

Summary of the report on the impact of Bridge to Business programme on participating Roma youth in Hungary





Bridge to Business is performed within *"Bridging Young Roma and Business - Intervention for inclusion of Roma youth through employment in the private sector in Bulgaria and Hungary"* project that has been supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation ("EaSI") 2014-2020.

Goal: The overall aim of the project is to highlight an approach that contributes to the emergence and strengthening of Roma middle-class, consisting of Roma with at least secondary education, working in mainstream environment in quality positions. The project is applying rigorous quantitative and qualitative measurements to evaluate the effect of the interventions. The final outcome of the project will be policy conclusions and recommendations for state employment services to adapt to the needs of that special target group of relatively educated Roma employees as well as providing similar policy advice to future employers on internal procedures and services needed for a similar Roma employment initiative.

Project Duration: 3 years (1/10/2016-30/09/2019)

Implemented by: Open Society Institute Foundation – Sofia (Bulgaria) in cooperation with Autonomia Foundation (Hungary) and Central European University (Hungary)



This publication has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014-2020). For further information please consult: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>

The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT ON THE IMPACT OF BRIDGE TO BUSINESS PROGRAMME ON PARTICIPATING ROMA YOUTH IN HUNGARY

Authors: Vera Messing and Zsuzsanna Árendás

The report gives account of the key findings of the impact study of the Bridge to Business programme (BtB) and its implementation in Hungary.¹ The main objective of the project was to facilitate access by highly educated Roma (with upper secondary and university degrees) to *quality, white-collar jobs* in the private sector. Activities in the programme aimed to prepare potential Roma employees to successfully apply for and enter jobs in the corporate sector. The programme delivered an intensive training to Roma youth, provided direct links to corporate firms partnering with the project and offered mentoring to participants guiding them throughout the lengthy process of job search and application.

The project included a research investigating the impact of the programme on the beneficiaries: Roma youth and partner companies. The investigation has considered how labour market status has changed from before to after participating in the program. It also discussed the most important factors that the programme addressed and hoped to make an impact on: job search skills, skills relevant during the job-selection process, adaptation to and inclusion at a new job, career expectations and personal networks. The impact study applied a multi-method approach and included a survey of participants, of a control group (including of Roma of similar age and education as the participant group) as well as repeated interviews with participants.

The programme that was implemented by Autonomía Foundation in Hungary, has reached its initial goal to include 150 young Roma with upper secondary or tertiary qualification in its training. 267 individuals applied to the programme; applicants with a generally higher level of education, more favourable labour market position were more likely to participate in the training. The difference between the number of registered (267) and programme beneficiaries (150) can largely be explained by self-drop-out and grouped into 3 broader categories: (1) those who disappeared after applying to the program (they could not be reached at the phone or e-mail they provided) (2) those who found a job in the meantime, (3) those who had some personal obligations they could not leave for five days in a row (coursework, young children, other care duties, job obligations or close relatives who did not support the applicant spending five days away from home). There is some gender bias recorded in terms of the share of those applicants who became beneficiaries of the program (43% of women and 60% of man registered online took part in the training).

¹ The Bridge to Business "Bridging young Roma and business – Intervention for inclusion of Roma youth through employment in the private sector in Bulgaria and Hungary" (Ref. № VS/2016/0236) programme took place between October 2016 and September 2019 with the financial support of the EC DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. The project took place in Bulgaria and Hungary. It was coordinated by OSI Sofia. The implementing partner in Hungary was the Autonomía Foundation.

ABOUT THE TRAINING

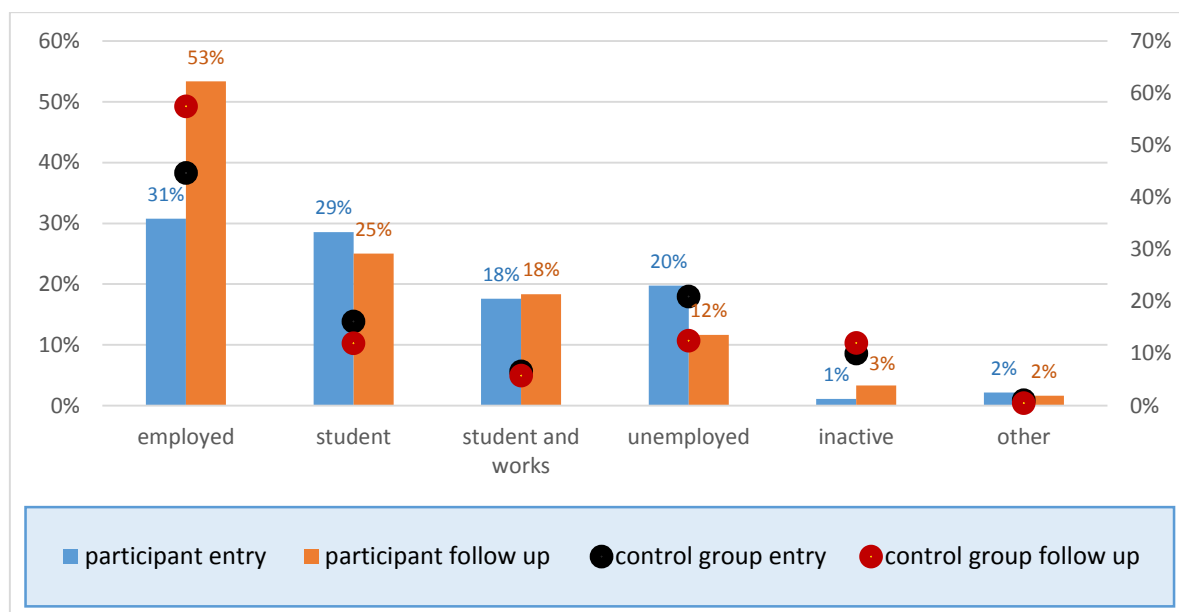
The core of the program was a 4.5 days long intensive training. Program participants were offered free accommodation, full board for the period of the training, and their travel expenses were reimbursed. Altogether 10 training sessions took place between March 2017 and May 2019, eight in Budapest and two were organized on the premises of Christian Roma Colleges in two rural towns. These latter training were also shorter (2.5 and one day long), which had a curriculum streamlined for university students with little or no labour market experience and no immediate need to find a job.

The core training included several modules addressing various soft skills relevant in job search: assertive communication; self-esteem; interview skills; self-assessment; realistic understanding of the labour market and realistic career expectations; CV writing. The training was very interactive, demanding full focus and cooperation from all participants. Its intensity simulated real world experiences and modelled the workload and working hours that an employee has to manage in the corporate sector job. The most important element were the **interview simulations** with professional HRs who gave immediate **feedback**, the **AC practices**, the development of **CVs** with HR professionals as well as an **HR dinner**, where participant could meet and talk directly with HR representatives of partner companies in an informal settings and an the **alumni dinner** during which former participants of the program who had been employed by partner companies since their participation in the training came and shared their experiences about the challenges of their job search and inclusion at the company. It is very important to emphasize that the entire training was conducted with the involvement of trainers and HR fellows presently working in the corporate sector. Participants have access to a range of additional trainings including English-language and IT skills, as well as mentoring and coaching throughout the job search process.

THE MAIN INDICATOR OF THE IMPACT STUDY: CHANGE IN THE LABOUR MARKET POSITION OF PARTICIPANTS

The main indicator of our study is the change of program participants' labour market situation in comparison to the control group. **The proportion of employed persons has significantly (from 31% to 53%) increased in the six months after participants entered the program**, while the share of unemployed has decreased. The labour market situation of the control group has also improved, but the improvement is much more salient among program participants (22% increase in the proportion of those employed) than in the control group (13% increase in the share of employed).

Chart 1: Labour market situation before and after participating in the B2B program



The composite indicator of labour market position change (including aspects such as return to tertiary education and change in income in addition to the change in labour market situation) shows an even greater improvement: although in both the participant and control groups the labour market position has generally improved but compared to the control group – consisting of Roma respondents with highly similar socio-demographic characteristics – the improvement was significantly greater among program participants: **50% of beneficiaries have improved their labour market position and only 9% have deteriorated**, while these proportions are 26% and 12% for the control group, respectively. This suggests that in addition to the improvement due to the generally favourable labour market environment, the programme has positively influenced the LM position of those Roma youth who participated in it.

No significant gender bias was found in terms of participants' labour-market position change. This is good news given that most programmes targeting disadvantaged social groups tend to demonstrate a strong gender bias in terms of their impact.

An important measure of the labour market position change is how **income** developed for those in employment. While incomes of those who have changed jobs increased in both the participant and control groups the change in the participant groups has been significantly greater.

Only a quarter of participants who found a (new) job did so at a BtB partner company; the majority found a job through personal contacts or by applying to open job calls outside the circle of partner companies, which signals that the 4.5 days long training was successful in terms of preparing participants to search, apply to and go through job selection process. The success of the program lies less in direct placements at partner companies, but rather lies in enhancing essential skills (self-awareness, confidence and communication skills) that are crucial to a successful job-search and placement process.

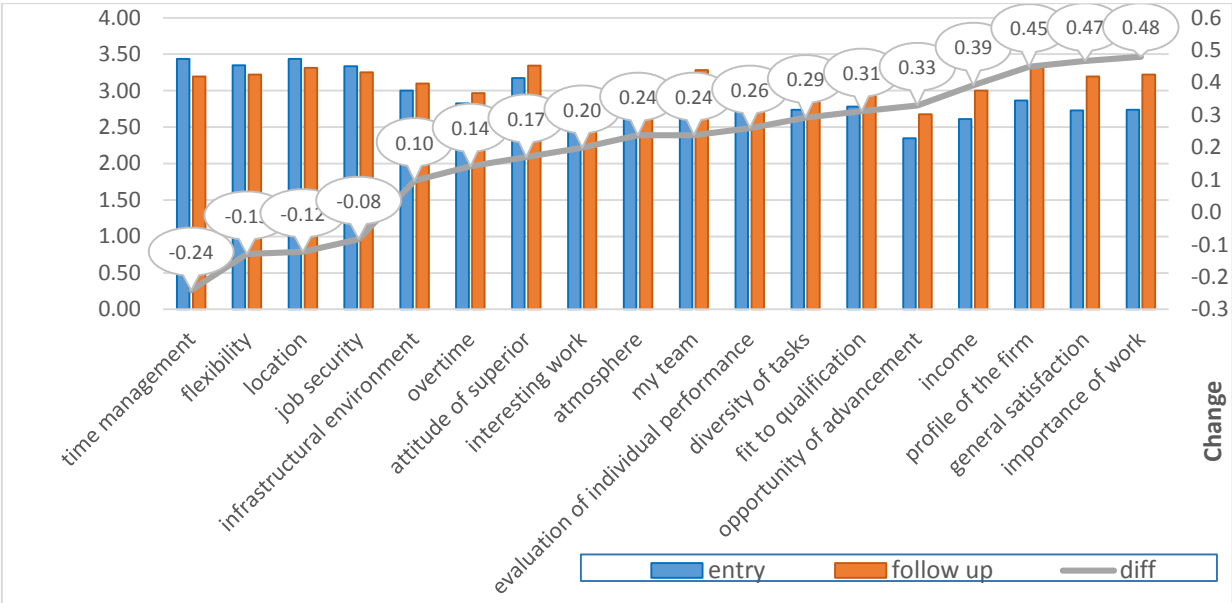
The **greatest barrier to taking a job at a partner company** were the mismatch between program participants’ residence and company locations (and the high cost of relocation and rentals that salaries offered to entrants would not cover) and a mismatch between educational backgrounds or career interests of Roma youth and the types of jobs available at the partner companies.

PROGRAMME IMPACT ON THE SKILLS, FUTURE EXPECTATIONS, PERSONAL NETWORK OF ITS PARTICIPANTS

There was almost no drop-out from the training: **only two out of 150 left the training** without prior arrangement with program coordinators. When looking into how the Bridge to Business programme affected its participants we found several important areas of impact.

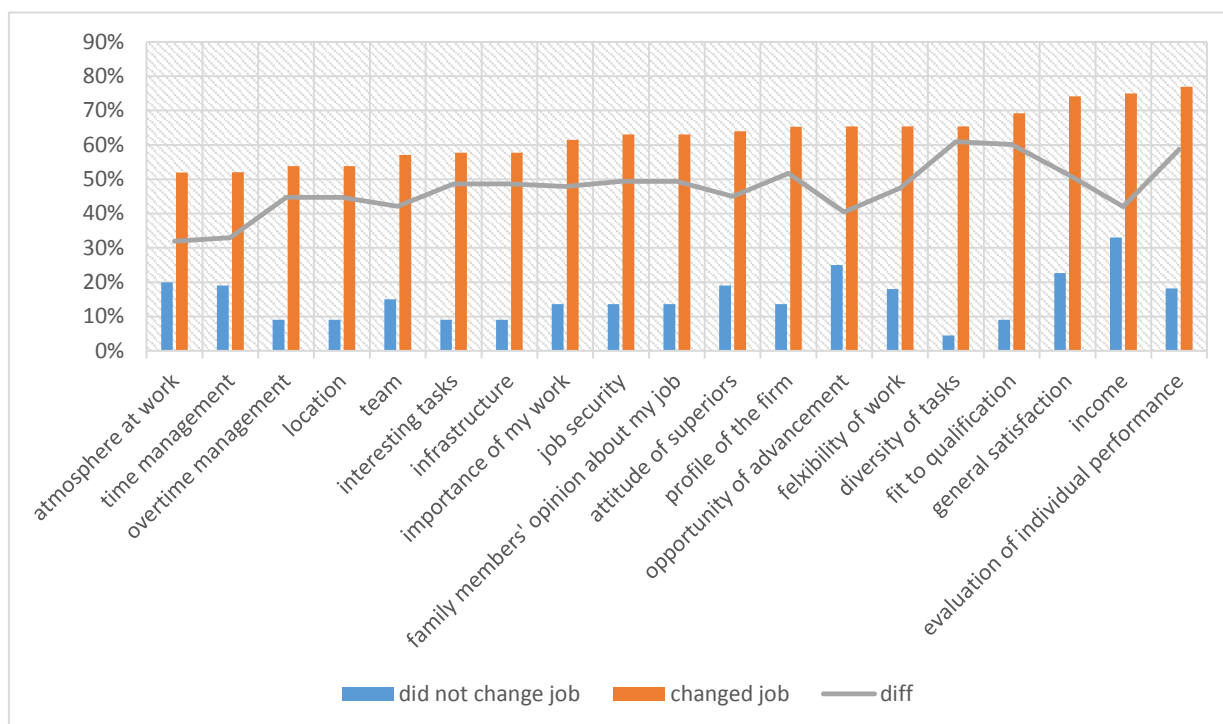
- Participants’ view of their own job-search and related skills became more realistic in the course of the training: they learnt about the difficulties and challenges associated with this activity and became more aware of the type of competences they had to work on.
- **Job satisfaction increased significantly** for those who took on a new job after the training. Those elements of job satisfaction increased most significantly with which they have previously been least satisfied with and which added the most to their professional career and well-being such as income, opportunity of advancement, importance of work, job fitting their qualification and the profile of the firm. With respect to the reportedly less crucial (comfort-related) elements – such as flexibility, time management, location and overtime - satisfaction increased just slightly or not at all. We may say that the program participation has brought about significant and important changes in term of the most important elements of career and job satisfaction.

Chart 2. Change in job satisfaction for those who have a job
(mean value of participants’ answers to the entry and follow-up surveys)
(1 = not at all important, 4 = very important)



- In all aspects of job satisfaction, the vast majority – 52% to 77% - of those who found a new job after the training experienced improvement. Income, the job's fit to qualification, evaluation of individual performance and general satisfaction with the job are the factors where most program participants who changed jobs following the training experienced improvement. (Chart 3)

Chart 3. Change in job satisfaction (% of those who mentioned positive change)



- As most of the candidates with tertiary education had degrees (a third of the participants and many were still studying) and work experience in social work, social care, teaching profession and the area of humanities, a typical profile of highly qualified Roma, one important challenges of the BtB program was to support Roma youth's ambition **to change career paths** to the corporate sector and develop skills relevant for such change. Job trajectories, which include a wide range of success and failure stories, are described in detail in the report.
- **Participants' future expectations** changed in a very interesting way: evidently, the share of those who foresaw their future in employment is dominant and has increased from 63% to 78%. The interesting outcome is that the share of those who foresaw their future in a foreign country has been after participating in the programme. We do not want to draw far-reaching conclusions from such a small sample, but because such a change did not occur in the control group, we suspect that this **decrease in interest in labour migration** might be due to the program showing Roma youth that aiming for jobs offering decent incomes and career paths is realistic and that a meaningful future in Hungary is possible.
- Concerning **personal networks**, if the programme brought about any change, they were not – as we expected – in the width of the personal networks, but in their ethnic composition. Participants changed their personal networks from more intra-ethnic to more open, inter-ethnic ones within just six months, including for informal activities that are not directly connected to employment or a job.

PARTICIPANTS' SATISFACTION WITH THE PROGRAMME

Participants were very satisfied with the programme in general, as well as with the individual components of the training. They most frequently mentioned that it:

- enhanced their self-esteem;
- made them understand and more realistically assess the labour market in the business sector;
- helped them to formulate realistic career plans and expectations;
- produced a professional CV that could be used for applications;
- prepared them for job interviews and AC tests through a lot of practicing;
- provided contacts with representatives of corporate firms (HR fellows)
- supported their search for job opportunities and navigation on job-search portals;
- strengthened their personal networks.

Participants felt that the program provided considerable support in developing skills necessary for searching a job and successfully participate in the selection process: over 90% of participants mentioned that the training prepared them for job interviews, developed their communication skills, and enhanced their self-awareness and self-confidence.

However, several participants felt that they received insufficient support in placement at partner companies and in building functioning connections to the business sphere. Survey responses as well as interviews revealed that while the programme made an extremely good job in preparing its participants to search for a job, go through the selection process and perform well on a job interview, it was unable to efficiently support the job placement of Roma youth at partner companies. Only 14 participants found a job at one of the partner companies, which is significantly less than expected. Still, most participants found a job beyond the set of partner companies, which means that the training part was efficient: they became able to apply for a job and successfully go through the selection process without the direct involvement of the program implementers.

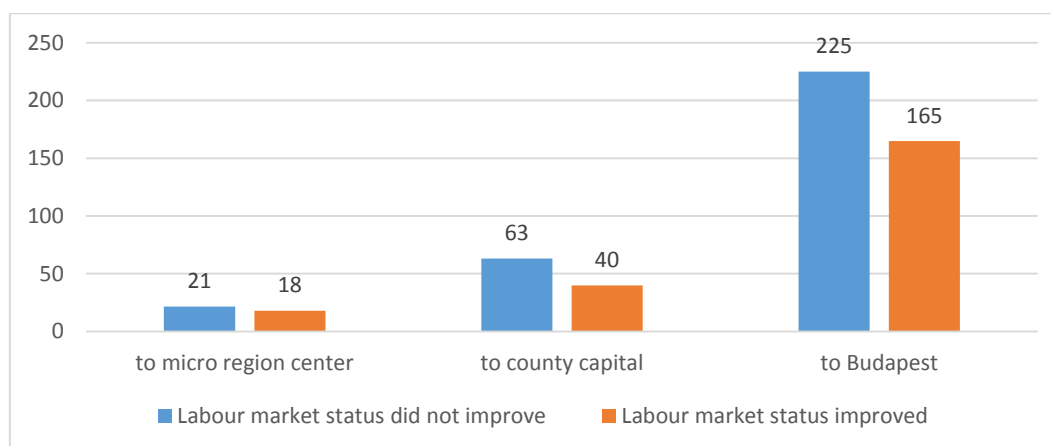
STRUCTURAL FACTORS INFLUENCING SUCCESSFUL PARTICIPATION

When checking structural factors that may have influenced the success of the programme, we found some interesting correlations. The higher educational qualification one had, the more likely s/he profited from the program. A less evident relationship relates to experiences of ethnic segregation in primary education: **those who attended a segregated school or class benefited more from the program than those who attended school in an ethnically mixed environment** (53% vs 40% improved labour market position). This is unexpected, but the analysis reveals that it is exactly those, who attended segregated schooling suffered the most from the lack of self-confidence and self-respect. Experiences of discrimination in childhood bum deeply into the personality and may then resurface in competitive situations as low self-confidence. One important goal of the BtB training was exactly to reinforce self-esteem and self-confidence and enable them to recognize and articulate the skills and advantages they might have with regard to a certain firm or job.

Checking for other background factors concerning compulsory schooling experiences, such as the quality of the school or teachers' competences, we found that generally, **a short-term programme, such as BtB is not able to compensate for systemic shortcomings of education**. In the same time, the role of **the immediate family in reaching secondary school diploma is essential**: 88% mentioned that their parents or older sibling convinced them to continue studying in upper secondary school, while 50% mentioned that they were supported by their teachers at school. The role of scholarships seems to be very important, too: 71% of program participants benefited from one or more scholarship schemes during their secondary or tertiary education.

Geographic location is a very significant structural factor influencing the impact of participating in the programme. Those young Roma who live in smaller, distant settlements of rural Hungary are less likely to benefit from the programme in terms of changing their labour market status for the better, and this is even more the case for those who cannot move away from the region where they live. When examining how far participants lived from the centre of the micro-region, from the county seat and from Budapest we found a stunning labour market disadvantage for those young Roma who lived in rural Hungary: living in a village involves a daily commute by public transport of almost two hours to the centre of the micro-region, where most public services and educational institutions are present, but it takes, on average of over 3 hours to travel the nearest county capital by public transport, where most private sectors jobs are. Checking the impact of the program we see again very big differences based on the distance from geographical centres:

Chart 4. Programme impact depending on the average time needed to reach geographic centres by public transport (travel time in minutes)



The chart is very explicit about the barriers of BtB program in terms of where it can best impact the labour market position of its participants: the closer participants live to a county seat and/or to Budapest (where most private sector jobs are concentrated) the better chance there is that the programmes will be able to improve labour market position of its participants.

The complete report, with further chart and tables can be accessed at:
<https://cps.ceu.edu/research/bridge-to-business>.