always be seen as different, as second-class citizens. She states:

“But let me tell you: a Romani person will never become a non-Romani person, no matter how they try. One day, their past will catch up with them.”

In addition, Romani political participation is severely limited. For example, in Zborov, although Romani people make up 52% of the population, they have no representation in the local council. This lack of political representation is seen as a result of Romani people’s failure to engage in the electoral process. According to (white) respondents from the local administration, the burden is on the Romani community to change this. The mayor R6, however, does not believe it is his responsibility to motivate the Romani community to become more politically active.

Nonetheless, he affirms that the local council consistently supports projects that aim to improve the lives of Romani people, particularly in the areas of social initiatives and infrastructure development. The village’s greatest need, according to the mayor, is housing construction and preparation of land for individual residential development:

“No Romani person has been elected. There’s a lot of envy going on. Sometimes, even a brother won’t vote for his brother because he’ll be doing better. The last time, when 3 or 4 Romani candidates ran, they ended up at the very bottom. Not a single vote. I don’t have the motivation to activate them now. We do things for them in the council, and the council approves every single project. It’s never happened that for Romani projects—projects primarily intended for Romani people or funded through Romani funds, let’s call it that—any council member has abstained or voted against it. It’s out of the question... from both current and previous periods. Everything is approved.”

ROMA PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS TO SERVICES: INSIGHTS FROM SAMPLE SURVEY DATA

► ROMA PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS TO SERVICES: INSIGHTS FROM SAMPLE SURVEY DATA

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLED HOUSEHOLDS

Differentiation of socio-economic groups within the Roma population

Numerous studies and authors (see e.g., Mušinka 2004, Mušinka 2012, Filadelfiová 2013, Podolinská & Hrustič, 2015; Marushiakova & Popov 2023) emphasize the importance of differentiating between different socio-economic groups within the Roma population. It has been observed that Roma communities are not a homogenous group, and there are substantial differences in socio-economic status, living standards, and access to various resources. In particular, research indicates that Roma households with better economic conditions often exhibit similarities with non-Roma households, not only in terms of living standards but also in relation to attitudes, culture, social aspirations (see e.g. UNDP 2002, UNDP 2012, Filadelfiová 2013). These households tend to have better access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, which results in improved living conditions and greater social mobility. Additionally, their views on issues such as integration, social participation, and community development are often more aligned with those of the wider population.

As a result, it is crucial to recognize the diverse needs and experiences of different Roma households in order to develop more tailored and effective policies and interventions. Thus, given these findings, it becomes evident that addressing the needs and challenges of Roma communities requires a more nuanced approach that acknowledges the differences between these socio-economic groups.

Grouping Roma households by socio-economic conditions

In our survey, we decided to differentiate households into two distinct groups based on their socio-economic characteristics. This decision was made with the aim of capturing the diversity within the Roma population and understanding how different economic conditions influence

living standards, access to services, and general outlook on issues such as education, employment, and healthcare.

To accomplish this, we used housing conditions as an indirect indicator of the economic status of the households. Housing is often considered a critical factor in assessing socio-economic well-being, as it directly affects access to essential services such as water, sanitation, electricity, and space for living. Furthermore, housing is closely linked to financial stability and social mobility.

In our research we grouped households into two categories based on their housing conditions.

Two categories of households

Households within the surveyed Roma population were classified into two distinct categories based on selected housing characteristics, which reflect fundamental aspects of housing and access to essential utilities.

Category 1 includes households with fewer than six members, connected to at least one basic utility—water—and living in an apartment or single-family house. These households can generally be considered to have relatively better living conditions due to the combination of smaller family sizes, access to basic infrastructure, and housing types associated with greater stability and comfort.

Category 2 encompasses all other households, including those with six or more members, and those lacking access to basic utilities such as water. This category also includes households that, while residing in an apartment or single-family house (76%), face overcrowding or other challenges. Moreover, a significant proportion—21%—of Category 2 households live in shacks or makeshift shelters. These dwellings often lack access to essential services and are characterized by precarious and unsanitary conditions, highlighting the stark disparities within the community.

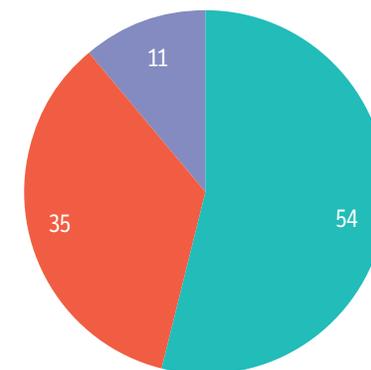
The distribution of households across these categories reveals a broadly even split, with 91 households falling into Category 1 and 95 households classified under Category 2. This near-equitable distribution underscores the diversity of living conditions within the surveyed population, ranging from relatively stable housing to severe deprivation. The overall breakdown of household types, as depicted in Figure 1, provides a visual

representation of these classifications. The analysis highlights the disparities in access to basic services and adequate housing, which remain critical indicators of quality of life. Such insights are essential for understanding the challenges faced by different segments of the population and formulating targeted interventions to improve living conditions.

Chart 1

HOUSEHOLD TYPE (RESIDENCE)

- Apartment in a residential building
- house
- shack



Q 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the household. Identification of the household type.

ROMA HOUSEHOLDS' ACCESS TO PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

A significant majority of households, regardless of their classification, have access to a water source, with 88% of all households connected to this essential service. Within Category 1, which includes households with fewer than six members and better living conditions, 100% of households are connected to a water source, demonstrating the relatively higher access to basic infrastructure in this group. Meanwhile, in Category 2, which represents households with larger sizes or more challenging living conditions, 76% of households have access to a water source. Although this figure is lower than in Category 1, it still highlights a substantial level of access, despite the additional vulnerabilities faced by households in this group.

When it comes to sanitation, the overall connection rate among surveyed households is slightly lower but still notable, with nearly 82% of

all households connected to a sewerage system. However, a significant disparity exists between the two categories. In Category 1, an 95.6% of households are connected to a sewerage system, reflecting the generally better quality of living conditions in this group. By contrast, only 68.4% of households in Category 2 have such access, underscoring the infrastructural challenges faced by this segment of the population.

The disparity becomes even more pronounced when focusing on specific housing types. Among households living in shacks or makeshift shelters, only 3 out of 20 (15%) have access to the sewerage system. These conditions highlight the severe lack of basic sanitation infrastructure for this subset of households, contributing to poor health outcomes and heightened vulnerability to diseases.

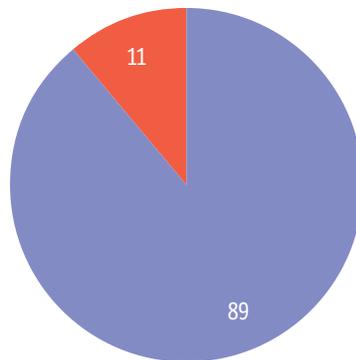
Conversely, nearly all households residing in apartment buildings (98 out of 99, or 98.9%) are connected to a sewerage system. This stark contrast illustrates the critical role that housing type plays in determining access to essential sanitation services. Apartment buildings, typically located in more developed areas, are far more likely to be connected to municipal infrastructure than informal or temporary dwellings.

The data underscores the persistent inequalities in access to water and sanitation services, with Category 2 households and those living in shacks facing significant disadvantages. These disparities highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to expand access to basic utilities, particularly for the most vulnerable populations. Addressing these gaps is crucial for improving overall living conditions and reducing health risks associated with inadequate water and sanitation infrastructure.

Chart 2

CONNECTION TO WATER

- yes
- no



Q 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the household. Is the house connected to the following utility networks?

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

ROMA PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS TO SERVICES: INSIGHTS FROM SAMPLE SURVEY DATA

HOW MANY ROOMS AND HOW MUCH FUNCTIONAL SPACE DO ROMA HOUSEHOLDS HAVE

An analysis of the number of rooms in surveyed households revealed that nearly half of all households had two or fewer rooms, indicating a prevalence of small living spaces across the community. This reflects the challenges of housing adequacy, especially for larger households where overcrowding is a likely concern. Among the surveyed households, the most frequently reported category was two rooms, suggesting that many families rely on minimal space to meet their living needs. This finding is significant as it points to potential issues such as limited privacy, insufficient space for children’s study or play, and restricted areas for household activities.

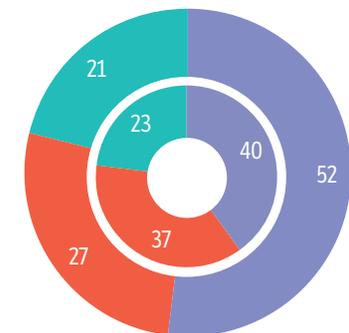
The distribution of household room numbers highlights the broader context of housing inadequacies that often accompany economic and social disadvantages. For households in Category 2, which already face challenges such as larger family sizes and reduced access to essential services, the prevalence of two or fewer rooms likely exacerbates their living conditions. In contrast, households in Category 1 may have slightly better space allocation due to their smaller family size and relatively better access to infrastructure.

Chart 3

NUMBER OF ROOMS IN HOUSEHOLD

- 2 and less
- 3 to 4
- 5 and more

inner circle—1. category
outer circle—2. category



Q 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the household. How many rooms are there in the household (house/apartment/shack)?

When the number of rooms is analyzed by household category, clear differences emerge between Category 1 and Category 2 households. Households in Category 1, which are characterized by smaller family sizes and better living conditions, tend to have a higher proportion of homes with more rooms. This suggests that these households are more likely to benefit from sufficient space to accommodate their needs, offering greater comfort and functionality.

In contrast, households in Category 2—larger families or those facing more challenging living conditions—face significantly greater constraints. In this category, up to half of the households have two or fewer rooms, underscoring the prevalence of overcrowded living conditions that can exacerbate stress, limit privacy, and negatively affect the quality of life.

Despite these differences, there is a notable consistency in the availability of certain functional spaces. Nearly all households in both categories have a kitchen and a living room, reflecting a baseline standard of housing functionality. However, it is worth noting that in 30 households, the living room is combined with the kitchen, which may indicate efforts to optimize limited space in smaller homes or resource-constrained environments.

When it comes to separate bedrooms, 82% of all households have at least one. This includes 81% of households in Category 1 and 78% in Category 2, showing a relatively even distribution across both groups. While the overall percentage is encouraging, the lack of a separate bedroom in nearly one-fifth of households highlights ongoing challenges in meeting even basic space requirements, particularly in Category 2 households.

A separate children's room, however, is far less common, with only 30% of all households having one. This figure drops to 24% in Category 2, compared to 36% in Category 1. The limited availability of dedicated spaces for children may negatively impact their well-being, as overcrowding can hinder academic focus, privacy, and personal development.

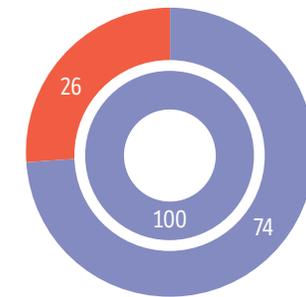
Households are beginning to differentiate themselves more significantly in terms of bathroom facilities. Overall, up to 86% of households have a bathroom, and while all households in Category 1 have a bathroom, up to 26% of households in Category 2 do not.

Chart 4

HOUSEHOLDS WITH BATHROOMS

- yes
- no

inner circle—1. category
outer circle—2. category



Q 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the household How many rooms are there in the household (house/apartment/cottage)? Indicate the number and tick the type

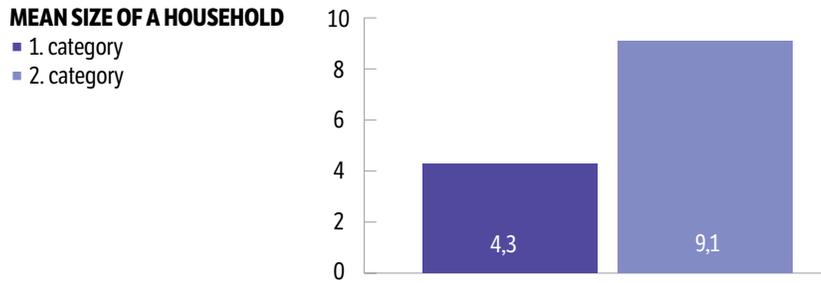
At the same time, 26% of households in category 2 do not have a toilet and 1/3 of households in total have a combined bathroom and toilet (most often due to lack of space in the house).

HOW NUMEROUS ARE ROMA HOUSEHOLDS

An analysis of the number of persons per household reveals important insights into family sizes and their distribution across the two household categories. Overall, the most common household sizes are 4 and 5 persons, which are equally frequent modal values. However, when broken down by category, distinct patterns emerge that highlight the differences in living arrangements between the two groups.

In Category 1, which generally comprises households with smaller family sizes and better access to resources, 4 persons per household is the most common size. This reflects a relatively balanced and manageable family structure, often associated with less overcrowding and more stable living conditions. Such household sizes are more likely to align with the available living space and resources, ensuring a higher quality of life for the members.

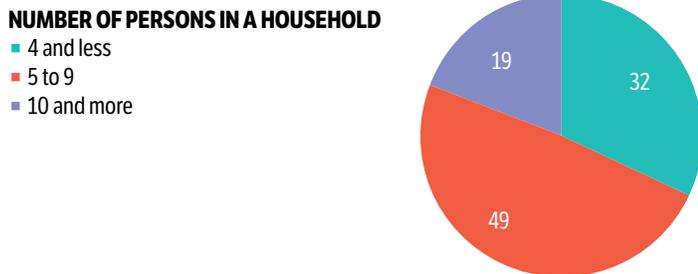
Chart 5



In contrast, households in Category 2—characterized by larger families and more challenging living conditions—show a different trend. Here, 7 persons per household emerges as the most common size. This significantly larger family size underscores the pressures faced by these households, particularly in terms of overcrowding and resource limitations. Larger households often require more space, greater access to utilities, and additional financial resources, all of which are frequently lacking in Category 2 settings.

These patterns reveal a stark contrast between the two categories, with smaller households being more prevalent in Category 1 and significantly larger households dominating in Category 2. This divergence has important implications for public policy and social interventions. Larger households, particularly those in Category 2, are more likely to experience issues such as overcrowding, limited privacy, and strain on available resources.

Chart 6

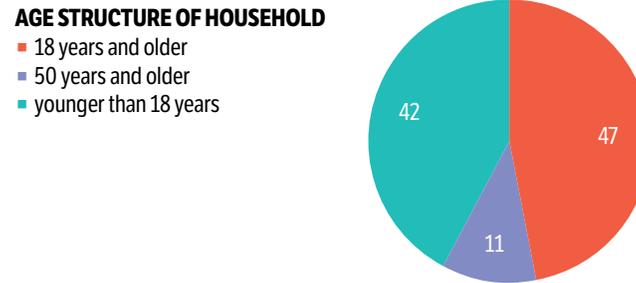


Q 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the household. How many people are in this household?

These data then show a relatively large disparity in average household size—while the average household size in category 1 is 4.3 persons,

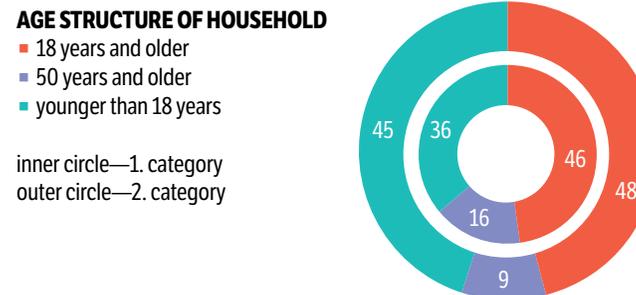
the average in Category 2 is 9.1 persons. In terms of the age distribution of persons in households, the distribution is fairly even in the youngest and middle generations (there is a higher proportion of children in Category 2 and a slightly higher proportion of persons over 50 in Category 1). Of the over 18 and over 50 age cohort, about a third are employed (45% of those in Category 1 and only 27% of those in Category 2 are employed). Of the under 18 age cohort 62% are in school (71% in Category 1 and 59.3% in Category 2).

Chart 7



Q 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the household. How many people are in this household?

Chart 8



Q 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the household. How many people are in this household?

These findings highlight the disparities in space allocation and functionality between the two household categories. They also underscore the pressing need for targeted housing interventions, particularly for Category 2 households, where overcrowding and inadequate living spaces are most pronounced.

ROMA SATISFACTION WITH SERVICES IN THEIR COMMUNITY

As part of the study, household heads were asked to evaluate their satisfaction with a wide range of services available within their community. To ensure clarity and consistency, responses were collected using a grading scale modeled on school grades, ranging from 1 (very satisfied) to 5 (very dissatisfied). This approach provided a straightforward way to capture respondents' perceptions of service quality across various aspects of community life.

The survey results revealed significant variation in satisfaction levels, with the ratings for different services ranging from a high satisfaction score of 1.3 to a low of 5. These values highlight the diverse experiences and opinions of residents concerning the services they rely on in their daily lives. Household heads, both male and female, expressed the highest level of satisfaction with the kindergarten services in their community, which received the top score of 1.3. This positive rating suggests that many residents view early childhood education facilities as well-organized, accessible, and well-maintained, meeting their expectations for quality and reliability.

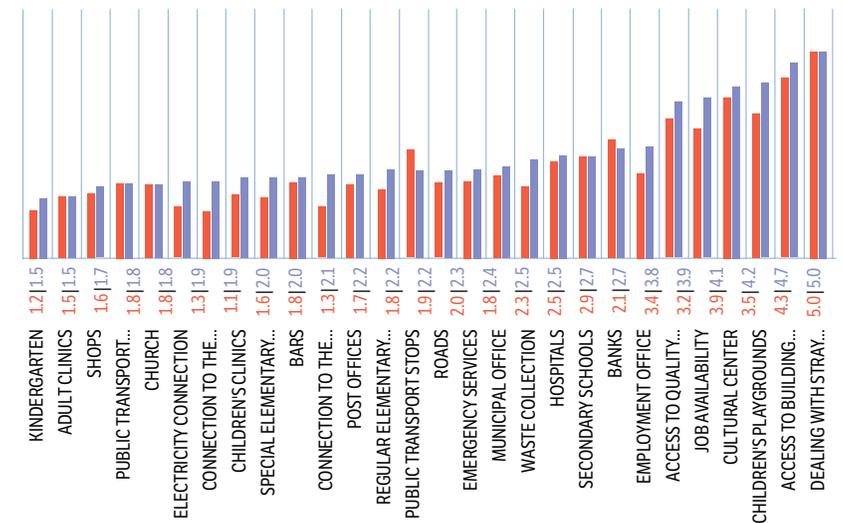
On the other hand, the lowest level of satisfaction was recorded for the situation surrounding stray dogs, which received the poorest score of 5. This indicates widespread dissatisfaction with how stray animals are managed within the community. Concerns about stray dogs may stem from issues such as public safety, sanitation, or a lack of effective animal control measures. The low rating underscores the need for targeted interventions to address this issue. The significant disparity between the highest and lowest satisfaction scores reflects the uneven quality of services within the community. While certain areas, such as kindergarten services, perform well and meet or exceed residents' expectations, others, like stray dog management, require attention.

In general, there were not large differences in scores for individual services and amenities between household categories, although on average households in Category 2 gave slightly worse scores (2.6 to 2.3 households in Category 1). The largest differences (0.8) between household categories were noted in satisfaction with water and sanitation connections, with higher levels of dissatisfaction expressed by households in Category 2.

Chart 9

SATISFACTION WITH SERVICES SCORE IN COMMUNITY

1—the best 2—the worst ■ 1. category ■ 2. category

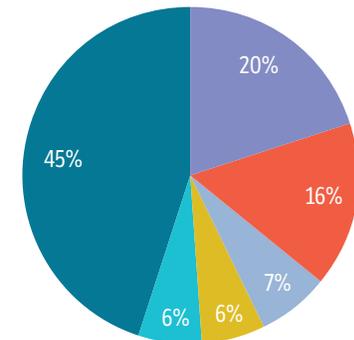


Q 2: Services in your area. Try to think about the services in your area. Please rank the following services from 1 to 5 according to your satisfaction.

Chart 10

TOP 5 IMPROVED SERVICES

- Regular elementary school
- Kindergarten
- Roads
- Shops
- Waste collection
- other



Q 3: Which services have improved the most in recent years?

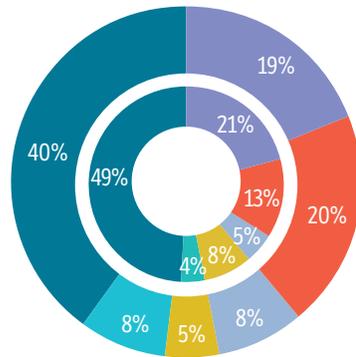
In terms of improvements in access to services, up to 20% of respondents agreed that mainstream primary schools and kindergartens had improved the most. The improvement in nursery school services was more likely to be reflected by Category 2 household heads, while the improvement in primary school services was slightly higher for Category 1 household heads.

Chart 11

TOP 5 IMPROVED SERVICES

- Regular elementary school
- Kindergarten
- Roads
- Shops
- Waste collection
- other

inner circle—1. category
outer circle—2. category



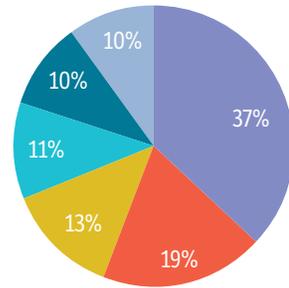
Q 3: Which services have improved the most in recent years?

Chart 12

IMPROVED SERVICES THANKS TO WHOM

(5 MOST FREQUENT RESPONDS)

- Mayor / local government
- Field social workers, community center
- Priest/pastor
- Government/state
- Member(s) of parliament
- other



Q 4: Thanks to what and to whom? [multiple choice]

Priority Areas for Service Improvements

When respondents were asked to identify the services where they most desired improvements, their priorities became clear. The services that ranked highest for desired improvements were related to mainstream primary schools, nursery schools, and church facilities. These results highlight the areas where community members feel there is the greatest potential for enhancement or where current offerings may not fully meet their needs.

Improvements to mainstream primary schools were consistently ranked as a top priority. This reflects the critical role that primary education plays as well as the challenges that families may face in accessing quality

education for their children. Nursery schools also emerged as a key area for improvement. Given the high satisfaction already reported for kindergarten services, the desire for further investment in nursery schools suggests that families see early childhood education as a cornerstone of their children’s development. Potential further improvements could include increasing the availability of nursery schools, enhancing the quality of care, or ensuring that facilities are accessible to Roma families, particularly those in marginalized regions.

The inclusion of church facilities as a priority for improvement underscores the cultural and social importance of religious institutions within the Roma community. Churches often serve as more than places of worship; they are community hubs that provide spiritual guidance, social support, and a sense of identity. Respondents may be seeking enhancements such as better-maintained facilities, expanded or increased accessibility to strengthen the role of churches in community life.

These findings reflect the values and priorities of the community, emphasizing the importance of education and social cohesion. Addressing these areas of concern could significantly enhance residents’ quality of life, and ensure that vital services better align with the needs and expectations of the population.

The most common consensus among male and female respondents was that the improvement is due to the mayors, with no significant difference between household categories here. The only significant difference was attributing the improvement in services to the government by Category 1 households (22%) rather than Category 2 households (%).

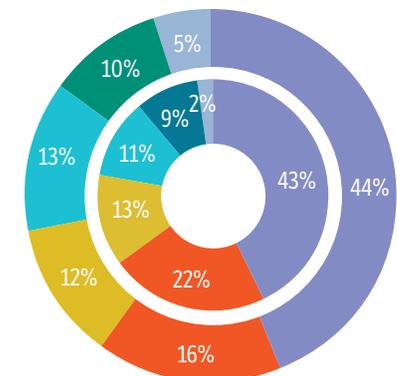
Chart 13

IMPROVED SERVICES THANKS TO WHOM

(5 MOST FREQUENT RESPONDS)

- Mayor / local government
- Field social workers, community center
- Priest/pastor
- Government/state
- Member(s) of parliament
- other

inner circle—1. category
outer circle—2. category



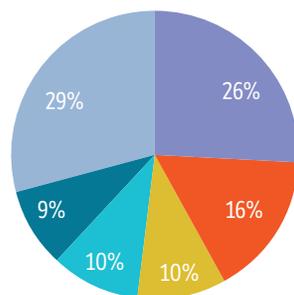
Q 4: Thanks to what and to whom? [multiple choice]

PERCEPTION OF DETERIORATION IN SERVICE QUALITY

Chart 14

TOP 5 WORSENEDED SERVICES

- Dealing with stray dogs
- Access to quality housing
- Job availability
- Hospitals
- Access to building plots
- other



Q 5: Which services have deteriorated the most in recent years?

110

Among the services evaluated, dealing with stray dogs emerged as the most significant area of perceived deterioration, with 26% of male and female respondents rating it as the most concerning decline in service quality. This issue appears to resonate across households, underscoring widespread dissatisfaction with how stray animals are managed. Concerns about public safety, sanitation and the potential spread of diseases likely contribute to this sentiment.

Beyond the issue of stray dogs, perceptions of service deterioration varied notably between household categories. Households in Category 2, which tend to face greater socioeconomic challenges, reported a more pronounced decline in two key areas. Almost 12% of Category 2 households cited a deterioration in employment opportunities compared to only 9% of Category 1 households. This suggests that economic challenges are felt more acutely by households already dealing with broader disadvantages, such as larger family sizes and limited access to resources.

Similarly, 12% of Category 2 households identified a decline in the availability of building land, compared to 6% of Category 1 households. This disparity reflects the additional barriers faced by Category 2 households in securing space for housing or development, which may exacerbate overcrowding and hinder efforts to improve living conditions.

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

ROMA PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS TO SERVICES: INSIGHTS FROM SAMPLE SURVEY DATA

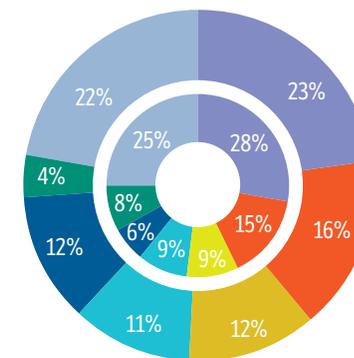
When respondents were asked to identify those responsible for the deterioration of services, perceptions varied depending on the nature of the issue. The government was most frequently held accountable, with 30% of households attributing the decline in service quality to national authorities. This suggests that residents view systemic or structural issues as significant contributors to the challenges faced by their communities. At the same time, 27% of respondents placed responsibility on the residents themselves, indicating a recognition that community actions—or inactions—also play a role in service deterioration.

Finally, mayors were seen as relatively responsible, with 24% of respondents attributing service declines to local leadership. While mayors were more frequently credited with driving service improvements, their perceived responsibility for declines suggests that local governance plays a main role in influencing community satisfaction. These findings reveal a nuanced perspective on service deterioration, with blame distributed among various stakeholders, including the government, local authorities, and the community itself.

Chart 15

TOP 5 WORSENEDED SERVICES

- Dealing with stray dogs
- Access to quality housing
- Job availability
- Hospitals
- Access to building plots
- Playgrounds
- other



inner circle—1. category
outer circle—2. category

Q 5: Which services have deteriorated the most in recent years?

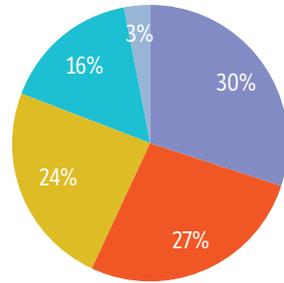
Category 2 households, for example, perceived the deterioration in the availability of work (12% to 6% for Category 1 households) as well as the availability of building land (12% | 6% for Category 1 households) more strongly. For responsibility for deterioration, the situation is slightly different. While mayors are more likely to be responsible for the improvement of services, the government is mainly responsible for the deterioration (30% of households) but also the residents themselves (27%). According to male and female respondents, mayors are also relatively responsible (24%).

111

Chart 16

WORSENED SERVICES THANKS TO WHOM
(5 MOST FREQUENT RESPONDS)

- Government/state
- Residents themselves
- Mayor/local government
- Member(s) of parliament
- other

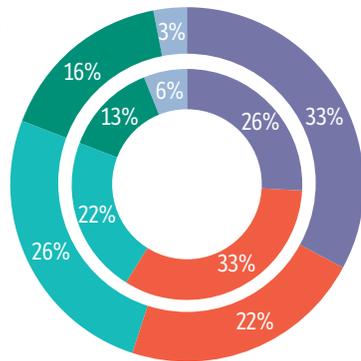


Q 6: Thanks to what and to whom?

Chart 17

WORSENED SERVICES THANKS TO WHOM
(5 MOST FREQUENT RESPONDS)

- Government/state
- Residents themselves
- Mayor/local government
- Member(s) of parliament
- other



inner circle—1. category
outer circle—2. category

Q 6: Thanks to what and to whom?

These findings reflect the values and priorities of the Roma community, emphasizing the importance of education and social cohesion. Addressing these areas of concern could significantly enhance quality of life and ensure that services better align with the needs and expectations of the population. Policymakers and stakeholders should consider these priorities when designing initiatives and allocating resources to foster meaningful improvements in these key areas. These findings also reveal a nuanced perspective on service deterioration, with blame distributed among various stakeholders, including the government, local authorities, and the community itself.

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

ROMA PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS TO SERVICES: INSIGHTS FROM SAMPLE SURVEY DATA

HOW ROMA SUBJECTIVELY PERCEIVE DISCRIMINATION

A significant portion of households surveyed reported experiencing worse treatment due to their Roma ethnicity, with a notable 44% of respondents answering “yes, often” to the question of whether they have faced discrimination or mistreatment on a frequent basis. This finding underscores the ongoing challenges of social exclusion and prejudice faced by the Roma population, particularly in areas where Roma population may encounter systemic barriers or negative stereotypes.

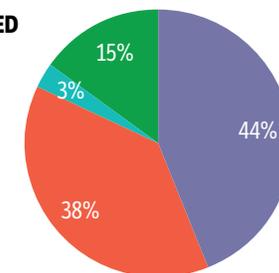
However, the data also reveals a pronounced difference in the experiences of Roma households in Category 2, which are those with poorer living conditions and lower access to resources. Within this group, the incidence of reported mistreatment is even more striking. 57% of Roma households in Category 2 reported that they often experience worse treatment, a percentage notably higher than that found in Category 1 households (44%). This suggests that Roma individuals who live in more disadvantaged conditions (such as overcrowded housing, limited access to education, and poor employment opportunities) are more vulnerable to discrimination and are more likely to encounter negative treatment.

The connection between worse treatment and living standards highlights the compounded challenges faced by Roma in Category 2. These households are not only dealing with economic hardship and social exclusion but are also more likely to face additional stigmatization based on their living conditions.

Chart 18

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED BEING TREATED WORSE BECAUSE YOU ARE ROMA?

- Yes, often
- Yes, occasionally
- No, never
- I don't know



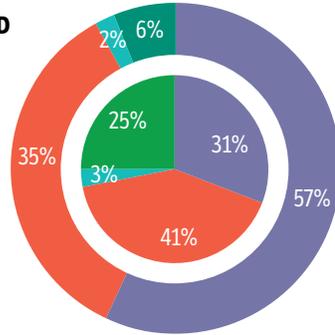
Q7: Try to think if it happens to you that someone treats someone worse because you are Roma?

Chart 19

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED BEING TREATED WORSE BECAUSE YOU ARE ROMA?

- Yes, often
- Yes, occasionally
- No, never
- I don't know

inner circle—1. category
outer circle—2. category



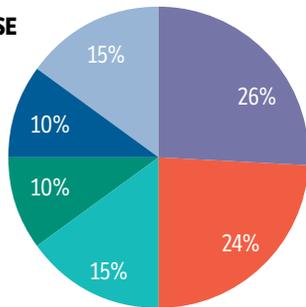
Q7: Try to think if it happens to you that someone treats someone worse because you are Roma?

Chart 20

WHERE YOU ARE USUALLY TREATED WORSE BECAUSE YOU ARE ROMA?

(5 MOST FREQUENT RESPONSES)

- Shops
- Offices
- Healthcare services
- Restaurants, pubs, bars
- Public transport
- other



Q7: Try to think if it happens to you that someone treats someone worse because you are Roma? If you answered yes, where does this happen to you most often [choose up to 3 options]

IN WHAT PLACES AND IN WHAT SITUATIONS DOES IT HAPPEN THAT ROMANI PEOPLE ARE TREATED IN A DISCRIMINATORY MANNER

Roma men and women frequently encounter inferior treatment in a variety of public and private settings, with shops and offices being the most common locations where this discrimination occurs. In these spaces, Roma individuals often report being treated with suspicion, being ignored by service staff, or facing verbal abuse or exclusion. In addition to shops and offices, Roma individuals also report experiencing mistreatment within health services. Discrimination in healthcare settings may manifest in various forms, such as being denied adequate care, facing dismissive attitudes from medical professionals, or encountering delays and lower-quality services. This unequal treatment can have serious consequences for Roma individuals' well-being, as it discourages them from seeking medical attention, leading to poorer health outcomes over time.

Responses from other areas, though less frequent, show that mistreatment is also common in schools and police. Schools are places where Roma children may face bullying, exclusion, or lower expectations from teachers due to ethnic biases. Similarly, interactions with the police often involve discrimination, with Roma being disproportionately treated with suspicion based on their ethnicity. This unequal treatment by law enforcement can worsen trust between the Roma community and the police, complicating efforts for mutual cooperation.

When analyzing the experiences of Category 2 households (those living in poorer conditions) the data reveals that these households report a higher likelihood of facing mistreatment in public transport. Discrimination on public transport may include being denied a seat, being ignored by drivers, or facing hostile behavior from fellow passengers. These experiences are particularly detrimental as they reflect broader societal prejudices and contribute to a sense of exclusion from public spaces.

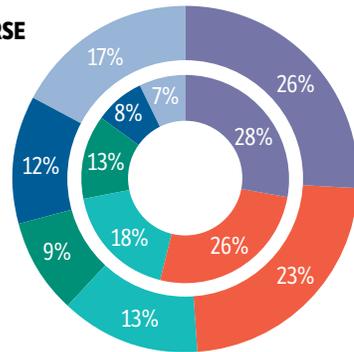
Additionally, Category 2 households report higher rates of mistreatment at school and in offices, mirroring the challenges already mentioned for the general Roma population but with greater intensity in this group. Above mentioned challenges may exacerbate the stigma faced by these households, making them more vulnerable to discriminatory behavior in various public services.

Chart 21

WHERE YOU ARE USUALLY TREATED WORSE BECAUSE YOU ARE ROMA?
(5 MOST FREQUENT RESPONSES)

inner circle—1. category
outer circle—2. category

- Shops
- Offices
- Healthcare services
- Restaurants, pubs, bars
- Public transport
- other



inner circle—1. category
outer circle—2. category

Q7: Try to think if it happens to you that someone treats someone worse because you are Roma? If you answered yes, where does this happen to you most often [choose up to 3 options]

The findings underscore the compounded nature of discrimination, particularly for Roma individuals in Category 2 households, where socioeconomic disadvantage and ethnic discrimination intersect to create harsh reality. The higher levels of discrimination in Category 2 households illustrate the urgent need for strategies to address both ethnic discrimination and socioeconomic inequality. Targeted interventions that focus on improving living standards, expanding access to education, and ensuring fair treatment in public services are crucial steps toward mitigating the systemic barriers faced by these households.

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

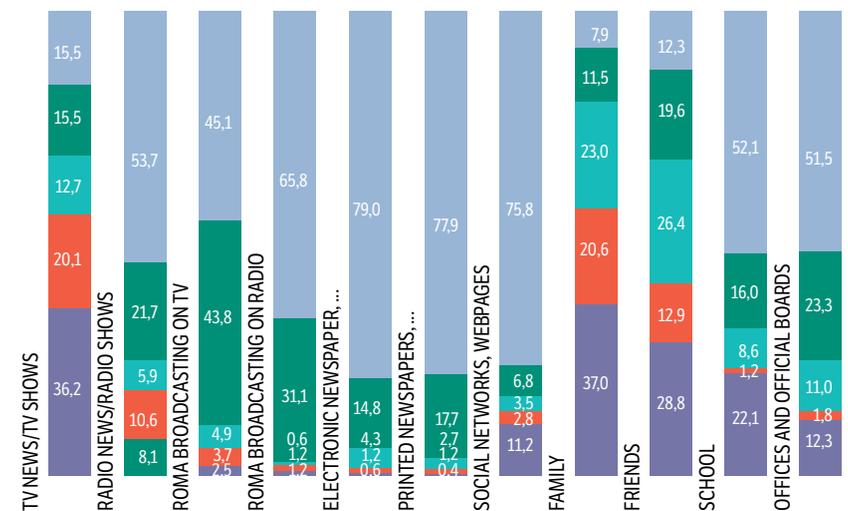
SOURCES OF INFORMATION ACQUISITION AND PERCEPTION OF THEIR CREDIBILITY

Two sources of information are dominant, indicating that many Roma households rely on traditional, personal, and widely accessible channels for staying informed. Family serves as an essential means of communication, with household members often sharing news and information directly with one another.

Chart 22

WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF YOUR INFORMATION (%)

always very often often sometimes not at all



ROMA PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS TO SERVICES: INSIGHTS FROM SAMPLE SURVEY DATA

Q 8: What sources of information about society and politics do you use and how often?

This network of close relationships creates a space for the exchange of practical advice, updates on local events, and discussions about broader social or political matters. The family unit, also, plays a critical role in access to more formal sources of information.

Television is another key source of information for Roma households, offering a broad range of content that can include news, entertainment, educational programming, and cultural content. Television remains an

important medium due to its wide accessibility, particularly for older generations who may be less familiar with digital technologies. As a central fixture in many homes, TV broadcasts provide a way for Roma families to stay connected to both local and national events, shaping their understanding of the world around them.

In addition to family and television, friends and school also play supplementary roles in disseminating information. Friends serve as a more informal but valuable network, often passing along personal updates, news, and advice. Schools are another important source of information, especially for households with children. Schools not only provide formal education but also serve as venues for accessing information about government policies, and opportunities for personal and professional development.

Despite the prevalence of these traditional sources, other forms of media are less strongly represented in households' information networks. With the exception of television, more formal media channels such as print newspapers, radio, and mainstream news websites are not as widely relied upon. This could be due to a variety of factors, including limited access to technology or cultural preferences for more personal and direct forms of communication.

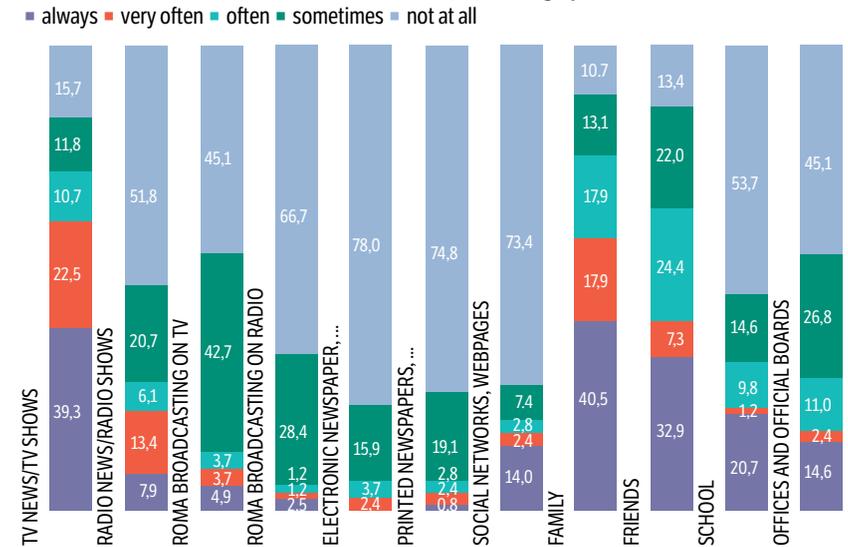
Specialized Roma broadcasts, such as Roma TV programs, have established themselves as a source of information, but their reach remains limited. Only 6.2% of households reported using Roma TV broadcasts "always or very often" as a source of information. While these broadcasts may offer content that is culturally relevant to Roma communities, their limited viewership suggests that their impact is still relatively small within the population.

In contrast, social networks have become a more strongly established source of information, particularly among younger generations. 14% of households reported using social media platforms "often or very often" for staying informed. Social media provides an interactive way to access news, engage with peers, and participate in discussions about relevant social, political, and cultural issues.

Significant differences in the importance of sources of information are not evident when households are divided into two categories. In both cases, television is the predominant source, supplemented by family and friends. The only significant difference is the slightly stronger representation as a substantial source of information from family and friends in the households of the Category 1.

Chart 23

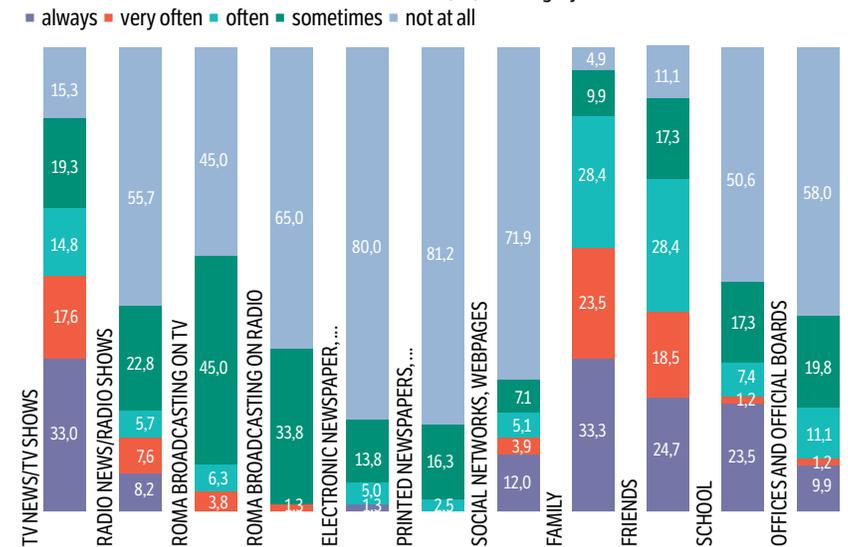
WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF YOUR INFORMATION (%) 1. category



Q 8: What sources of information about society and politics do you use and how often?

Chart 24

WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF YOUR INFORMATION (%) 2. category



Q 8: What sources of information about society and politics do you use and how often?

CREDIBILITY OF INFORMATION SOURCES

In terms of trustworthiness, social networks and the internet have emerged as increasingly important and reliable sources of information for Roma households, despite not being used as frequently as traditional forms of communication like family or television. Social networks and the internet are increasingly viewed as credible because they provide real-time access to diverse perspectives and allow individuals to verify information from multiple sources. Interestingly, the credibility of information from social networks and the internet is ranked higher than that of information from family or friends. While family and friends are highly valued for their personal and informal communication, they may also carry inherent limitations based on their own experiences and knowledge. In contrast, information available on social media and the internet can provide a more comprehensive understanding of various issues, making these platforms more trusted in some cases.

120

Furthermore, this trust in digital platforms is particularly pronounced among individuals from Category 2 households—those facing greater socio-economic challenges. Interestingly, members of Category 2 households report placing a higher level of trust in the information they receive from social networks and the internet compared to those from Category 1 households. This suggests that Roma individuals in more disadvantaged circumstances may turn to digital platforms as a way of accessing news. For these individuals, the internet offers a way to overcome barriers related to information that might otherwise be difficult to reach.

In contrast, Category 1 households—which may have more resources and stronger social networks—may rely more on traditional sources such as family, friends, and television for their information needs, as these sources may offer more familiar perspectives.

When it comes to the most important sources of information for households, family and television play a central role. Low level of engagement with specialized Roma media highlights the need for greater access to and promotion of Roma-centered content that can resonate with wider segments of the population. The rise of social media usage indicates a shift in how Roma households engage with the digital information,

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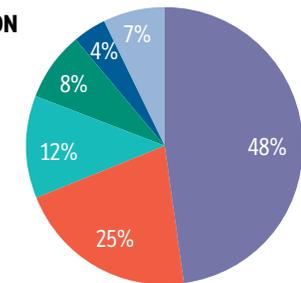
ROMA PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS TO SERVICES: INSIGHTS FROM SAMPLE SURVEY DATA

suggesting that these platforms may play an increasingly important role for information, particularly for younger members of the community. The growing trust in social networks and the internet signifies a shift toward digital platforms as reliable sources of information, especially for those in Category 2 households.

Chart 25

THE MOST RELIABLE SOURCE OF INFORMATION (5 MOST FREQUENT RESPONDS)

- TV news/TV shows
- Social networks, webpages
- Family
- Radio news/Radio shows
- Friends
- othe

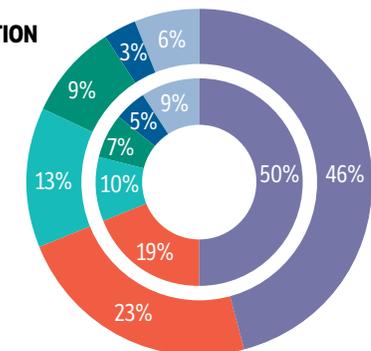


Q 9: Which sources of information do you trust the most (maximum 3)?

Chart 26

THE MOST RELIABLE SOURCE OF INFORMATION (5 MOST FREQUENT RESPONDS)

- TV news/TV shows
- Social networks, webpages
- Family
- Radio news/Radio shows
- Friends
- other



inner circle—1. category
outer circle—2. category

Q 9: Which sources of information do you trust the most (maximum 3)?

121

ROMA VIEWS ON SEGREGATION AND PERCEPTION OF THE WORK OF POLITICIANS

Opinions on Separate Housing for Roma and Non-Roma

When asked about the idea of separate housing for Roma and non-Roma populations, the responses reveal a significant divide in opinion, with a portion of the population expressing support for the separate housing. Almost one-third of respondents indicated a preference for separate housing, highlighting the complex nature of ethnic and social integration. This significant percentage reflects a broader feeling of segregation or separation, which may stem from perceived differences in lifestyle, cultural practices, or historical experiences between the Roma and majority population.

Interestingly, support for separate housing is more indicated among households in Category 2, the group that experiences worse living conditions and greater socio-economic challenges. These households appear to express a stronger preference for separation, potentially as a response to social exclusion or discrimination that they face in mixed communities. The desire for separate housing could reflect also a desire for greater safety, more control over living environments, and protection from the discriminatory practices that often occur in integrated or mixed housing settings. These households may believe that having separate spaces would reduce the instances of racism and social marginalization.

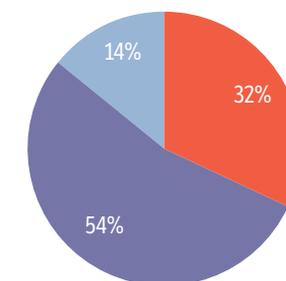
In contrast, households in Category 1, which tend to have better living standards and greater access to resources, show a lower preference for separate housing. This suggests that, for individuals who have relatively better social and economic integration, the idea of living apart from other ethnic groups may not be as appealing. They may place greater value on social cohesion and integration, and prefer more inclusive living.

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

Chart 27

DO YOU THINK ROMA AND NON-ROMA SHOULD LIVE SEPARATELY?

- yes
- no
- I don't know



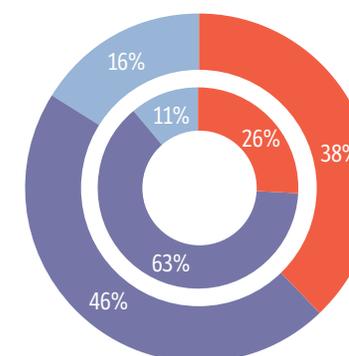
Q 10: Do you think it's better if the Roma live separately and the non-Roma live separately?

Chart 28

DO YOU THINK ROMA AND NON-ROMA SHOULD LIVE SEPARATELY?

- yes
- no
- I don't know

inner circle—1. category
outer circle—2. category



Q 10: Do you think it's better if the Roma live separately and the non-Roma live separately?

The opinions on this issue are highly diverse, reflecting the complexity of Roma integration and the varying experiences within the community. The key words frequently mentioned in responses to this question provide valuable insights into the underlying reasons for the differing opinions. Some respondents emphasized the importance of interaction between Roma and non-Roma populations, suggesting that mixed living conditions can promote social harmony and a better understanding of different cultural backgrounds. (see Picture 1). These individuals may argue that living together can break down stereotypes, support mutual respect, and help eliminate the division between the groups.

Picture 1



Q 11: Do you think it's better if the Roma live separately and the non-Roma live separately? If yes, try to tell why?

However, many respondents also highlighted the better conditions experienced by the majority population, indicating that Roma individuals may feel disadvantaged or excluded when living in mixed settings. The experiences of discrimination, racism, and maladjustment in these environments were noted frequently, reflecting the social tensions and challenges that arise when different ethnic groups live in close proximity. For many Roma individuals, the integration process is fraught with barriers, such as prejudice and negative stereotypes, that can make mixed living arrangements uncomfortable or even harmful. These persistent issues contribute to the desire for separate spaces where Roma families can feel more secure and accepted without the constant threat of racism or hostility.

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

OPINIONS ON JOINT, DESEGREGATED EDUCATION OF ROMA AND NON-ROMA

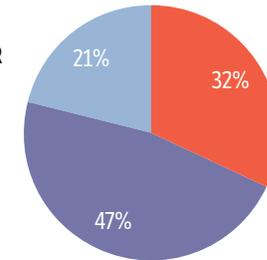
When it comes to the importance of joint education for Roma and non-Roma children, the patterns in responses reflect similar tendencies to those seen in the discussion on separate housing, though with some differences in how opinions are expressed. A notable feature is that a slightly higher proportion of respondents were unsure or did not

have a clear opinion on this question. This uncertainty may stem from conflicting views on the benefits of integrated education versus the potential challenges that arise from discrimination and cultural differences within mixed educational settings.

Chart 29

DO YOU THINK IT IS BETTER FOR YOUR CHILDREN TO HAVE THEIR OWN CLASSES OR SCHOOLS

- yes
- no
- I don't know



Q 12: Do you think it is better if your children have their own classes or schools or if they go to classes with non-Roma?

Diverging Opinions Based on Household Category

As with the question on separate housing, there is a distinct divide in responses between households in Category 1 and Category 2. However, in this case, there is a notable difference in the way the responses are distributed across both categories. Specifically, the response rate among households in Category 2 (those experiencing worse socio-economic conditions) is much more balanced compared to the response distribution on separate housing. In Category 2, opinions are almost equally divided between those who prefer joint education and those who see potential challenges with it. This more equal distribution of opinions could reflect the greater exposure to experiences among Roma families in this category, many of whom may have dealt with discrimination and social exclusion in schools.

On the other hand, Category 1 households, which are likely to have better educational outcomes and more integrated experiences in schools, may lean more towards supporting joint education, seeing it as a way to promote social cohesion and equality. These households are more likely to have children attending schools where they interact regularly with non-Roma peers, and may perceive joint education as a way to bridge social gaps.

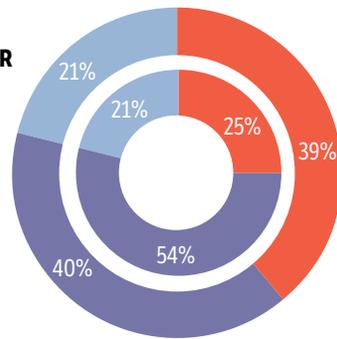
ROMA PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS TO SERVICES: INSIGHTS FROM SAMPLE SURVEY DATA

Chart 30

DO YOU THINK IT IS BETTER FOR YOUR CHILDREN TO HAVE THEIR OWN CLASSES OR SCHOOLS

- yes
- no
- I don't know

inner circle—1. category
outer circle—2. category



Q 12: Do you think it is better if your children have their own classes or schools or if they go to classes with non-Roma?

Diverse Opinions on the Benefits of Joint Education

126

When analyzing the content of the responses, it becomes clear that there are a range of opinions regarding the benefits and drawbacks of integrated education. Several respondents pointed out the motivational benefits for Roma pupils in joint educational settings. The idea is that interacting with non-Roma peers may inspire Roma children to perform better academically, as they are exposed to a wider range of learning behaviors and expectations.

Others expressed a belief that joint education promotes better cohabitation and social harmony between Roma and non-Roma communities. These respondents argue that by attending school together, Roma and non-Roma children have the opportunity to form friendships, learn about each other's cultures, and break down the prejudices and stereotypes.

However, a significant portion of respondents also raised concerns about discrimination and biases that Roma students may face in mixed educational environments. Many expressed the opinion that separate education might be a more appropriate solution to protect Roma children from racism, bullying, and social exclusion that can occur in schools. For these individuals, the perceived benefits of integration are overshadowed by the negative experiences that Roma students often encounter in mainstream schools. These respondents argue that in environments where Roma children are in the minority, they are more likely

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

ROMA PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS TO SERVICES: INSIGHTS FROM SAMPLE SURVEY DATA

to be stigmatized, have lower expectations placed on them by teachers, and face difficulties with non-Roma pupils who may have prejudiced views (see Picture 2.)

Picture 2



Q 13: Do you think it is better if your children have their own classes or schools or if they go to classes with non-Roma? Try to say why?

Some respondents also pointed to the idea that separate education could offer a more tailored learning environment that caters to the specific needs and cultural backgrounds of Roma children. This perspective suggests that specialized educational settings could provide more effective support systems, such as Roma-speaking teachers, cultural education programs, and personalized curricula, which might better address the unique challenges Roma students face.

127

PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR ROMA

When assessing the results of political work in favor of the Roma community, the responses from Roma households tend to be largely negative or vague. Many respondents expressed frustration with the lack of tangible outcomes or concrete actions taken by political figures to improve the living conditions and socio-economic opportunities for the Roma population. This suggests a general sense of disillusionment or

skepticism toward political leaders, especially when it comes to addressing the systemic issues of discrimination, poverty, and exclusion that many Roma families face.

While the general responses were negative or uncertain, there were a few notable mentions of politicians who were perceived as having made a positive impact on the Roma community. In particular, Peter Pollák, a Member of Parliament, is mentioned five times in a positive light. The positive mentions of Pollák suggest that, despite the overall dissatisfaction, there are a few political figures who have been able to earn trust and recognition from the Roma community.

Additionally, the mayor of a local area is mentioned four times in a positive context, indicating that local political leaders may have had a more direct or visible impact on the lives of Roma residents. Mayors, especially in smaller towns or cities, may be perceived as more approachable to their local communities. The responses suggest that, for Roma communities, local governance may be seen as more effective or responsive than national political figures.

THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL SUPPORT

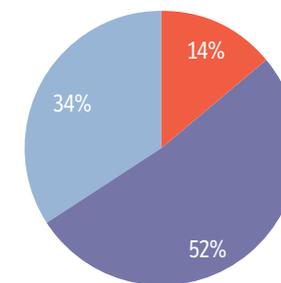
Overall, however, the positive mentions of specific individuals such as MP Peter Pollák few, with the general sentiment leaning toward disappointment with the political establishment as a whole. Many Roma respondents likely feel that political figures—whether at the local or national level—have failed to enact the structural changes needed to address the longstanding challenges facing their communities. Issues such as poor housing conditions, lack of access to education, discrimination in the labor market, and marginalization in public life are often seen as being either ignored or poorly addressed by politicians, leading to the overall negative or vague responses.

In summary, the issue of separate housing for Roma and non-Roma highlights the ongoing tensions between integration and segregation within society. While some see separate living as a means to ensure safety and reduce discrimination, others advocate for more inclusive approaches that encourage interaction and mutual understanding. The responses to this question underscore the complexity of Roma inclusion and the diverse experiences of individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Chart 31

ARE THERE ANY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT OR OTHER POLITICIANS WHO HAVE DONE OR ARE DOING GOOD THINGS FOR YOU?

- yes
- no
- I don't know



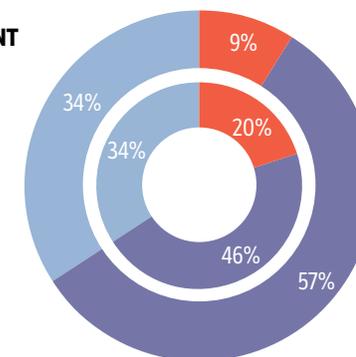
Q 14: are there any MPs or other politicians who have done or are doing good things for you?

Chart 32

ARE THERE ANY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT OR OTHER POLITICIANS WHO HAVE DONE OR ARE DOING GOOD THINGS FOR YOU?

- yes
- no
- I don't know

inner circle—1. category
outer circle—2. category



Q 14: are there any MPs or other politicians who have done or are doing good things for you?

The opinions on joint education for Roma and non-Roma children are diverse and reflect the broader societal complexities surrounding integration and inclusion. While some view joint education as a means of fostering better academic performance, social cohesion, and mutual respect, others feel that separate educational settings would better protect Roma children from the discrimination and cultural barriers they face in mixed schools. The diversity of opinions, particularly in Category 2 households, underscores the need for a more nuanced approach to Roma education that takes into account the varied socio-economic conditions, experiences, and cultural perspectives of the Roma community.

While there are isolated instances where Roma respondents acknowledge the efforts of certain politicians, the general sentiment toward political support for Roma issues is one of dissatisfaction and disillusionment.

The low frequency of positive feedback highlights a need for more comprehensive, targeted political engagement that addresses the real concerns of the Roma community.

ROMA SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTION OF THE FUTURE

The final question in the survey asked respondents to reflect on their perceptions of the future and to identify what they felt was most needed or lacking in their lives. This open-ended question was an opportunity for individuals to express their most pressing concerns and desires for improvement, shedding light on the fundamental issues they believe must be addressed to improve their quality of life. The responses revealed a pattern of recurring themes, with certain needs and desires being expressed with particular frequency.

130

The most commonly mentioned words and concepts in the answers were money, housing, health, work, and income. These responses are indicative of the core areas of concern for the Roma community, many of whom face significant challenges in these domains. The repetition of these terms underscores how central these issues are to the everyday lives of Roma families and individuals (see Picture 3).

Picture 3



Q : Finally, we would like to ask you what your family lacks the most and what you would need the most for your family

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

ROMA PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS TO SERVICES: INSIGHTS FROM SAMPLE SURVEY DATA

Money and Income

One of the most frequently mentioned needs was money, highlighting the financial strain that many Roma households experience. This reflects the broader issue of poverty, as many Roma families struggle to meet basic needs due to insufficient financial resources. Respondents likely see money as a key to unlocking opportunities for a better future, as it is directly tied to access to services, education, healthcare, and housing. Additionally, income was mentioned in many responses, underscoring the need for better-paying jobs, improved economic opportunities, and a more stable financial situation.

Housing

Housing was another area of major concern. The importance of decent, stable housing was expressed by numerous respondents, with many pointing to inadequate living conditions as a significant barrier to overall well-being. Many Roma families live in overcrowded or substandard housing, which can negatively impact their health, quality of life, and access to basic services. The desire for adequate housing is tied to a broader longing for security and dignity, as stable and decent housing is foundational to a person's sense of belonging and stability.

131

Health

Health emerged as another critical need, with many respondents emphasizing their desire for improved access to healthcare services. Health was mentioned frequently, reflecting the disparities that exist in terms of healthcare access and quality within Roma communities. Many Roma individuals face barriers such as lack of insurance, poor health infrastructure, discrimination in healthcare settings, and financial constraints that prevent them from seeking timely medical attention.

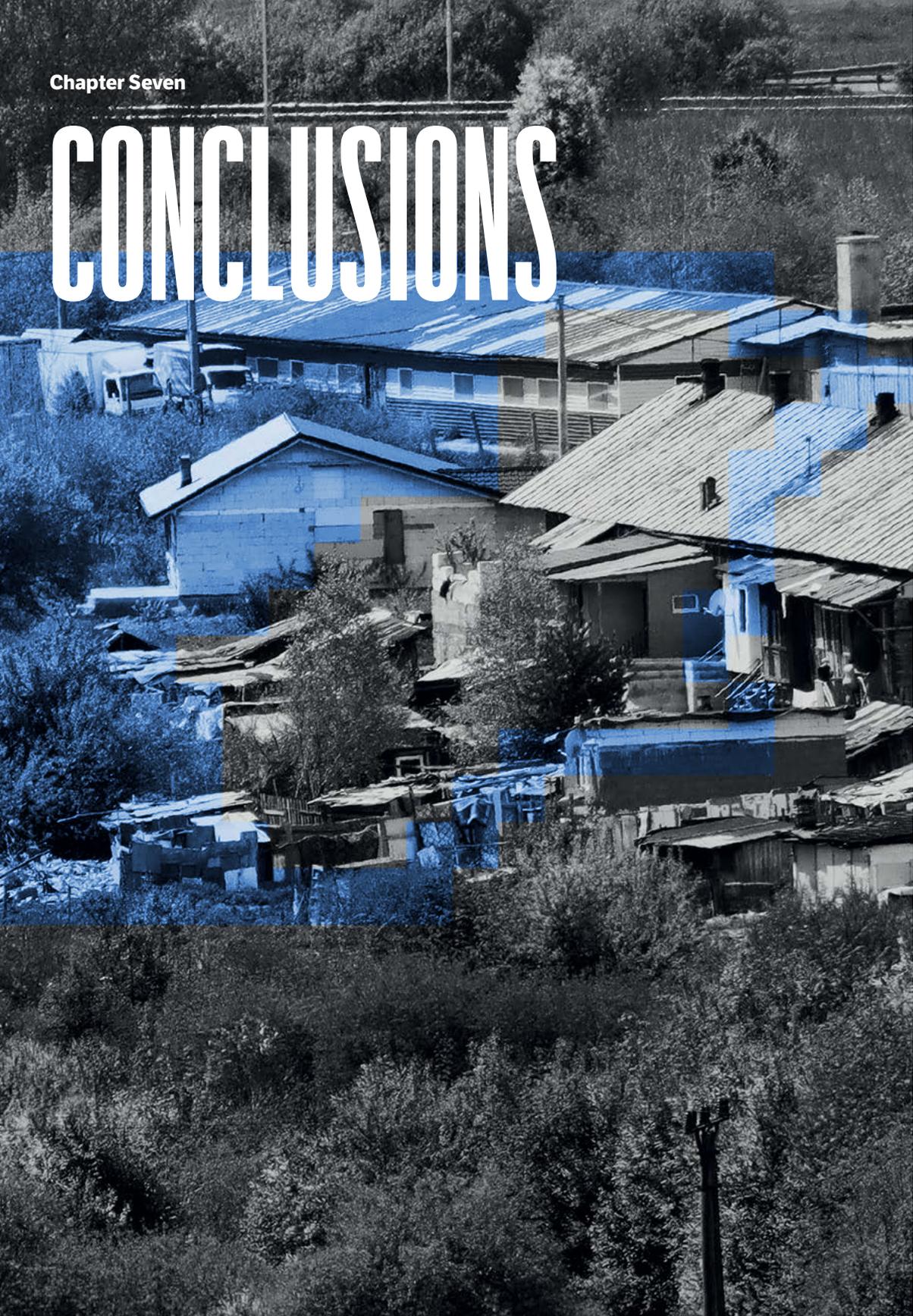
Work

Employment and work opportunities were also major themes in the responses. Finding stable employment was a key need expressed by many Roma respondents, with work being seen as essential for achieving financial independence and contributing to the community. Job discrimination, lack of skills training, and limited access to job opportunities were likely factors behind the demand for better access to employment. For many Roma individuals, employment is not just a source of income, but a pathway to social mobility, self-respect, and economic stability.

The subjective perception of the future, as expressed by Roma respondents, reveals a deep longing for financial stability, decent housing, better healthcare, employment opportunities, and improved income. These are the foundational needs that many Roma individuals feel must be addressed to improve their lives and secure a better future for themselves and their families.



CONCLUSIONS



The comprehensive analysis and synthesis of data collected through all three research methods reveal significant disparities in how the situation regarding living conditions and access to services is perceived by different groups, particularly between non-Roma and Roma communities. This divergence in perception is especially stark when comparing the views of representatives from municipalities, local education authorities, and other governmental bodies—collectively referred to as the authorities—with those of Roma inhabitants or Roma employees working within municipalities and schools.

On one hand, non-Roma respondents, often referred to colloquially as “white” respondents, generally express a sense of optimism and perceive notable improvements in living conditions and service accessibility over recent years. From their perspective, efforts made through various programs and initiatives are yielding positive results, and the trajectory of development appears promising. These respondents often highlight advancements in infrastructure, public services, and community projects as evidence of progress.

On the other hand, Roma inhabitants exhibit a more skeptical outlook, often characterized by a heightened awareness of the persistent challenges and inequalities they face. Their perception of the situation and their expectations for future development tend to be less positive. This skepticism stems from their lived experiences, which frequently include barriers to accessing services, substandard living conditions, and systemic discrimination. Roma respondents often point out that the improvements cited by authorities do not adequately address the structural and institutional issues that perpetuate inequality. Furthermore, they argue that these changes, while visible in some areas, have not meaningfully altered their everyday lives or alleviated the challenges they face.

This divergence in perception underscores a critical disconnect between the authorities and the Roma community. While municipal and local education representatives may focus on measurable indicators of progress—such as new infrastructure projects or policy implementations—Roma inhabitants emphasize the continued existence of deeper social, economic, and institutional barriers that hinder equitable access to opportunities and services.

DIFFERENT PERCEPTION WITHIN THE ROMA COMMUNITY

The research also highlights notable differences within the Roma community itself, specifically in how living conditions and access to services are perceived. These variations are closely linked to the socioeconomic status of individual households, which significantly influences their experiences and outlook.

Roma individuals and families who occupy a relatively stronger social and economic position tend to view their situation in a more positive light. These households often have better access to resources, education, and employment opportunities, which contributes to a sense of optimism about their future. Despite facing discrimination in various aspects of everyday life—such as in employment, public spaces, and service provision—this group remains hopeful about their prospects for integration into wider society and the potential for improving their standard of living. Their optimism is often underpinned by the belief that gradual progress is possible, both for themselves and for their communities, as systemic barriers are addressed over time.

In contrast, Roma households that are economically disadvantaged exhibit a much higher level of dissatisfaction with their living conditions and the quality of services available to them. These families frequently encounter significant barriers in accessing basic services, including healthcare, education, and public utilities. Additionally, they report more frequent and pronounced experiences of discrimination, not only by governmental authorities but also by service providers and staff in everyday settings, such as shops, restaurants, and schools. This ongoing discrimination exacerbates feelings of marginalization and contributes to a pervasive sense of hopelessness about their ability to achieve meaningful improvements in their quality of life.

The disparity between these two groups within the Roma community underscores the intersection of economic status and social perceptions. While those in better economic standing may perceive incremental improvements and hold onto aspirations for upward mobility, poorer Roma households are often trapped in cycles of poverty and exclusion. Their experiences of systemic neglect and bias reinforce a narrative of stagnation and frustration, further deepening the divide in perceptions within the community itself.

136

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

DYNAMICS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROMA LIVING CONDITIONS

Regarding the dynamics of the development of living conditions among the Roma population, the findings indicate a notable improvement in the infrastructure of settlements and localities where Roma households reside. Over recent years, there has been progress in key areas such as access to water supply, sewage systems, roads, public lighting, and electricity. These enhancements have positively impacted the general living environment and addressed some of the long-standing infrastructural deficits in these communities. However, despite these advancements, significant challenges remain, revealing a more nuanced and complex picture of development.

One emerging issue is the economic barrier that prevents many Roma households from fully benefiting from the improved infrastructure. While the necessary facilities may now be in place, a substantial proportion of Roma families lack the financial resources required to connect their homes to this infrastructure. This disconnect underscores the gap between infrastructure development and practical accessibility, illustrating how systemic inequalities continue to limit the impact of progress on marginalized communities.

Housing, in particular, remains a persistent challenge. Despite numerous projects aimed at constructing rental housing in villages and towns, the issue of affordability severely restricts access to adequate housing for many Roma families. The high cost of housing places it beyond the reach of the majority of Roma households, both in terms of availability and affordability. Furthermore, the quality of housing remains a significant concern. Overcrowding is a common issue, with families often living in cramped conditions with insufficient rooms to accommodate their needs. In addition, the interiors of these homes frequently feature low-quality furnishings and materials, further compounding the difficulties faced by residents.

These housing challenges are symptomatic of deeper structural issues, including limited economic opportunities, systemic discrimination, and a lack of targeted support for Roma communities. While the visible improvements in infrastructure mark an important step forward, they must be complemented by policies and programs that address the financial,

CONCLUSIONS

137

social, and institutional barriers preventing Roma families from accessing these benefits. Without a holistic approach to development, the disparity between infrastructure advancements and actual living conditions will continue to persist, leaving many Roma households in a state of exclusion and precarity.

LACK OF HOUSING AND POOR QUALITY OF HOUSING

Municipal and city officials often view the challenges surrounding the lack of housing and the poor quality of housing in Roma communities through a lens that attributes much of the responsibility for these conditions to the Roma themselves. This perspective tends to emphasize perceived behaviors and practices of the Roma population, such as irregular payment of rent or failure to maintain properties, while overlooking the systemic and institutional factors that contribute to these issues. These include entrenched socioeconomic inequalities, historical marginalization, and insufficient policy frameworks aimed at addressing the specific housing needs of Roma communities. By failing to recognize these broader structural causes, municipal approaches to housing often lack the comprehensive strategies needed to create meaningful and sustainable improvements.

From the perspective of Roma inhabitants, there is widespread dissatisfaction with the state of housing services. Many Roma individuals and families feel that the authorities exhibit a lack of genuine interest in addressing housing problems within their communities. This perceived indifference is reinforced by the slow pace of improvement and the failure to prioritize affordable, high-quality housing projects that cater to the needs of the Roma population. For Roma families, the housing crisis is not merely a matter of affordability but also of quality and dignity, as overcrowding, poorly constructed homes, and inadequate furnishings are common issues that remain unaddressed.

Another persistent challenge shared by municipalities and Roma households alike is the issue of waste management. Municipalities frequently cite non-payment of waste collection fees and household debts as major obstacles to regular and efficient waste management in Roma settlements. These financial constraints, coupled with limited

municipal resources, often result in irregular waste collection services, exacerbating the accumulation of waste near residential areas.

Roma residents, however, offer a different perspective. They argue that the substandard waste management practices of municipalities disproportionately affect Roma settlements. Irregular waste collection schedules, inadequate infrastructure for waste disposal, and a lack of clear communication or collaboration between the authorities and the community are commonly cited grievances. This situation creates a cycle in which poor waste management contributes to deteriorating living conditions, further marginalizing Roma communities while perpetuating stereotypes about their inability or unwillingness to maintain their environment.

The differing perspectives on both housing and waste management reveal a deep disconnect between municipal authorities and Roma residents. Bridging this gap requires a shift in approach, where systemic factors are acknowledged, and collaborative, community-centered solutions are prioritized. By fostering a more inclusive dialogue and taking a holistic approach, authorities can begin to address these long-standing issues in a way that benefits all stakeholders.

THE AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY OF SERVICES IN INDIVIDUAL VILLAGES

The availability and quality of services in individual villages vary significantly, creating a pronounced disparity in living conditions and opportunities among communities. In some villages, infrastructure and public services are relatively comprehensive, featuring well-equipped schools, health centers, and recreational facilities such as playgrounds for children. These villages offer their residents easier access to essential services, contributing to a higher quality of life and better opportunities for personal and community development. However, in many other villages, residents face significant challenges due to the lack of such infrastructure. In these areas, access to basic services like healthcare is limited, forcing residents to travel to neighboring villages or district towns to obtain necessary medical care. This disparity underscores the uneven distribution of resources and the need for targeted efforts to ensure more equal access to essential services.

EDUCATION

In the area of education, a general positive trend has been observed in recent years. Respondents from various groups, including Roma residents, municipal representatives, and school leaders, have expressed satisfaction with the current state of schools. Many schools are now better equipped than before, with access to modern facilities such as computers, playgrounds, and gymnasiums, which enhance the overall learning environment. These improvements reflect a broader commitment to advancing educational infrastructure and resources.

Policy measures introduced at the central government level have also contributed to this progress. One notable initiative is the introduction of compulsory pre-school attendance, which has been widely praised for its potential to improve early childhood education and prepare children for their formal schooling journey. This policy is seen as a positive step towards reducing educational disparities and promoting integration from an early age.

Despite these advancements, challenges remain. Communication between teachers and Roma parents, while generally functional, is not without its difficulties. Cultural differences, language barriers, and differing expectations can sometimes hinder effective collaboration between schools and families. These issues highlight the importance of fostering open and inclusive communication channels, providing cultural sensitivity training for teachers, and offering additional support to Roma families to bridge the gap between home and school.

Overall, while significant strides have been made in improving education and services in certain areas, the uneven distribution of resources and persistent communication challenges indicate that more work is needed to create equitable access and support for all communities. Addressing these issues will require sustained efforts from both local and central authorities, as well as active participation from the communities themselves.

140

BRIDGING THE GAP: ROMA ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES IN SLOVAKIA

SEGREGATION

The issue of segregation continues to pose a significant challenge, particularly in critical areas such as education and housing. In education, segregation is most evident in villages with predominantly Roma populations, where schools often become entirely segregated due to the withdrawal of non-Roma children. Many non-Roma parents opt to enroll their children in schools outside these villages, typically in areas where there are no Roma students, further entrenching the divide. This phenomenon is widely recognized by authorities as a negative development, as it perpetuates inequality and limits opportunities for integration. However, effective solutions to counteract this trend remain elusive, leaving the issue unaddressed.

Within the Roma community, opinions on educational segregation are mixed and often influenced by socioeconomic status. Roma families who are in better economic standing tend to favor integrated educational settings, viewing them as opportunities for their children to access better resources, build social connections, and enhance their prospects for the future. Conversely, economically disadvantaged Roma families often express contentment with segregated classrooms and schools, perceiving them as safer, less competitive environments where their children are less likely to face discrimination or feel marginalized. However, these families may overlook the long-term negative consequences of such segregation, including reduced access to quality education, limited social integration, and fewer opportunities for upward mobility. These outcomes can perpetuate cycles of poverty and exclusion for Roma children.

Segregation is also deeply entrenched in the realm of housing, where Roma communities are often confined to segregated neighborhoods or settlements. Housing designated for Roma families is typically concentrated in specific localities, often referred to as “Roma housing.” This segregation is not only a reflection of social marginalization but also a factor that influences and limits development initiatives. One of the significant barriers to addressing housing segregation is the reluctance of local authorities to allocate land for Roma housing in central areas of municipalities. Instead, new housing projects for Roma families are frequently relegated to peripheral parts of towns or the sites of existing Roma settlements. This practice perpetuates spatial segregation, further isolating Roma communities from economic opportunities, social networks, and essential services.

CONCLUSIONS

141

The negative effects of such segregation extend beyond physical separation. In education, segregated schools often lack the resources and quality of instruction available in more diverse or predominantly non-Roma schools. This limits the potential for Roma children to achieve academic success and contribute meaningfully to broader society. In housing, spatial segregation reinforces stereotypes, exacerbates social exclusion, and perpetuates the cycle of poverty and marginalization.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that prioritizes integration and inclusion. In education, this might involve policy interventions such as redistricting, inclusive curriculum development, and community outreach programs to foster trust and collaboration between Roma and non-Roma families. In housing, governments and local authorities need to commit to equitable land allocation and the development of mixed housing projects in central areas, coupled with measures to combat discriminatory attitudes and practices. Without deliberate and sustained efforts, the cycle of segregation will continue to limit opportunities and deepen disparities for Roma communities.

DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination remains a persistent and recurring issue that manifests across multiple areas of daily life, posing a significant barrier to equality and integration for Roma communities. This problem is highlighted predominantly by Roma respondents, who consistently report experiences of unequal treatment and exclusion. In contrast, municipal authorities and representatives often appear either unaware of the extent of this issue or tend to downplay its significance, suggesting a troubling disconnect between institutional perceptions and the lived realities of the Roma population.

The Roma point to frequent instances of discrimination in their interactions with public services, where they often face unequal treatment and systemic bias. Labor offices, for instance, are cited as places where Roma applicants may encounter prejudiced attitudes, delays, or dismissive treatment when seeking employment assistance. Similarly, healthcare facilities are reported as environments where Roma patients sometimes experience substandard care, lack of empathy, or even outright refusal of service compared to non-Roma individuals. Such discriminatory practices not only undermine trust in public institutions but also exacerbate the social and economic marginalization of Roma communities.

The issue extends beyond public services to include discrimination in private spaces such as restaurants, pubs, and shops. A particularly egregious example is the presence of reserved areas in some pubs, where Roma guests are segregated from non-Roma customers. This blatant form of discrimination, while illegal, often goes unaddressed due to insufficient enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and societal indifference. Such practices reinforce feelings of exclusion and perpetuate harmful stereotypes about the Roma, further entrenching social divides.

Despite the illegality of such acts, the systemic nature of discrimination and the lack of proactive measures to address it create an environment where unequal treatment persists. This gap highlights the need for a more robust and comprehensive response from authorities. Efforts to combat discrimination must include raising awareness among public officials and service providers, implementing sensitivity training, and strengthening the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws. In addition, creating accessible reporting mechanisms for discrimination incidents and ensuring that complaints are addressed promptly and effectively can help build trust and accountability.

Addressing the deep-rooted issue of discrimination also requires a societal shift in attitudes toward the Roma population. Public education campaigns that challenge stereotypes and promote understanding and respect are critical to fostering an inclusive environment. Without a concerted effort from both institutions and society at large, the cycle of discrimination will continue to perpetuate inequality and hinder the full participation of Roma communities in social, economic, and civic life.

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