



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

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

**Prepared by:**  
PI Roma Community Centre  
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**Civil society monitoring report  
on implementation of the  
national Roma integration strategy  
in Lithuania**

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Although the Roma Civil Monitor pilot project, as part of which the report was prepared, is coordinated by CEU, the report represents the findings of the author and it does not necessarily reflect the views of CEU. CEU cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the moment, the NRIS is in place, but is not working properly in practice. The main reasons for this is the lack of political will to address the difficult situation of the Roma community, as well as lack of influence and relatively low number of Roma organisations, which could enable them to request a more efficient implementation of the NRIS. The measures used by the authorities are usually soft, and this, combined with the above-mentioned factors results in these measures being inefficient.

One of the other problems in the implementation of the NRIS (as well as other policies aimed at the Roma inclusion) is the lack of cooperation by the governmental institutions and municipalities, who are the key players in solving the issues specifically in housing and education.

Although the Strategy has brought significant improvements to the fields of employment and education (to be explained further in more detail), it is so far unable to ensure the solution to the most acute problems the Roma community is facing, which is illegal housing and consistent forced evictions with no alternative funding provided. This and several other areas, discussed below are not tackled, as they are in the jurisdiction of the municipalities, which lack political will and capacity to deal with these issues.

### Governance and overall policy framework

Looking at the mainstreaming of Roma inclusion on the national level, this inclusion is only carried out through consultation and later through the participation of Roma community in specific (and time-limited) projects. There are currently no Roma employed in any relevant governance structure on a long-term basis. Roma are not represented in elected authorities.

### Anti-discrimination

Differently than most countries with high Roma population, where school segregation is one of the key problems, in Lithuania the problem of early drop-outs should rather be discussed. Several studies are produced on the issue, and the ways to tackle this problem are defined. However, the implementation of those measures could also be stronger.

Another relevant issue for the Lithuanian Roma community is the ill-treatment by the police force. No policies are set in place to prevent this, and no measures so far are taken to ensure the confidence of the Roma community in reporting those cases.

### Addressing antigypsyism

Currently, the main structure for addressing antigypsyism on a national level is the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman; however, this measure is not used by the Roma community frequently as well as the Office of Ombudsmen of *Seimas* (Parliament).

The Plan of Anti-discrimination Promotion Activities for 2017-2019 is adopted by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour in 2017. The measures on fighting antigypsyism are not mentioned there, although these measures would be welcomed and could potentially improve the general situation.

## INTRODUCTION

According to the population and housing census of 2011, the country was inhabited by 2,115 Roma people. From 1989 the number of Roma in the country is gradually decreasing. In 1989 there were 2,719 Roma people in Lithuania, while in 2001 – 2,571.

According to data of 2011, 81 per cent of the minority lived in urban areas, 19 per cent – in rural areas. Most of Roma lived in Vilnius (38 per cent, or 814 persons), Kaunas (23 per cent, or 482 persons), Šiauliai (11 per cent, or 224 persons), Marijampolė (10 per cent, or 214 persons), and Panevėžys (7 per cent, or 145 persons) districts. The majority (93 per cent of Roma) have Lithuanian citizenship, while 2.3 per cent have citizenship of Russian Federation, and the rest 2.6 per cent have other or no citizenship.

The main problems faced by the community are lack of adequate and accessible housing (especially acute in Vilnius), early school-drop outs and access to quality education for children, low levels of employment and general negative attitude towards Roma by the majority of the population, resulting in variety of problems ranging from bad atmosphere in schools for the children to hate-crimes.

As the population of Roma in Lithuania is rather small, this fact was often used to justify the lack of measures taken by the authorities to improve the acute situation of this community. The lack of political will combined with the well-rooted stereotypes and scape-goat attitude applied to the community led to worsening of the situation in the fields of education, housing and employment. After Lithuania has joined the EU, and especially later with the adoption of the Communication on the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) by the European Commission in 2011, the question of improving the situation of Roma was put on the political agenda.

The currently operating Roma organisations are the following: Public institution Roma Community Centre, Lithuanian Gypsy Community “Čigonų laužas”, Lithuanian Roma Community, Roma Integration House, Roma Integration Centre, Lithuanian Gypsy Community “Čigonų laužas” Šalčininkai Division.

The first document adopted as a response to the Communication from the European Commission on National Roma Integration Strategies was the Action Plan for 2012-2014, adopted by the Ministry of Culture. This document was later built upon with the 2015-2020 Action Plan for Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society, coordinated by the Department for National Minorities of the Republic of Lithuania.

This analysis reviews the main policies, relevant for the Roma community in Lithuania. It analyses first and foremost the National Strategy, prepared by the Republic of Lithuania in response to the Communication of the European Commission. After the main analysis was assembled, the information gaps were identified. In order to fill them in several informal interviews were carried out with employees of NGOs as well as with the representatives of the Department of National Minorities.

This report is based on an analysis of several information sources. The main one was already existing studies, legal acts, reports and commentary, produced over the last years by the civil society (the PI Roma Community Centre as well as other human rights and Roma organisations in Lithuania).

## GOVERNANCE AND OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK

### Mainstreaming Roma inclusion across ministries and other national level public authorities

The main Roma Contact Point within the Government of Lithuania is the Department of National Minorities under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania. The Department is supposed to liaise and coordinate all the policies, relevant to the Roma with other Ministries, municipalities and bodies concerned.

The Department also annually purchases education, social and cultural enhancement services provided by teachers, teacher assistants, inter-cultural mediators and other administrative staff from the Roma Community Centre. The Centre offers the services to the Roma community in Kirtimai and other locations. As an example, the Centre hosts language and citizenship exam preparation classes, driving classes, after-school activities for children.

In order to ensure the integration of the Roma minority in the Lithuanian society, the Department coordinates the 2015-2020 Action Plan for Integration of Roma into the Lithuanian Society.<sup>1</sup> Measures of the Action Plan are implemented by: Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Health, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Education Development Centre, National Centre for Special Needs Education and Psychology, Education Supply Centre, Lithuanian Centre for Non-formal Youth Education, Lithuanian Children and Youth Centre, primary health care institutions, Lithuanian Labour Exchange, Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, Vilnius City Municipality, other Lithuanian municipalities, public institution Roma Community Centre in cooperation with Lithuanian Gypsy Community "Čigonų laužas", Lithuanian Roma Community, Roma Integration House, Roma Integration Centre, Lithuanian Gypsy Community "Čigonų laužas" Šalčininkai Division.

As mentioned above, the implementation of different parts of the Action plan is coordinated by the Department of National Minorities. The Department regularly organises consultations on relevant thematic issues with the stakeholders involved. For example, to coordinate the employment project, carried out by the Roma NGOs, a consultation process is set up, consisting not only the NGOs involved, but also the representatives of Ministry of Labour, municipalities, Labour Exchange and others. Similar procedures are taking place in other thematic fields. The challenge to this coordination is the variety of structures involved and the reliance on political will of the stakeholders, as the Department is not able to enforce any stronger measures, should the other stakeholders be slow in implementing their part of the action.

During the process of drafting the first version of the Action Plan for the years 2012-2014 the civil society organisations expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of initial consultations and the lack of comprehensive measures in the plan. This feedback was taken into consideration by the Department, who ensured the involvement of these organisations in the preparation and the implementation of the current action plan (2015-2020).

At the moment, the Roma community is involved in the process of drafting the action plans only on the level of regularly organised consultations, mostly through the main Roma-led organisations. This involvement in forming the relevant policies remains insufficient, as there are no Roma employed in either local or national authorities. The only influence the Roma community may have on these policies is through the consultations and temporary

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of the preparation of the 2015-2020 Action Plan for Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society the Department of National Minorities was a part of the Ministry of Culture. It was later restructured to operate directly under the Government of Lithuania.

contracts for mediation.<sup>2</sup>

An additional step taken by the Department for National Minorities to ensure the voice of Roma community in the process of the implementation of the NRIS is the current project Roma Platforms. Through the project five Roma mediators are employed in different municipalities and meet monthly with the authorities to raise their concerns and ideas.

### Promoting empowerment and participation of Roma

The Roma self-empowerment movement in Lithuania could be described as less efficient, if compared with other countries with the bigger Roma population. One of the reasons is the lack of critical mass: as the population is small, the authorities are less interested to get the community on their side and to have its support during the elections.

Another reason could be the lack of communication either between the Roma leaders and the authorities or between Roma leaders and community as well. Currently, the programme of mediators and assistants, curated by government (the Roma Platform 2) addresses this issue by empowering five Roma mediators to work with the municipality and building their capacity.<sup>3</sup> However, one can notice the positive change in this situation with the emergence of more and more educated and ambitious Roma community representatives, who are at the same time motivated to put their time and effort to serving the interests of the wider community.

The initiatives coming from the ground are few and are less likely to receive any financial or political support than the ones coming either from the government itself or from established leaders and organisations. As an example, the lack of education or formal qualifications (which is often the case of Roma in Lithuania) is often the obstacle to participate in programmes due to the rigid requirements in long-running employment projects.

### Guarantees for the effectiveness of programmes with the largest budgets

As the Roma population in Lithuania is rather small, the mainstreamed national or local programmes have little effect on the situation of this community. Both, currently and in the past, there have been a number of Roma-specific programmes of comparatively large budget in the fields of employment and education. For example, the latest budget of the Roma Integration Strategy allocates 40,000 EUR annually to educational activities, 60,000 EUR annually to the mediation activities. The rest of the budget can be accessed via the website of the Department of National Minorities.<sup>4</sup>

An example of a functioning Roma-specific measure could be the employment project called "Face the Roma",<sup>5</sup> ran in 2009-2012 by the UNDP Lithuania. During the project 37 individuals of Roma origin were employed.

Currently, an even larger employment project is running as a part of the Action Plan framework. The project is called "Work together with Roma: New Employment Opportunities" and is aimed to provide services on integration into the labour market for the Roma community all around the country by six Roma organisations. The project includes mentorship, workplace trainings, mediations in employment and support for business.

On the contrary, an example of a non-efficient mainstream policy could be the situation in

<sup>2</sup> More information about the mediator programme can be found at: <http://www.romuplatforma.lt/en/about-project/>

<sup>3</sup> More information about this programme can be found at: <http://www.romuplatforma.lt/>

<sup>4</sup> Currently the budget is available in Lithuanian at: <http://www.romuplatforma.lt/departamento-veikla-romu-integracijos-srityje/>

<sup>5</sup> Description of this project can be found at: <http://sopa.lt/2012/05/05/atsigrezk-i-romus-inovatyvios-romu-dalyvavimo-darbo-rinkoje-priemones/>

the field of housing, which currently is one of the most problematic areas for the Roma community in Lithuania in general and in Vilnius specifically. The mainstream programmes (such as for example the process of application for social housing) do not separate Roma from the majority of the population in any positive way. The lack of affirmative action leads to the situation in which a large percentage of Roma, who suffer from inadequate living conditions is much higher (68 per cent) than the one of the majority of the population (19 per cent).<sup>6</sup>

### Policies and measures addressing specific needs of Roma women, children and youth

In the Lithuanian Roma group, there is a slightly higher proportion of women than men. Significant differences in the distribution by sex is observed in the group of 30 years old and older Roma – women here account for 57 per cent, while men – 43 per cent of the total number of Lithuanian Roma.<sup>7</sup>

Differences between Roma women and men in education is recorded, but they are not very significant – a slightly higher number of illiterate and drop-primary education (difference – 1 per cent) or with only primary education (difference – 3 per cent), a slightly higher number of men have acquired basic education (difference – 4 per cent).<sup>8</sup>

The current Roma Integration Strategy seeks to improve the opportunities for Roma women to participate in public life. It allocates special budget for women empowerment activities, such as business projects and trainings.<sup>9</sup>

In the framework of the Action Plan, the Department of National Minorities has paid special attention to empowering Roma women by organising seminars and trainings for women, as well as by consistently promoting gender balance in all activities.

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<sup>6</sup> Sociological Research “The situation of the individuals of Roma origins in comparison with other citizens of Lithuania”, 2015, Diversity Development Group.

<sup>7</sup> Statistikos departamentas (2013). Gyventojai pagal tautybę, gimtąją kalbą ir tikybą. Vilnius: Statistikos departamentas. [Statistics Lithuania (2013). Population by nationality, native language and religion. Vilnius: Statistics Lithuania.]

<sup>8</sup> Petrušauskaitė V. 2014. (Ne)lygios galimybės švietime: ankstyvo romų vaikų pasitraukimo iš ugdymo sistemos Vilniaus mieste analizė. //Etniškumo studijos 2014/1, Vilnius: Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras. [Petrušauskaitė V. 2014. (Non)Equal opportunities in education: analysis of dropping out of Roma children from the educational system in Vilnius city.]

<sup>9</sup> Lithuanian National Strategy for Roma Integration 2015-2020

# ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

## Race Equality Directive

The author is not aware of any Roma-specific cases brought to the court within the framework of the Race Equality Directive.

## Educational and residential segregation

Due to a small number of Roma in Lithuania, educational segregation as such is a less relevant issue than in the other European countries. The Roma students usually attend mainstream schools and classes, although in the past there have been cases of separate classes formed exclusively of Roma pupils.<sup>10</sup>

A more pressing problem in the field of education was the high dropout rate for the Roma pupils and inability to fit in a school due to a set of factors: racism or hostile attitudes from teachers, fellow classmates and/or their parents, lack of pre-school preparation and difficulty to understand Lithuanian (or Russian, if this was a Russian-speaking school) language being a native speaker of Romanes.

Those issues were, and still are, tackled by the government and the civil society through a set of measures. In order to combat the hostility, mediators are employed to facilitate the communication between the teachers, classmates and the Roma students. The civil society observed positive changes due to the work of mediators, however, it must be noted, that the programme financed by the state is not enough to ensure tangible results and more mediators should be involved on a consistent level in order to contribute at decreasing the drop-out rates.

Special attention is paid to the programmes of pre-school education and extra-curricular activities, to bridge the gap between the Roma and non-Roma students. The children's activity centres are funded through private or public funds. According to data of 2015, 33 per cent of Roma children attend child day-care or children's activity centres.

Education of Roma people during 2001-2015 has noticeably changed, possibly due to having a more consistent measures thanks to NRIS. Compared to data of 2001, illiteracy and incomplete primary education in this age group decreased by 39 per cent (in 2001 – 47 per cent, in 2011 – 11 per cent, in 2015 – 8 per cent), the number of persons with basic education increased from 7 to 27 per cent. In 2011, education of Roma children (10-19 years) in their peer children group in across Lithuania distinctly differed only in secondary education, while illiteracy, primary and basic education indicators differed only by 1-5 per cent (in 2001, the difference reached 11-36 per cent).<sup>11</sup>

## Residential segregation

Parts of the Roma community in Lithuania face residential segregation. For example, the main settlement in Kirtimai is a clear example of a segregated neighbourhood, where little was done by the authorities to desegregate it. The settlement is located in the industrial zone South of Vilnius, making it time-consuming and relatively expensive for the inhabitants to come to the city.

Although this cannot be used as the only explanation for low employment levels and high school drop-out rates, the location does contribute to those facts. According to the most recent analysis of the situation of Roma in Lithuania, the living conditions of the Roma on average are worse than of other citizens. The lack of access to facilities like hot water (49 per cent, the national average is 25 per cent), flushing toilet, shower (49 per cent, the

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<sup>10</sup> Eglė Kristina Kučinskaitė. (undated) In the Dark: Segregating Roma in Lithuania. ERRC. Available at: <http://www.errc.org/roma-rights-journal/in-the-dark-segregating-roma-in-lithuania>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.romuplatforma.lt/en/education/>

national average is 24 per cent), gas and electricity although decreased insignificantly from 2001<sup>12</sup> to 2011<sup>13</sup> but remains well below the national average.

### Discriminatory behaviour by police, misconduct by prosecutors or courts

As an organisation working on a daily basis with the Roma community being physically located in the largest Roma settlement in Vilnius Kirtimai, PI Roma Community Centre observes a significant amount of cases of discriminatory behaviour by police. At the same time, only few of these cases are being properly reported, due to the (often well-founded) mistrust of the Roma towards the legal organs.

The Roma community, and especially the settlement in Vilnius, are consistently being targeted as drug-dealers, and are often treated by the police as criminals before any legal proceedings are actually carried out. These cases are known well to the organisations working with the community, however, remain undocumented, therefore the statistics are not available.

The civil society organisations are not aware of any disciplinary measures taken against the police for the misconduct against the Roma community.

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<sup>12</sup> Earlier report available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=8977&langId=en>

<sup>13</sup> Statistics Lithuania. 28 June 2013. Dwellings and their characteristics. Results of the 2011 Population and Housing Census of the Republic of Lithuania. Vilnius: Statistics Lithuania.

## ADDRESSING ANTIGYPSYISM

### Institutional settings for fighting discrimination and addressing antigypsyism

According to the latest available data from 2015 by the Institute of Ethnic Studies of Lithuania, the Roma remain the most disliked ethnic group in the country with 66 per cent of the population stating that they would not want to have the Roma as their neighbours. Such monitoring is carried out since 2005, and shows that the results have remained stable throughout the last 10 years.<sup>14</sup>

The main existing structure set to counter antigypsyism by the government at the moment is Equal Opportunities Ombudsman. The equal opportunities Ombudsperson investigates complaints, conducts investigations at its own initiative; carries out independent investigations relating to cases of discrimination, and independent surveys of the situation of discrimination, provides findings and recommendations on any matters relating to discrimination; carries out preventive and educational activities, ensuring equal opportunities for all.

The work of the ombudsman is not targeting the Roma minority specifically, but all the citizens, whose rights are violated, including the national minorities, gender and other vulnerable groups. The ombudsman operates on a national level, and currently there are no initiatives or similar programmes carried out on local or regional level.

When a complaint concerning ethnic discrimination or antigypsyism is filed by an individual, who as a rule is not doing this procedure alone but is represented or helped by a human rights or Roma organisation, the description of the problem provides a clear information on the ethnicity of the applicant. The complaint form can be found online at the website of the Ombudsman.<sup>15</sup>

An example of such complaint could be the investigation from 2016, when a local tourist agency offered a tour in the Roma settlement of Vilnius Kirtimai. The description of the tour clearly portrait the Roma community as dangerous and inferior to the rest of the population. The decision of the Ombudsman in this particular case was that the tourism agency has violated the equal rights and the description of the tour needed to be changed. The description was changed according to the court decision.<sup>16</sup>

The complaint process however is not used well by the Roma community. In the year 2011 only one complaint was submitted, and in the following years the number slowly grew up to five complaints in 2016, according to the yearly reports of the Ombudsman's office.<sup>17</sup>

The Roma are currently being involved in public administration and public services only through the organised consultation processes (meetings hosted by the authorities where the civil society and activists are invited to participate and express their opinion) and temporary mediation contracts. The assigned mediator is responsible for ensuring the better communication between the local and central government and the Roma community. As to the knowledge of civil society organisations, there are no Roma currently employed in the prosecutors' office or courts. The employment of Roma in the police, if any, is not significant.

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<sup>14</sup> Petrušauskaitė V. 2014. (Ne)lygios galimybės švietime: ankstyvo romų vaikų pasitraukimo iš ugdymo sistemos Vilniaus mieste analizė. //Etniškumo studijos 2014/1, Vilnius: Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras. [Petrušauskaitė V. 2014. (Non)Equal opportunities in education: analysis of dropping out of Roma children from the educational system in Vilnius city.]

<sup>15</sup> Complaint form available at: <http://www.lygybe.lt/lt/e-skundas>

<sup>16</sup> More information about the tour project and the case can be found at: <http://manoteises.lt/straipsnis/ekskursijos-po-tabora-aprasymas-skatina-netolerancija-romu-bendruomenes-atzvilgiu/>

<sup>17</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus 2016 m. veiklos ataskaita [Annual Report of the Ombudsman for 2016]

The awareness-raising programmes about antigypsyism and stereotypes normally address the general public rather than the public administration or services, police or courts. However, at the moment the Department of National Minorities through the second part of the Roma Platform Programme is planning to work more on establishing the dialogue between the public service and the Roma community through assigning the mediators<sup>18</sup>. At the same time in the current Roma Integration Strategy there was no mention of any programmes targeting specifically the public authorities.

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<sup>18</sup> More information about the mediator programme can be found at: <http://www.romuplatforma.lt/en/about-project/>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Governance and overall policy framework

- Institutionalisation of the consistent dialogue and consultation with the Roma community on drafting all the policies, relevant to the Roma community (as opposed to the current ad hoc consultancy processes) by the relevant institution, at the moment the Department for National Minorities.
- Introduction of hard measures, especially in the field of housing and education (with clear assignment of these tasks to the relevant ministries of Education and municipalities involved) in addition to the soft measures in order to ensure the implementation of the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion. An example of such measures could be stable employment of mediators and a clear strategy for solving the housing problem in Vilnius.

### Anti-discrimination

- With the clear commitment of the Ministry of Education and Municipalities (in charge of schools) to ensure consistent (instead of short-term) employment of the mediators within the educational sector, allowing the people employed to build better relationships at their workplace and to constantly improve their performance.
- Introduction of independent investigation of police's misbehaviour as well as disciplinary measures for the police for misconduct towards the Roma community.

### Addressing antigypsyism

- Specific antigypsyism programme measures, targeting the public institutions, courts, local administrations and other decision-making bodies, responsible for the creation of Roma-targeted policies, in addition to the ones aimed at the general public and/or the Roma themselves. An example of such measure could be awareness-raising and competency building training for the authorities.

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