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Roma Situation: Roma at the Cross-Road of Education and Labour Market

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Research summary

The research aimed at disclosing the factors of Roma adaptation and integration into Lithuanian society and revealing factors of successive socialisation of young Roma (up to 29 years old). For these purposes, the socio-demographic characteristics of Roma were identified, issues of Roma children education and related matters analysed, and processes of Roma integration into Lithuanian society assessed.

The research covered the following research methods: analysis of secondary sources, collection and analysis of statistical data on Roma children at secondary schools of Lithuania, Roma survey with a sample of 231 persons and qualitative interviews with over 50 experts. The research covered different geographical sites of Lithuania. The data was collected in November – December 2008.

The report presents research results according to the main research questions and structural parts of the questionnaire. At first the socio-demographic characteristics of Roma, issues of housing and territorial mobility, Roma education, experiences in the labour market and relations with various institutions are presented. In a separate section, data on Roma children involvement into education system, main problems are discussed. Data of quantitative Roma survey and qualitative interviews with experts are presented in an integrated manner, following the matters and problems approached.

Although the most elaborated information source on the whole Roma community is available from the 2001 Census, and statistical data on current Roma population is absent, presumably the information collected represents the current situation of Lithuanian Roma community. This statement is grounded on the demographic distributions that correspond to the data of both the Census and previous surveys (e.g. 2007). The information collected could be treated as a

micro-census, according to which children under 15 years old comprise 46 per cent of Roma community; women share is higher than men (59 and 41, accordingly), this might be related to emigration and employment in foreign countries.

The project implemented in 2008, includes the biggest Lithuanian Roma survey with a sample of 231 respondents. If to sum up the sample and the number of children regarding whom the information provided, in total the research reached 621 Lithuanian Roma. On the basis of the results of Roma situation research, that covered analysis of statistical data of Roma children at secondary schools of Lithuania, Roma survey and interview with experts, the main generalisations and conclusions are presented below.

LIVING CONDITIONS AND POVERTY MIGRATION

Emigrational experience of Lithuanian population of the current decade influenced Roma community. The information and data collected indicate that a significant part of Roma have moved to foreign countries, however, Roma from neighbouring countries, such as Kaliningrad area, Russian, come to Lithuania and migration within Lithuania takes place. Roma surveyed have experience of both short and long term emigration, including employment abroad. Average foreign residence is around 6 years. Over half (52 per cent) of Roma surveyed indicate that their both family members and friends moved abroad and majority is employed. However, Roma migration does not overcome the problems of social exclusion: along with emigration, **the research indicated poverty migration within the country**, when Roma gradually move to cheaper housing because of too high expenditures. This processes indicates a deepening social marginalisation of Roma that has started during the economic growth of country. In this way, part of Roma community is set away from centres and opportunities of social development (urban) both geographically and socially.

In general, Lithuanian Roma live sedentary life. Over half of Roma surveyed (52 per cent) indicate that they have been living over 20 years in current city, town or village. Over one fourth of respondents live in the site for 11–20 years. According to the research data, an average Roma household consist of 6–7 persons. Nearly half of Roma surveyed (49 per cent) have 1–3 children, a quarter (24 per cent) – 4 children and similar part (25 per cent) – 5 or more children. Over one third of Roma questioned (38 per cent) live in their own housing or property of their family members. The other big group (31 per cent) is comprised of Roma who live in municipal housing (rent their housing from the municipalities).

EMPLOYMENT

While answering a question regarding their employment position and sources of incomes and payments, majority of Roma surveyed (57 per cent) indicate that they are unemployed. 41 per cent are currently employed or involved in activities that generate income. These are mainly informal individual activities (such as collection of scrap metal, fortune-telling or carrying on traffic). Only 9 per cent of Roma surveyed are employed under the labour contracts, 6 per cent indicate work without a contract. Data indicate that Roma participate in successive and available labour market sectors such as construction (e.g. 9 per cent indicated their last incomes from the construction works).

Social benefits comprise the main source of income for more than one third of Roma surveyed; also, parental support is a significant source of means of subsistence.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION TO SOCIAL SUPPORT

Responses to the question regarding Roma relations with different institutions confirm results from previous research of the Centre of Ethnic Studies that revealed limited social networks of Roma and their disposition to self-dependant solution of problems faced, partly narrowing to the networks within the community rather than applying various institutions.

Most often Roma consult with health care institutions, educational establishments and institutions of social support. Weak relations with schools maintain that at the moment (at least yet) school has not become an institution that encourages social integration. It is worth mentioning that **28 per cent of Roma with school children indicated that during the last 12 month they did not approach or had no contacts at the school.** Over half of Roma surveyed (52 per cent), within the last year had no contacts with a social worker. Mainly women of different age, the majority of whom are unemployed, approach social workers. Relatively more often Roma women living in Vilnius County have contacts with social workers. According to the survey data, younger and illiterate or poorly educated Roma are among those who drive without driving licence. Acquisition of driving licence is an illustrative example how weak education and illiteracy put Roma at a disadvantage regarding formalisation of social skills and their exercise for social integration.

EDUCATION

During the last decade, the average Roma education has increased, however, most Roma do not acquire basic education. While generalising statistical data of 2000–2008 on Roma children at secondary schools of Lithuania, it is possible to state that although the majority of Roma students concentrates at the primary education level (1st–4th grades), this part has decreased and comprises a half (52 per cent). In comparison to previous years, a part of Roma at 5th–7th grades has relatively increased, however, still the majority of Roma schoolchildren acquire only primary education and overcome only few steps of the basic education. Basic and secondary education remains a challenge regarding Roma education. One fifth of Roma surveyed did not attend secondary school and finished any grade. One fourth of Roma surveyed attended only primary school and finished 1st–4th grades. Over one third of Roma surveyed attended secondary school, however, finished not more than 8 grades, i.e., did not overcome basic education stage. Only 17 per cent of Roma surveyed finished 9 or more grades of secondary education.

However, **a distinct part of young Roma surveyed** (32 per cent of those below 18 years old) **started school at the age of 10 or later.** This part is relatively big in comparison with older generations of Roma. Therefore, the timely inclusion into the school system and problems of continuance are relevant to the youngest Roma generation, which is of the school age. While estimating the age of school start and finish, it is possible to conclude that **on average, the Roma surveyed attended school for 6–7 years and finished 5 grades.**

Over one half (56 per cent) of Roma surveyed did not acquire higher education than their parents: in these terms, **community's social development makes no progress.** While analysing the data collected, a negative dependence between school start and grades finished is observed: the later the school start, the less number of grades finished.

CHILDREN EDUCATION

While comparing school start of Roma surveyed and their children, it is obvious that a far more significant part of children start attending school timely: at the age of 6-7 years, 54 per cent of Roma surveyed and 77 per cent of their children started attending school.

A certain "model" of the way how Roma families make decisions on children's age of school start: in most families all children start school at the same age (including the cases, when all children start school at the age of 10 years old) – this share of families comprises over half. Data of this and other research indicate that a main turning-point that influence Roma decision on further education, school attendance takes place at the 6th–8th grades or at the age around 16 (the age of compulsory education). Only a minor part of Roma surveyed reaches the grade equivalent to their age. Most are simply deleted from the students' list because of poor attendance.

However, during the expert interviews, the respondents mentioned that parents of present school children tend to inquire on educational opportunities of their elder children.

According to the opinion of experts, the main reasons that influence Roma' learning difficulties are related to the lack of social skills, linguistic barriers and poor school attendance.

Majority of Roma children (69 per cent) did not attend either pre-school establishments (kindergartens), or pre-school groups; participation in after school activities is uncommon among Roma – it is more complicated to acquire social skills that would contribute to adaptation at school.

In general, Roma children are multi-lingual; however, their language skills differ a lot. Therefore, special attention should be paid to assist the primary school children with poor competences of language of instruction. Most teachers interviewed maintained that Roma school attendance is closely related to learning results: if Roma children attend school, their attainments do not deviate from the average. The majority of Roma learn under the programmes of special needs. However, despite the programmes applied, they do not have significant influence for school graduation or increase of grades finished – only few Roma finish secondary schools.

Schools have neither specific plans, nor position regarding solution of problems related to poor attendance. The majority maintain that they have tested all possible ways such as informal speaking to parents or visits with police; however, it has not improved the situation.

According to the opinions of experts interviewed, it is possible to conclude that **the most effective factors regarding solution of Roma problems at school and further social integration are related to cooperation between several institutions and individual relations to Roma parents.** Still, at few schools visited, experts maintained that they face irresponsible attitude of different institutions and lack of cooperation between the institutions, e.g., if a school provides with information (e.g. on poor attendance) or responds to a letter (e.g. inquire on characteristics), the institutions do not inform on their activities taken or institutions approached in order to solve the problem.

Evidence collected for this research suggests that while there is some reluctance amongst school representatives and teachers to recognise the Roma as a distinct group with specific needs, Roma pupils have to receive improved teacher assistance, combined with other possible extra means of social or other kinds of support, while emphasising on individual needs of a student assessment rather than on treatment of Roma as a group. Still, the challenge for the

education system is to provide training and support to those teachers who take on extra work with such pupils. Both this research and previous studies provide with the grounds that acknowledging and working with the specific social and educational needs of the Roma will strengthen their position in mainstream education.

While responding to a question regarding possible support for their children at school, the Roma surveyed mentioned problems related with financial familial status most often (e.g. training aids, clothing, etc.). A significant part of Roma surveyed indicated other needs such as educational assistance, including extra lessons, homework, etc.; social support in coping with various difficulties related to emotional support, social relations at school (including conflicts among children, documentation, etc.). Also, some parents pay attention to the distinction of Roma children at school and maintain that equal treatment of Roma by different school community members (students, teachers, parents) could prevent this. While considering children's schooling, the Roma surveyed assess children's friendship with non-Roma students, free meals and children's will to go to school most positively. Most parents surveyed maintain that teachers help their children at school. A far smaller part mentions assistance of a social pedagogue.

The data of 2007 survey of Roma of employment age carried out by the Centre of Ethnic Studies and data of 2008 Roma survey indicate that in similar parts respondents are for the usage of Gypsy name and for excluding ethnicity from personal documents (14–16 per cent). However, a share that is for the Roma name has increased significantly (from 20 per cent in 2007, to 49 per cent in 2008) and a share maintain that the name does not matter has decreased (from 57 to 19 per cent, accordingly). Also, the research data propose that Roma do not share unanimous opinion and their attitudes tend to change. Worth mentioning that during the expert interview, the respondents mention a relatively new phenomena observed – replacement of child's ethnicity from Roma to some other (especially in cases of mixed families) or unmentioned ethnicity in the documents. This phenomenon indicates that **Roma treat their ethnicity as a** factor that impedes their opportunities to implement their objectives.