



Civil society monitoring report
on implementation of the national Roma
integration strategies
in Latvia

Focusing on structural and horizontal
preconditions
for successful implementation of the strategy

Prepared by:
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CoE	Council of Europe
CSB	Central Statistical Bureau
EEA	European Economic Area
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCMA	The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs
SEA	State Employment Agency

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, at the political level no significant changes in regards to the representation of the Roma interests have taken place. The standard of living and integration of the Roma has somewhat improved; however, faster and more purposeful solution of the existing problems is being significantly slowed down by the lack of horizontal cooperation within ministries and government institutions. Barriers for the Roma integration in the labour market over the past few years have not decreased, which is the result of the lack of awareness about the impact of positive discrimination on the development of the community and the economic growth of the territory. The activity and willingness to participate in the activities implemented within state and EU programmes and projects is low.

Governance and overall policy framework

The Ministry of Culture is the responsible authority for the coordination of the national Roma integration policy planning and implementation, yet several line ministries have not been granted particular responsibilities in working with the Roma community. There are no purposeful programmes for the Roma as the direct target group; the existing EU and state programmes are directed to a wider target group, including the Roma, and the goal of such programmes is the inclusion of social risk groups and the elimination of discrimination. Positive is the tendency of the recent years in terms of the availability of state financial sources for the Roma civil society organizations.

Anti-discrimination

No cases of direct discrimination have been observed, however, the Roma mediators regularly report instances of indirect discrimination on daily basis – unequal attitude against the Roma based on stereotypes and prejudices. So far, no specific researches or reports have been developed or carried out that could provide information on the ethnic profile of the execution of police and judicial functions and the related difference in attitudes or decisions taken. Overall, the Roma people live in houses in critical conditions, the level of comfort and household amenities is critical and with limited access to clean water.

Addressing antigypsyism

The Latvian state officially recognizes the historical fact of the genocide against the Roma during the Second World War and since 2015 the International Roma Day is being marked. In recent years, society's general knowledge on the history and culture of the Roma has been enhanced. Nevertheless, insufficient measures have been taken to eliminate the spread of hate speech against the Roma.

INTRODUCTION

On 1 January 2017, 7,456 Roma people have been registered in Latvia of whom 94.4 per cent are citizens of Latvia. In 2016, according to the data provided by Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (CSB) 5,297 Roma people permanently lived in Latvia which is less than in 2015 (5,388 people). In the last years a considerable part of the Roma population has emigrated to foreign countries for economic reasons.

The topical tasks and activities in Roma integration policies are outlined in the *Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy (2012-2018)*. The Action Plan in the Guidelines includes series of policy tasks and activities for the integration of Roma community in the Latvian society. Part of those tasks and activities are applied particularly to the Roma target group (targeted approach), but there is also general type of activities (mainstreaming approach) in order to raise the level of tolerance in the society, to improve the protection of rights and interests of the minorities, including Roma people, civic participation, to ensure the support to the development of culture and maintenance of the identity.

The report is prepared on the basis of the analysis of the current situation, widely consulting with the representatives of the civil society, collecting variety of opinions and describing both issues and the good practices. Evidence of data and facts were collected and analysed using the following methods: interviews with the officials (politicians, officers) responsible for the implementation of the Roma integration policy and representatives of civil society (Roma and non-Roma NGOs) and Roma mediators; focus group discussion with the implementers of state integration programmes; critical analysis of the existing political documents, research, statistics, reports and other documents; specific surveys for different groups at different levels (national, municipal, institutional).

GOVERNANCE AND OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK

Representing the interests of Roma in the parliament

In theory, the Roma living in Latvia can use their voting rights to the full extent by participating in both parliament and local elections and referendums organized by state. Nevertheless, numerous practical obstacles exist in the implementation of the Roma voting rights, as for instance, absence of documents (passport), absence of citizenship (foreign passport), unavailability of the actual information (declared residence does not coincide with factual residence).

At the level of legislative power Roma integration and anti-discrimination issues have been included in mandates of three *Saeima* (Parliament of Latvia) Committees: the Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee, the Citizenship, Migration and Social Cohesion Committee, and the Legal Affairs Committee.

In the last years, no legislative proposal related to the Roma context have been discussed in the above-mentioned committees. The government informs them about the course of the Roma integration policy, achieved results and the good practices;¹ moreover they organise hearings with Roma NGOs.² In their daily agenda, the members of the parliament do not speak about the Roma issues and during the *Saeima* (since 1991) has never established any working group to consider Roma-related issues.

At the political level no significant changes in regards to the representation of the Roma interests have taken place: there are no Roma members in the parliament, and, political parties with clear antiqypsyist programmes do not exist.

Mainstreaming Roma inclusion across ministries and other national level public authorities

Because of the small Roma population in the country, Latvia has not developed a special Roma inclusion strategy, but rather a set of policy measures aimed at Roma integration,³ which are part of a wider policy document, "Guidelines for National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy for 2012-2018"⁴ and its action plans. The currently action plan for 2017-2018 includes within its goals aimed at social inclusion and fight against the discrimination a special sub-goal concerning the Roma inclusion.⁵ This sub-goal includes five tasks:

- 1) Increase the level of education of the Roma children, ensuring appropriate learning support programmes; as well as encourage the participation in the education

¹ For example, the report of implementation of Latvian Roma integration measures, 2016; available at: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/KM_050417_romi.pdf

² For example: <http://titania.saeima.lv/livs/saeimasnotikumi.nsf/0/3A5129688A4FE8D2C22581240044F2B7?OpenDocument&srcv=dt>; (24 May 2017)

<http://titania.saeima.lv/livs/saeimasnotikumi.nsf/0/4689BA6714872C4DC22580EB0036779E?OpenDocument&srcv=dt>. (29 March 2017)

³ Roma integration policy measures in Latvia; available at: [https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/Dokumenti/Pasakumu_kopums_Romi\(2012-2018\).pdf](https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/Dokumenti/Pasakumu_kopums_Romi(2012-2018).pdf)

⁴ https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/KM_130515_Prec_Nac_ident_pilson_sab_un_itegr_polit_pamatnost_2012-2018.pdf

⁵ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291179?&search=on>

processes of the representatives of the Roma community over the age of compulsory education.

- 2) Support cooperation projects for the Roma integration, participation and for the development of civil society; ensure the operation of network of regional experts on Roma integration, in order to promote regular exchange of information and experience among the local authorities experts on Roma integration;
- 3) Information and education activities for the Roma NGOs and activists in various cities of Latvia on the Roma social inclusion;
- 4) Support activities of the Council of Europe campaign *Dosta!* for the Roma;
- 5) Implement the monitoring of the Roma integration policy activities.

The responsible ministries and governmental institutions have the power to participate in the integration policy planning and programme development processes, as well as to set goals corresponding to their area of responsibility, to plan and implement specific activities and services, for which they can receive budget allocations. For example, the Ministry of Welfare in regard to the Roma community primarily has set forth the goal to reduce unemployment and improve employment.

However, not all sectoral ministries submit their proposals, and therefore do not receive funding for specific support measures. This has a negative consequence that initiatives implemented within the framework of projects of the non-governmental sector and local authorities frequently are not being continued at national level, even though the initiatives have presented high impact indicators and significant results have been achieved. As an example, one can mention the Roma teachers' assistants, who worked in educational institutions within the framework of NGO projects. The Ministry of Education and Science evaluated their work as effective, and planned to include their remuneration in the ministry's budget.⁶ However, in 10 years they have not yet done so, even though every year it is being stated publicly that such goal is still topical.

The Ministry of Culture is the authority responsible for the implementation and coordination of the national Roma integration policy. The Ministry of Culture also manages coordination of network of regional experts in Roma integration issues (13 municipalities), which has been established at the end of 2014, based on the EU's recommendations.⁷

Since 2012, within the Ministry of Culture, the *Advisory Council for Implementation of the Roma Integration Policy* operates. The Council includes public institutions and representatives of different NGOs. The responsibilities of the Council are to evaluate the reports and results of the implementation of the integration policy of the Roma, provide with consultations and suggestions, and improve the cooperation between the government and the Roma community. The head of the Council is the Minister for Culture. Nevertheless, representatives of NGOs taking part in the Council consider it an ineffective mechanism for cultivating political monitoring and civic participation.⁸ In the Council meetings, which take place twice a year, mainly information on project activities implemented by the public institutions and NGOs is being presented and no actual progress and impact is discussed on the results of the policy implementation on the Roma community and the society in general.

⁶ Examples of Good Practice in the Field of Protection and Promotion of Human Rights available at: https://www.coe.int/t/commissioner/Activities/GoodPractices/Latvia_RomaEducation.pdf

⁷ Recommendation "Effective Roma integration measures in the Member States" (9 December 2013) and the included recommendation to Latvia on structural priorities and coordination in the report of the European Commission "EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies" (2 April 2016).

⁸ From an interview with experts of NGO, January 2018.

The ministries and government institutions that implement support activities and projects for the Roma community have not organized events for strengthening tolerance, cultural diversity and solidarity among their personnel, except for the publicly announced invitations to participate in informatively educational affairs implemented within the framework of the projects of the Ministry of Culture, for example, public discussions, Roma Holocaust Remembrance Day, Roma Museum visits, etc.

In the area of the promotion of the Roma participation, the main objective of the actions of ministries and government institutions is to improve the cooperation with the Roma community. However, the cooperation takes place mainly in two forms:

- Participation of the representatives of Roma NGOs in the Advisory Councils;
- Participation of the Roma people in the public institutions implemented projects co-financed by the EU funds (remunerated labour responsibilities), for example, in the project "Latvia Roma Platform II: Dialogue, Participation and Mutual Learning" administered by the Ministry of Culture".⁹

Employees of the ministries admit that the cooperation with the Roma is not always meaningful and frequently the involvement of the Roma people is formal.¹⁰ Also, the Roma themselves often are inactive and do not participate in the Council meetings or activities of the working groups over a long-term. The Roma people explain this aspect as feeling unsecured about whether "what I have said will be accepted" or "I do not have the financial resources for the travelling or other expenses for physically reaching the meetings and working groups",¹¹ since they take place in Riga, but the Roma live scattered around different regions of Latvia (travel costs are not refunded to attend the meetings).

In 2016, the Ministry of Culture signed a contract with the European Commission on the implementation of the project *Latvian Roma Platform I: dialogue, cooperation and involvement*,¹² with the aim to establish a Latvian national Roma platform in order to bring together the involved parties.¹³ Within the framework of the Latvian Roma Platform, Roma participation is being promoted quite intensively (dissemination of information, organization of events, etc.), however, there are certain barriers that limit the civil participation, such as:

- low number of active Roma people willing to participate in activities in order to defend their interests; Roma youth is especially inactive;
- low number of Roma organizations – the majority do not execute any practical actions; irregular activities are being implemented by 3-4 Roma NGOs in the whole country;¹⁴
- scarcity of formation of new youth interest groups and new Roma NGOs, because of lack of financial resources for implementing main activities.

⁹ The project information available at: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/integracija-un-sabiedriba/romi/projekti-un-pasakumi/latvijas-romu-platforma-ii>

¹⁰ From an interview with a ministry's employee; January 2018.

¹¹ From an interview with a head of Roma NGO; January 2018.

¹² The project information available at: <https://www.km.gov.lv/en/integration-and-society/roma/projects/latvian-roma-platform>

¹³ Summary of the project available at: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/ENG/LatvianRomaPlatform_2016-vf.pdf

¹⁴ Roma NGO web-pages: <http://romucentrsen.weebly.com/>; <http://alternativas.mozello.lv/home/>; <http://sip.jelgava.lv/lv/nvo/mazakumtautibu-nvo-cigani/>

Roma organizations mainly operate with issues of conservation of cultural heritage, for example, the maintenance of the Roma History Museum,¹⁵ and organizing events, for example, organizing a concert or summer camp for Roma. Yet, it has been observed, that there are no efforts in representing the internal diversity of Roma in the larger society, like, for example, gender.

Regardless of that, as admitted by the leader of the largest Roma NGO, there are several significant barriers for the Roma integration, such as the society's indifference and rather tense attitude towards Roma, as well as the distrust of the Roma towards government and municipal institutions.¹⁶

Mainstreaming Roma inclusion across local authorities

In Latvia there are 119 municipalities – 110 local governments and 9 republican cities. The functioning of the municipalities is determined by the law on municipalities,¹⁷ where Article 15 stipulates several autonomous functions such as: to organize the public utility services to the inhabitants, to take care of their education, to ensure availability of health care, to ensure social aid, to provide support to resolving housing issues, to implement children's rights protection in the respective administrative territory, etc.

Municipalities with higher number of Roma inhabitants frequently set specific goals and tasks and elaborate them in their development programmes/strategies; for example, Rūjiņa municipality in the investment plan of their *Development programme for 2012-2018* have included a task *Formation of the system of support in working with Roma children, involvement in education process* (section 1.9.7.3).¹⁸ Still, such practice is not widely spread among municipalities, regardless of the fact that the Roma community in Latvia lives scattered in numerous regions.

Some municipalities that have founded specific integration institutions, like society integration administrations, need to develop integration plans for the integration of the minorities (including Roma) living in the respective territory. One of the most proactive institutions from such municipality institutions in the country is Jelgava City Council Society Integration Department.¹⁹ The responsibilities of the institution include every-day work with minority NGOs, including organizing different activities and coordinating voluntary work.²⁰ The operation of such institutions is being financed from the budget of the respective municipality.

Even though there are 150 minority groups living in Latvia, many municipalities do not provide special support activities in the area of integration, including to the Roma, under the pretext of the lack of financial resources and capacity, as well as using phrase "all human beings are equal to us". Such actions can be also explained by the lack of understanding about the impact of positive discrimination on the development of the community and the economic growth of the territory.

Nevertheless, it has to be pointed out that municipalities, where Roma families live, willingly participate in different projects implemented by NGOs and public institutions. Such active participation improves the progress of the processes and the implementation of new initiatives, like, the work of Roma mediators in municipalities.

¹⁵ Web-page of the Roma History Museum: <http://www.romucentrs.lv/muzejs.html>

¹⁶ From an interview with N.Rudevics, January 2018.

¹⁷ Available at: <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=57255>

¹⁸ Available at: <http://www.rujiņa.lv/files/raksti/planosana/ap2012-2018/ap-4-parskats.pdf>

¹⁹ More details at: <http://sip.jelgava.lv/lv/about-us/>

²⁰ Web-page of the Jelgavas City Council Society Integration Department: <http://sip.jelgava.lv/lv/>

In 2017, five Roma mediators worked in four regions out of five.²¹ The initiative of Roma mediators was initiated by an NGO "Centre for Education Initiatives",²² but in 2017 the operation of the Roma mediators was ensured within the projects of the Council of Europe (CoE), which is administered by the Ministry of Culture.²³ The main task of a Roma mediator is to promote and ensure the dialogue and cooperation between the Roma families and local authorities, as well as public agency specialists in areas such as education, social issues, employment, children's rights, etc. A Roma mediator will help with understanding the situation and those challenging issues faced by Roma at local level and in cooperation with the representatives of social affairs, education and other authorities in the municipalities; the mediator helps to find appropriate solutions, in order to improve the integration and social inclusion of the Roma of the social and poverty risk groups at local level. Furthermore, the Roma mediator informs the local Roma inhabitants on the opportunities of social support on regular basis and services provided by the municipalities, as well as motivate the Roma to access education, enter the labour market and get involved in cultural and youth events.

The municipality survey data²⁴ shows that the most considerable driving force in terms of Roma integration is considered to be the employee of a municipality who owns the responsibility to coordinate this issue at the local level. Most commonly these are people who have already historically shown their willingness to help Roma within the framework of the projects implemented by the NGOs, for instance director of a school or an officer of education division. Such people are mainly involved in the operation of the network of Roma experts initiated by the Ministry of Culture, which positively impacts the sustainability of the support processes to the Roma in municipalities.

Roma are being involved in implementation of different projects in the field of social aid or education at the municipal level (organised by non-Roma NGO²⁵ or/and local authorities²⁶), where the direct target groups are the Roma; for example, hosting events for the Roma children, performing responsibilities of the Roma mediator. These tasks are being carried out by the most active Roma community leaders, who are well known by the officials of the local authorities and based on the previous cooperation; there is a certain level of trust between them. Those Roma representatives, who are involved, receive the support of their community, even though it is difficult for these representatives to motivate their own Roma community.

Activities implemented within the project *Latvian Roma Platform* (2016-2018) administered by the Ministry of Culture and financed by the EC include an support exchange of experiences among local governments; employees of local authorities (representation of 10-15 municipalities) visit different cities and regions of Latvia to get acquainted with the real situation, to analyse the main problems that the Roma community faces and to learn the good practice and methods/mechanisms used for resolving the existing issues. Since the project was in the process of implementation during the

²¹ Web-page of Center for Education Initiatives: <http://iic.lv/projekti/romu-mediatori-dialogs-lidzdaliba-un-savstarpeja-macisanas/>

²² Web-page of Society Integration Foundation: http://www.sif.gov.lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9252:Jauna-iniciativa-romu-integracijas-joma-%E2%80%93-tiek-uzsakta-romu-mediatoru-sagatavosana-darbam-pasvaldibas&catid=14:Jaunumi&Itemid=186&lang=lv

²³ Project's information available at: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/integracija-un-sabiedriba/romi/projekti-un-pasakumi/latvijas-romu-platforma-ii/atbalsts-romu-mediatoriem>

²⁴ From a surveys of local Municipalities, January 2018.

²⁵ For example, see: <http://iic.lv/roma-projects/>

²⁶ For example, see the web-page of Jelgavas municipality: <http://www.jelgava.lv/lv/pasvaldiba/dokumenti/projekti/2013-qads/socialas-rehabilitacijas-programma-jelgavas-pilseta-dzivojosam-romu-tautibas-gimenem-ar-pirmsskolas-vai-skolas-vecuma-berniem/>

development phase of the research, its impact is not yet objectively measurable, however, several employees of the local authorities has given information in the surveys that they have gained confidence that the involvement of the Roma (Roma mediator, assistant to the teacher in preschool and primary school) is one of the most effective manners of how to resolve the existing problems and how to provide the necessary support at individual level.

Promoting empowerment and participation of Roma

Despite the fact that opportunities and forms of participation of Roma as an ethnic group have not been directly stipulated in the political documents at national level, an agenda exists regarding the allocation of opportunities and forms of participation for the members of community, whose aim is to promote strengthening of democratic and civil society (for example, law on associations and foundations²⁷). Whereas, a task is defined to support cooperation projects aimed at Roma integration, civic participation and the development of civil society in the Action Plan of the Guidelines; the indicators achieved are currently not objectively measurable, as the evaluation of implementation of Guidelines Action Plan for the 2017-2018 has not yet been completed.

In Latvia several forms of participation have been developed, as for example, Council for Implementation of the Cooperation Memorandum between non-governmental organizations and the Cabinet of Ministers, whose aim is to promote such performance of public administration that is effective and in accordance with the interests of the society, thus ensuring the involvement of the civil society in the decision-making processes at all levels and stages of public administration. However, since the beginning of this Council (since 2014) the Roma NGOs have not been involved to represent the interests of their community in the Council.

The representatives of the Roma NGOs (International Romani Union, Roman Culture Centre, Latvian Roma Youth and Friends, Talsu Roma NGO, *Alternativas*, *Romani Čačipen*, ME ROMA, *Nēvo Drom D*) take part in the following governmental councils at national level:

- Minorities Advisory Council under the Chancery of the President of Latvia,²⁸
- Advisory Council on Minorities Education under the Ministry of Education and Science,²⁹
- Advisory Council for Implementation of the Roma Integration Policy under the Ministry of Culture.³⁰

The purpose of these advisory councils is to support the dialogue between policy-makers, practitioners and the society.

The participation of Roma at the local level is mainly promoted formally, except for separate positive examples; the reason for such positive examples is the consistent not fragmentary (only when projects are being implemented) work in the Roma integration, purposefully planning the development and allocating finances of the municipalities (for example, Jelgavas and Valmieras municipality). The most developed areas at municipal level are the availability of education, social aid to families with children, but the least

²⁷ Available at: <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=81050>

²⁸ Web page of the Chancery of the President: <https://www.president.lv/lv/darbibas-jomas/komisijas-un-padomes/mazakumtautibu-konsultativa-padome>

²⁹ Web-page of Ministry of Education: <http://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/konsultativa-padome-mazakumtautibu-izqlitibas-jautajumos>

³⁰ Web-page of the Ministry of Culture: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/integracija-un-sabiedriba/romi/konsultativa-padome>

developed areas are employment and issues of housing needs, as well as the reduction of illiteracy.

In the recent years, the Roma NGOs have had an opportunity to receive financial support from state and municipality, budget allocated for small scale projects to facilitate the civic participation. The heads of the Roma NGOs admit that this is a considerable support for the promotion of the Roma participation, it is a stimulus to try to express oneself, the culture and good examples, it improves the cooperation, self-initiative and the trust from the side of the society. Still, taking into consideration that there is a small number of legally registered and active Roma NGOs and that new organizations are not established, the financial support available in the municipalities is not used for the promotion of the Roma participation.

Guarantees for the effectiveness of programmes with the largest budgets

Already nine years since the implementation of the national programme "Roma in Latvia 2007-2009",³¹ there has been no purposeful programmes aiming specifically at Roma. The existing programmes including ESF programmes and thematic campaigns (e.g. campaign *Dosta!*) are being targeted towards wider target groups, including Roma. Their goal is to integrate groups in social risk and to reduce discrimination.

Even though several studies on the situation of Roma exist³² and recommendations for improving the situation in various areas, such as education, healthcare, employment, and housing issues, the existing programmes are mainly focused on social inclusion and defending the interests of Roma.

So far, in the framework of the national programmes, specific needs of Romani women, youth and children are being covered minimally or are not at all, mainly the cross-sectoral principle is being used.

Considering the fact that the majority of programmes with relevance to Roma inclusion are designed as mainstream (targeting the general population), it could be expected that positive impact on Roma depends on the outreach specifically Roma community. However, most of the governmental programmes are not subject to any independent evaluation which would assess their effectiveness specifically in relation to Roma and their impact on Roma inclusion. The programmes of Society Integration Foundation are partly subjected to independent assessment (data is not publicly available but is presented to the Council of Society Integration Foundation), and the data collected affirms that Roma, as the target group, is being reached, but the results achieved are not always sustainable. Moreover, the evaluation identified a specific weakness concerning weak targeting of the Roma youth. This example reflects the inconsistency between the programmes administered by public institutions, which claim the youth policy, including support of youth organisations and support of youth participation are priorities participation, and even provides dedicated funding to local governments to support achievement of this objective.³³

Civil society's access to funding for Roma inclusion activities

Several funding sources are available to the associations and foundations (NGOs) for the assurance of the civil society, including the Roma NGOs. The largest are:

³¹ Available at: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/145998-par-valsts-programmu-cigani-romi-latvija-2007-2009-gadam>

³² For example, researches "The Roma in Latvia" (2015) and "The Roma Rights for Education" (2011).

³³ Available at: <http://jaunatne.gov.lv/lv/valsts-programma/atbalsts-jaunatnes-politikas-istenosanaivieteja-limeni>

- “NGO support programmes” funded by the Ministry of Culture are being implemented in all the regions of Latvia. NGOs that implement projects in the field of promotion of civil society can receive funding (yearly funding is 120,000 EUR). Within this programme there are three supported areas from which one – support of minority NGOs, especially highlighting the Roma NGOs. In 2016 six Roma NGO integration projects were implemented, as well as three intercultural projects, where Roma were one of the target groups. The funding for one project is approximately 2,000 EUR. Mainly, the aim of such projects are conservation of Roma cultural identity and promotion of the participation which is implementation of specific activities; within these programmes the operating expenses of the NGOs are not being funded (for example, office expenses).
- From the budget of the Ministry of Culture, the maintenance of the Roma History and Art Museum is being funded, as well as partly – organizing the International Romani Culture Festival.³⁴
- Since 2016, the state budget programme “NGO Fund” is being implemented; the yearly funding is 400,000 EUR. Every year different priority areas are being set out, including strengthening of NGOs and the defence of their interests. In 2016 one Roma NGO project was supported³⁵ (support for international festival ROMA WORLD-2016, with a budget of 4,935 EUR), but in 2017, no Roma NGO project were supported.³⁶ The reason could be that the majority of Roma NGOs lack administrative capacity in order to apply for the project calls and receive support for the implementation of the projects, as well as lack of experience to implement projects fully in accordance with the criteria set out.
- Society Integration Foundation (public organization)³⁷ administrates the implementation of integration and inclusion programmes where the Roma NGOs can also submit their applications. The main priorities of these programmes are to support of the employment, solving discrimination issues, including campaigns for informing the society, promotion of social inclusion and civic participation and cooperation between the youth of belonging to diverse minorities and the mainstream society. The target groups of the programmes have been mainly defined by using ethnic and social criteria (include Roma community), as well as the combination of these criteria. The objective of the Roma inclusion is supported only through small grant scheme.³⁸ The management of the Society Integration Foundation justified this by the fact that there is a small number of Roma people in Latvia and the Roma do not have necessary capacity to participate in the project calls alone.

From 2019 to 2021, 8,500,000 will be available to the civil society, including the Roma from the EEA/Norway Grants funding.

The tendency of availability of higher financial sources for the organisations of civil society and public benefit organisations in the last years is positive and every year these are being characterized by new topicalities, for example, in 2017 social entrepreneurship developed rapidly.

³⁴ <http://www.romucentrs.lv/roma-world-festiv257ls.html>

³⁵ List of projects is available at: <http://www.sif.gov.lv/images/files/valsts/vb-2016/nvof/Apstiprinatie-projekti.pdf>

³⁶ Description of the programme is available at: http://www.sif.gov.lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=410&Itemid=127&lang=lv

³⁷ Web-page of the Society Integration Foundation: <http://www.sif.gov.lv/index.php?lang=en>

³⁸ Available at: http://www.sif.gov.lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=67&Itemid=77&lang=lv

Availability of reliable data on the situation of Roma

Sensitive data, including the ethnic origin, has the status of specially protected data. Indication of ethnicity in passport is optional. Nonetheless, the population census includes the parameter of ethnic data, and the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) and other public institutions in some statistical indicators ask the respondents for their ethnicity, for example, for the unemployment records.

There is no accurate information about the number of the Roma population residing in Latvia, and in different sources of data provide different numbers. According to the CSB, currently 5,388 Roma live in Latvia,³⁹ which is considerably less than the latest available statistical data in the population register of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (OCMA) where 7,796 Roma were registered as of 1 July, 2015, constituting 0.36 per cent of the total Latvian population.⁴⁰ These differences might be explained with the fact that, probably, many Roma have emigrated in search of employment and this change was not registered in OCMA. However, the Roma leaders and representatives of the Roma civil society point out that the Roma population in Latvia might be considerably larger – from 10,000 even up to 15,000. They explain this essential difference mainly with the fear of Roma from possible discrimination, therefore, they are unwilling to indicate their real ethnicity in official documents. It is underlined not only by the Roma leaders and representatives of the Roma civil society, but also by several interviewed public sector employees by stating that quite often Roma choose to indicate either Latvian, Russian or Pole ethnicity in their passport or other official documents.

An alternative method is used relatively widespread for obtaining data and information on the situation of the Roma, for example, specific surveys targeted at Roma community in the frame of the specific support measures, such as tracking the unemployed Roma.⁴¹ As ethnicity data cannot be verified, the data obtained in any form, including Roma, are not completely accurate, but they are relatively reliable. There is no fixed abuse or misinterpretation of the data of Roma ethnic group.

The Ministry of Education and Science carries out a monitoring of the number of Roma students (once in three years, carried out twice – in 2013 and 2016).⁴² Within this monitoring only statistical data on numbers of Roma students in preschool and primary schools are collected. But this data collection had practically not contributed to the improvement of the situation in terms of availability of the education and assurance of qualitative education to the Roma children and pupils. In addition, in the framework of monitoring no information is being collected or analysed on professional and higher education stages.

³⁹ http://data.csb.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/Sociala/Sociala_ikgad_iedz_iedzskaits

⁴⁰ <http://www.pmlp.gov.lv/sakums/statistika/iedzivotaju-registrs/>

⁴¹ Available at: <http://www.jelgavasvestnesis.lv/pilseta/nva-no-102-romu-bezdarbniekiem-80-izqlitiba-ir-zemaka-par-pamata>

⁴² The report available at: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/KM_050417_romi.pdf (see specifically pp. 5.6).

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

Implementing the Racial Equality Directive

According to the information provided by the Ombudsman Office and based on the information available in the annual reports of the Ombudsman,⁴³ there have been no cases of complaints in the area of rights and equality concerning the Roma in recent years – no violations of the Racial Equality Directive (RED) have been identified.

In 2016, the priority of the Ombudsman Office was to strengthen the fight against the discrimination, but during the course of the year, there was practically no issue or case that was considered in connection with ethnic discrimination against the Roma. The Ombudsman has been involved in the development of several *Equinet* reports in 2016-2017, and on the *Report on discrimination on the grounds of race and ethnicity* which is currently in the process of drafting.

Ombudsman Office pays great attention to the protection of the rights of detainees, including Roma. In 2016, 550 complaint applications were received from detainees, but none of them was based on complaints about the imposition of worse conditions on the grounds of Roma ethnicity.

In order to provide the best possible availability of Ombudsman Office specialist's consultations, Ombudsmen Office regularly organizes educational seminars and on-site consultations in Latvian cities, including prisons. More than 40 educational seminars, more than 10 on-site consultations, discussions and other educational events were organized in 2016-2017, but no Roma have not participated in any of them. Interviews with the employees at Ombudsman Office revealed that several years ago they had seen different attitudes towards Roma offenders during the on-site visits in places of detention, but no official complaints were received.

Roma mediators consulted during preparation of this report have not reported cases of direct discrimination but indicated that indirect discrimination against Roma is rather common in Latvia, particularly at the level of local authorities – municipalities. However, Roma usually do not report such cases to the Ombudsman. The mediators indicated examples of indirect discrimination that Roma face in daily lives, for example, when taxi drivers ask them for the service charge before the drive, restaurants not willing to rent the rooms for family celebrations or social workers excluding Roma from opportunities to receive items, such as second-hand clothing, donated in charity.

Both the Ombudsman Office and the implementers of the state integration policy recognise the continuing problem of negative stereotypes and prejudices against Roma community that promote discriminatory attitudes in Latvia as a key issue – the Roma are not hired, people do not want to live with them in the neighbourhood, etc. In 2007, the ECRI advised Latvia to complement the policy of easing employment with the necessary measures to prohibit discriminatory behaviour of employers who refuse to recruit Roma, taking into account their ethnic background,⁴⁴ however, the interviews conducted within development to f this report have not reported any major changes and improvements in this area.

Educational and residential segregation

Adequate measures are not taken at national level to ensure Roma's equal access to education. For example, there are insufficient measures to terminate existing practice of placement of Roma pupils in special schools reported by the interviewees (but there are no data about the extent of this problem available); the placement of Roma children in

⁴³ Available at: <http://www.tiesibsargs.lv/lv/pages/petijumi-un-publikacijas/qadazinojumi/qada-zinojumi>

⁴⁴ Available at: <https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/latvia/LVA-CbC-III-2008-2-LVA.pdf>

special schools is often unfounded and there are cases where Roma children are sent to a pedagogical-medical commission for the diagnosis of childhood disability based on the teacher's dislike for this child and family. The problems of education of Roma children and tier segregation in schools will be discussed in detail in the Roma Civil Monitor second-year report.

Historically, there is no knowledge about the Roma community to be segregated in Latvia, however, researchers have observed a negative trend in some municipalities to segregate poor people, including Roma in certain houses at municipalities' outskirts, often in form of provision of social housing in such segregated areas. Such public policy-making approaches promote segregation and undermine the principle of equal treatment for the provision of adequate housing in an integrated environment.

Discriminatory behaviour by police, misconduct by prosecutors or courts

Ombudsman Office does not have the information and evidences of discriminatory behaviour against Roma by police or other law enforcement agencies. So far, no specific researches or reports have been developed or carried out that could provide information on the ethnic profile of the execution of police and judicial functions and the related difference in attitude or decision taken.

Interviews with Roma, conducted for the purpose of this report, have confirmed that they and their members of the family have not had significant conflicts with the police in their daily communication in the last years.⁴⁵ However, this conclusion cannot be applied to the entire Roma community living in Latvia, because of the lack of objective and comprehensive information on the situation in the country as a whole.

Access to clean water and sanitation

The most recent information on access to clean water, sanitation and sanitary equipment has been relatively widely presented in the research *Roma in Latvia*. Although this study does not have comparative data with the situation of other people, the research identifies a problem. It has been concluded that there is no water supply in the dwelling of a quarter of the surveyed Roma or 26 per cent; 42 per cent of the Roma dwellings are not equipped with the water flush toilets; there is no shower or bath available in about 56 per cent of Roma dwellings. These problems will be further discussed in the the Roma Civil Monitor second-year report.

⁴⁵ From an interview with Roma mediators and Roma NGOs' leaders, January 2018.

ADDRESSING ANTIGYPSYISM

Institutional settings for fighting discrimination and addressing antigypsyism

Roma, as a group of ethnic minorities, who have historically been living in the territory of Latvia, are officially recognized by the government and public institutions. There is no direct evidence that the public sector is aware that antigypsyism is one of the main causes of exclusion as it is not mentioned and defined in the Latvian law and political rhetoric. There are no special public institutions and structures that analyse and prevent antigypsyism in institutional behaviour and develop long-term recommendations. This is because no antigypsyist outbreaks have been detected in Latvia, for example, public rhetoric directed against Roma or violent attacks.

In the public events and communication related to Roma, the concept of antigypsyism is used in the context that it affects not only personal, but also social and institutional behaviour. For example, within the framework of the Council of Europe's campaign *Dosta! Enough! Go beyond prejudice, meet Roma!* in 2016, the Latvian Centre for Human Rights, in co-operation with the Ministry of Culture and the University of Latvia, organized a seminar for journalism students "*Antigypsyism and its manifestations in the public space*".⁴⁶ In 2017, the Latvian Women's Non-Governmental Organizations Network together with the Ministry of Culture organized the event *Blueberries and Romance* to raise awareness of Roma culture and promote understanding between different cultures and people in Latvia.⁴⁷

In accordance with the European Parliament's resolution on the occasion of International Roma Day "Antigypsyism in Europe and EU recognition of the Memorial Day of the Roma genocide during World War II",⁴⁸ the Latvian state officially recognizes the historical fact of the genocide against the Roma during the Second World War. In October 2017 an international Roma Holocaust conference was held in Riga (delegates from 10 countries were represented). Roma Culture Centre organized a travelling exhibition *Latvian Roma Holocaust*, which was exhibited in 14 places in Latvia as well as in other countries, for example, in Prague. Appropriately, about 50 Latvian Roma have been paid compensation for the atrocities (forced labour) committed by Nazis and other regimes, as well as their allies during the Second World War. Since 2015, the International Roma Day has been marked in Latvia with a wider range of events.

Funding from a variety of sources is also available to combat the discrimination against the Roma and to strengthen the intercultural dialogue. Despite a limited funding from the governmental budget,⁴⁹ they are several NGOs active in those fields.

In view of the above, it can be concluded that, in recent years, an important symbolic step has been taken in the fight against antigypsyism, and the general knowledge on the history of the Roma and the Roma Holocaust have been promoted.

⁴⁶ Available: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/integracija-un-sabiedriba/romi/projekti-un-pasakumi/ep-kampana-dosta>

⁴⁷ Programme of the event: <http://www.skolas.unesco.lv/lv/jaunumi/kampana-dosta-parkap-aizspriedumiem-iepazisti-romus-starptautiskaja-iecietibas-diena/>

⁴⁸ Available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+MOTION+B8-2015-0326+0+DOC+XML+V0//LV>

⁴⁹ http://www.sif.gov.lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=410&Itemid=30&lang=lv and <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/integracija-un-sabiedriba/pilsoniska-iesaistisanas/nvo-atbalsts>

Countering hate crime and hate speech against Roma, and antigypsyist rhetoric of politicians, public figures and media

In 2016, developing the research *Problematic aspects of practices on recognition and investigation of hate speech and hate crimes in the Republic of Latvia*, the Ombudsman has focused on the situation concerning the hate crime and hate speech in the framework of public information and education measures to promote tolerance and anti-discrimination; the research included the hate crime and hate speech against Roma as one of the groups affected by these phenomena.⁵⁰ The research contains wide information on the legal framework for the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, the legal framework and practices for investigating and preventing hate speech and hate crime, and the role of the media in detecting hate speech in anonymous comments. The research concludes:

- it is the responsibility of the government to strengthen the strategy to combat the spread of hate-motivated offenses and to restrict hate speech in websites on the Internet. Within the framework of the strategy, it is necessary to promote the more active application of criminal law norms in practice, to strengthen the effective mechanism of rights protection and to take preventive measures to eliminate the spread of hate speech and hate crime;
- law enforcement agencies must pay more attention to the issues of identification, definition and investigation of hate speech and hate crime;
- it is necessary to develop information campaigns on promoting tolerance of society, as well as reducing the cases of hate speech and hate crime.

In 2016-2017, no applications were submitted to the Ombudsman Office for the cases of hate speech regarding the Roma. However, the reality is different. In the period from 2013 to 2015, the Latvian Centre for Human Rights carried out the monitoring of Latvian media *Reflection of Roma in Latvian Media*.⁵¹ Information on how the Roma are reflected in the media was obtained through monitoring. As it is concluded, it is often tendentiously negative, but people's comments are mostly not hostile, but they are strongly negative and based on stereotypes. For example, the Latvian Roma are most often portrayed visually as glamorous and dancing singers or, on the contrary, as a poor man and people around the campfire, regardless of whether the material is about the Roma education or any other topic. Taking into account the fact that the Latvian Roma community does not visually identify and do not wear traditional Roma costumes on a daily basis, Internet media and TV use the photo materials of foreign news agencies most often in order to create the most vivid impression. In this way, the media not only distorts the existing reality, but forms the emotional subtext of the reader and the viewer – fear, dislike, etc.

In 2017 a material for teachers *Say NO to hate speech!* was published.⁵² It provides insight into what is intolerance, hate speech and hate crime. The material explains how intolerance, hate crime and hate speech are manifested, the impact and consequences they have on individuals and society, and suggests how to respond to such manifestations. Specific groups of society, such as the Roma, are not mentioned in this material.

The overall level of tolerance of the society, including against the Roma, is relatively low. This can be illustrated, for example, by the answers to the question "How close are you with the Roma?" in a survey among Riga inhabitants from 2014.⁵³ Only 3.8 per cent of

⁵⁰ Available at: http://www.tiesibsargs.lv/uploads/content/publikacijas/naida_noziegumu_un_naida_runas_izmeklesana_lv_2016_1496214733.pdf

⁵¹ See: <http://cilvektiesibas.org.lv/lv/publications/notiks-diskusija-romu-atspoqulojums-latvijas-medij-331/>

⁵² See: <http://cilvektiesibas.org.lv/lv/publications/paligmaterials-skolotajiem-saki-ne-naida-runai-439/>

⁵³ See: http://www.nvo.lv/site/attachments/02/10/2014/Sabiedribas_integracija_Riga.pdf

respondents would accept to have a Roma as relative or partner, 6.5 per cent to have Roma as close friend, or 5.7 per cent as a colleague. Moreover, as many as 10.2 per cent of respondents in this survey expressed that the Roma should not be allowed to be in the country.

Analysing and forming narratives and attitudes towards Roma

In recent years different initiatives and campaigns promoting public awareness and building a positive narrative about the Roma have been carried out on a relatively regular basis, which are evaluated to be relatively effective. Both governmental and non-governmental organizations, including Roma organisations, have been involved in activities. The funding of these initiatives is mainly based on the implementation of specific projects funded, for example, by the EU and the European Economic Area and the Latvia state budget programmes.

Examples of major events implemented in recent years include:

- International Roma Culture Festival *Roma World* (implemented in 2016 and 2017): The aim of the festival is to promote the development of cohesive society and cultural dialogue by changing attitudes towards the Roma and breaking the stereotypes that have developed for centuries.⁵⁴
- Video stories campaign *7 stories about us*: The campaign aims to address the society about the absurdity of discrimination. One of the video stories is aimed at reducing discrimination against the Roma (2014, funding by EU PROGRESS programme).⁵⁵
- Video story *Roma women in Jelgava - they work in educational institutions*: it aims to promote good examples of Roma employment and the benefits of the whole society (2016, funding by European Economic Area and the Latvia state budget programme).⁵⁶
- Annual programme *Dosta!* events.

Consequently, it can be concluded that deliberate actions have been taken to change the narrative about the Roma and their contribution to the historical and cultural development, economical growth of Latvia and Europe

⁵⁴ See : <http://www.romucentrs.lv/starptautiskais-romu-kult363ras-festiv257ls-roma-world-2016.html>

⁵⁵ See: http://www.sif.gov.lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9870:Video-stasti-%E2%80%9C7-stasti-par-mums%E2%80%9D-aicina-pardomat-attieksmi-pret-lidzsilvekiem-Pieejami-ar-subtitriem-latviesu,-an glu-un-krievu-valoda&catid=14:Jaunumi&Itemid=186

⁵⁶ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPA2ntphwI>

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia is the responsible government institution for the planning and implementation of the national Roma integration policy. It is recommended for the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia to carry out the following measures:

- To activate the participation of responsible sectoral ministries and government institutions in the development of specific tasks and achievable indicators in order to achieve a common goal and to promote the implementation of the Guidelines Action Plan more effectively;
- To provide the development and implementation of a special training course for the representatives of regional (local authorities) network of experts to promote the awareness raising, including the impact of positive discrimination on community development and economic growth in the region.

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia is the responsible institution for the education of Roma. It is recommended for the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia to carry out the following measures:

- To improve significantly the monitoring process of Roma pupils by including more qualitative (such as data on the number of Roma students in vocational and higher education institutions, the number of unjustified absenteeism of Roma students and the number of Roma dropping out of education. On basis of the analysis of these data, to develop an action plan to improve the current situation in order to improve the accessibility of education and the provision of quality education at all stages of the education of Roma children and students;
- To provide adequate funding and to ensure the establishment of a Roma Teacher's Assistants Group, the implementation of training and work in the pre-school and primary schools with a larger number of Roma.

It is recommended for the institutions responsible for the programmes funded by state budget and EU, in which the Roma are one of the target groups, provide the independent evaluation of programmes qualitative analysis of the results achieved, in order to purposefully plan the continuity and progress of Roma integration support measures, their coherence and the setting of new goals, as well as addressing the specific problems of the Roma community, paying particular attention to the problem of Roma children and the youth.

It is recommended to renew the national programme "Roma in Latvia" and establish it as a sustainable national strategy to combat social exclusion simultaneously in all sectors; to engage Roma civil society activists as well as Roma integration experts with relevant academic knowledge and international experience in the process of development and implementation of this plan.

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