



Civil society monitoring report  
on implementation  
of the national Roma integration strategy  
in Slovenia

*Assessing the progress  
in four key policy areas  
of the strategy*

**Prepared by:**  
Maja Skalar  
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEP	Active Employment Policy
CSW	Centre for Social Work
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
ESF	European Social Fund
ESS	Employment Service of Slovenia
HFRS	Housing Fund of the Republic of Slovenia
MEDT	Ministry of Economic Development and Technology
MESP	Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning
MESS	Ministry of Education, Science and Sport
MH	Ministry of Health
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIPH	National Institute of Public Health

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Generally, the situation of Roma community in Slovenia is improving, but not at a desired pace. There are several policies, legislation and programmes aimed at integration of Roma in Slovenia. The National Programme of Measures for Roma of the Government of Republic of Slovenia for the period 2017-2021 includes welcome measures in all the fields where Roma are marginalised the most: employment, housing, healthcare and education. The problem is in its implementation, heavily relying on EU funds, as well as in often undefined activities, timeframes and budget. There is a lack of institutional cooperation and coordination, inclusion of Roma community in implementation, and we often see shifting of responsibility between the state and local authorities.

### Employment

There is a very high level of unemployment of Roma in Slovenia, estimated between 90 and 98 per cent. The Employment Service of Slovenia does not collect data on Roma separately in the record of unemployed persons, and official numbers of unemployed Roma (around 2,400 Roma) are considered an underestimation. Reasons for extremely high unemployment rate are low educational level, prejudices and discrimination by employers and social assistance system which sometimes does not provide enough of an incentive to find work. There are no tailor-made programmes for Roma in the field of employment – the only measure is inclusion in the active employment policy measures. Around 2,500 Roma are included annually, mostly in counselling, some in educational programmes or public works which mean virtually the only option of (temporary) employment for Roma, however results are lacking – very few then end up in the long-term employment.

### Housing and essential public services

Roma in Slovenia are most severely excluded in the field of housing which means further exclusion in the fields of employment, education and health, making Roma even more affected by poverty and marginalisation. There was some progress achieved in the recent years, for example legalisation and improvements to the communal infrastructure of some Roma settlements. However, most Roma continue to live in settlements isolated from the rest of society and in conditions well below the minimum standard of living, without access to basic infrastructure – especially in the south-eastern area of Slovenia. The implementation of measures to improve the situation in Roma settlements depends on the political will of each municipality – some local authorities are consistently uncooperative, and the state does not intervene even if it could. The most important recent measure was establishment of a state Interdepartmental Working Group for Resolving Spatial Issues of the Roma who worked actively on the issue, e.g. prepared recommendations for the municipalities where Roma live to include Roma settlements in their spatial plans. Legislation has been changed which might have a positive effect on further legalisation of Roma settlements. Public tenders were implemented for state co-financing of basic municipal infrastructure projects in Roma settlements – one positive measure recently is financing and implementing the arrangement of one of the biggest Roma settlement Žabjak-Brezje. Roma often face discrimination in renting private apartments, and there is a general lack of non-profit affordable apartments.

### Impact of health care policies on Roma

Roma have the same right to healthcare as other citizens, but sometimes they do not or cannot exercise these rights, mostly because of lack of awareness of their rights and their overall social exclusion. The poor health status of Roma is most often attributed to lower access to health services, financial barriers, trust and communication issues, low health literacy, bad housing conditions and less healthy lifestyle. Institute of Public Health (especially the unit in Prekmurje) has implemented health promotion activities in the Roma community throughout Slovenia since 2014. Projects on raising competences of health

professionals and civil servants have been organised, as well as conferences on access to healthcare for Roma. Ministry of Health has been funding NGOs to implement health-educational workshops; the most recent public tender was focused on the health of Roma youth, women and children, and especially on reproductive health. Those are all welcome and necessary activities; however, they do not reach all Roma, they are not systematic and show a slow progress in increasing awareness of Roma about general health prevention and building their trust in institutions. One of the issues is also a complex medical language used by health care professionals, so NGOs have recommended that Roma assistant in the field of health care should be introduced.

## Education

Low access of Roma children to quality education affects their employment opportunities, housing conditions and health. Some of the most important issues in the area of access to education of Roma are low inclusion in preschool that would give Roma children a chance to learn the Slovenian language and acquire necessary skills and knowledge; bad housing conditions; and low awareness among some Roma parents about the importance of education. Education is the only field where Slovenia has a separate governmental strategy. Projects focusing on preschool education have been implemented, specifically inside Roma settlements where preschool and extra-curricular activities are organised in several multi-purpose centres throughout Slovenia. The concern is that those preschools do not encourage integration, and the problem remains the inclusion of Roma children into integrated kindergartens. Participation in education among Roma is still low, especially after primary education. There is an overall lack of data on school attendance, success rates and early drop-out of Roma children; however, it is clearly visible that it varies heavily among regions. One of the most successful measures was the introduction of Roma assistants in primary schools, which has contributed to addressing the challenge of school absenteeism and achieving better school performance. There is a lack of regular trainings of professionals working with Roma children. NGOs think that all measures for Roma integration, including in the field of education, should be systematic for all Roma settlements, not based on projects and limited only to biggest Roma settlements. NGOs also point out that the issue of early, forced and arranged marriages should be addressed more effectively by the state, since they effectively end the educational path of Roma girls.

## INTRODUCTION

This report aims to monitor the implementation of the national Roma integration strategy (NRIS) in Slovenia, as well other governmental policies, legislation, programmes and initiatives affecting Roma in the field of employment, housing, health care and education. It illustrates how the situation of Roma community in Slovenia is in general improving, but at a slow pace and with several challenges.

In the 2002 census only 3,246 Slovenian citizens declared themselves as Roma,<sup>1</sup> however by estimations between 7,000 and 12,000 Roma live in Slovenia, most of them in Prekmurje and in south-eastern parts of Slovenia, and some live as well in urban centres (Ljubljana, Maribor, Velenje, Celje). It is worth to note that Slovenia does not collect data disaggregated by ethnicity, therefore we face a lack of data on Roma in general, which prevents the drafting of more evidence-based policy making targeting the Roma community.

Problematic is also that existing legislation providing for special rights of the Roma (e.g. Roma Community Act) does not ensure equal treatment of all Roma communities living in Slovenia – it includes a distinction between “autochthonous” (i.e. traditionally settled Roma communities living in 20 municipalities in Prekmurje and south-eastern Slovenia) and “non-autochthonous” (i.e. immigrant or “newcomer”) Roma, including Sinti community and urban Roma community originating from former Yugoslav republics. This distinction was criticised by Council of Europe, UN bodies and Slovenian constitutional court.

The National Programme of Measures for Roma of the Government of Republic of Slovenia for the period 2017-2021 includes measures in employment, housing, healthcare and education, as well in promoting Roma culture, language and identity and in fighting anti-Roma stereotypes and discrimination.<sup>2</sup> However, several activities, timeframes and budgets are undefined, and there is a lack of institutional coordination and inclusion of Roma community in implementation.

This report was written by the author as an independent researcher in consultation with Roma and human rights NGOs, institutions and experts. Methods of data collection included desk research (existing studies and other publicly available data) and the report was consulted with the NGO EPEKA that produced the [first year Roma Civil Monitor report](#), as well as with an expert on Roma issues from a Slovenian human rights organisation. Interviews in person were conducted with the president of Roma Union of Slovenia, representative of Romani Union Association Murska Sobota, and the president of the Roma Councillors Forum. Conclusions from those interviews have been integrated in the report. As mentioned already, author faced limitations in data collection due to the fact that Slovenia does not allow for collecting ethnically disaggregated data.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.stat.si/popis2002/en/rezultati/rezultati\\_red.asp?ter=SLO&st=7](http://www.stat.si/popis2002/en/rezultati/rezultati_red.asp?ter=SLO&st=7)

<sup>2</sup> Government of the Republic of Slovenia. 2017. *National Programme of Measures for Roma for the period 2017-2021*. Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/NPUR\\_2017\\_2021.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/NPUR_2017_2021.pdf)

## EMPLOYMENT

There is a very high level of unemployment of Roma in Slovenia, estimated between 90 and 98 per cent. Official number in the record of unemployed persons is on average 2,400 unemployed Roma (e.g. 2,547 in 2016 and 2,486 in 2017),<sup>3</sup> which means around 2 per cent of the total number of unemployed persons. However, we can consider this an underestimation since it only accounts for those individuals who register themselves as unemployed in order to participate in employment plans. The Employment Service of Slovenia (ESS) does not collect data on Roma separately in the record of unemployed persons, since there is no legal basis for the collection of data on ethnicity. Only those Roma who identify themselves as Roma in the process of creation of the employment plan or in any other processes at the ESS, are recorded in the record of the unemployed persons.

Reasons for extremely high unemployment rate among Roma in Slovenia can be attributed largely to low educational level, but also to prejudices of employers and discrimination in employment, and motivation of Roma themselves (due to social assistance system). Roma are mainly employed as unskilled workers, either during seasonal work or for a limited period of time. Some are also employed abroad or participate in informal employment (e.g. herbs or mushroom picking, collecting scrap metal etc.).

Since Roma population is concentrated in particular in Prekmurje and Dolenjska regions, high unemployment level becomes also a regional problem. The educational structure of Roma is very low: the 2003 survey by the Employment Service of Slovenia revealed that 98.2 per cent of the unemployed Roma in Dolenjska and 90 per cent in Prekmurje have not completed primary education.<sup>4</sup> To our knowledge more recent studies or surveys were not conducted. In September 2018, 2,467 Roma overall in Slovenia were registered as unemployed, 58 per cent of them with unfinished primary school, 32 per cent with finished primary education, 5 per cent with lower vocational, 4 per cent with secondary vocational, 1 per cent secondary professional or general education and 0.08 per cent with higher education.<sup>5</sup>

Social assistance can act as a disincentive for employment in spite of strict conditions for obtaining and retaining the cash benefit (regular visits to the Employment Office, active employment seeking, etc.). The total of social benefits frequently exceeds the amount that the Roma could earn in the labour market.<sup>6</sup> Certain types of social assistance that can be given to citizens of Slovenia are legally bound to the status of unemployment (registration with the ESS). Sometimes it happens that persons registered are not seeking for work but are only registered for the purpose of enforcing social rights.

### Improving access to labour market and effectiveness of employment services

Slovenian government promotes the employment of Roma within the framework of the applicable legislation<sup>7</sup> and strategic and program documents in this field, on the basis of

<sup>3</sup> Source: Employment Service of Slovenia.

<sup>4</sup> Government of the Republic of Slovenia. Office of Nationalities. 2010. *Report of the Republic of Slovenia on the Situation of Roma Community in Slovenia – the report on the implementation of Roma Community Act* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 44/2007)

<sup>5</sup> Employment Service of Slovenia

<sup>6</sup> Stropnik, Nada. 2011. *Promoting Social Inclusion of Roma. A Study of National Policies*. Institute of Economic Research, Ljubljana. Access: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=8985&langId=en>.

<sup>7</sup> Government of the Republic of Slovenia. Labor Market Regulation Act, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 80/10.

which Roma are recognised as one of vulnerable groups of the population, which is characterised by long-term unemployment. The overall goal in the field of employment in the National Programme of Measures 2017-2022 is to increase employment and to reduce unemployment of Roma, with emphasis on the employment activation of the long term unemployed and on removing the obstacles upon (re)entering the labour market. The only measure in this programme area is inclusion of Roma in the state measures on the labour market – active employment policy measures (AEP).<sup>8</sup> The rights and obligations of Roma are equalised to the rights and obligations of other citizens of the Republic of Slovenia in accordance with the regulations in the framework of employment, which are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Unemployed Roma, as well as all other unemployed persons, have the right and obligation to become involved in AEP measures to increase their employment opportunities. Before inclusion of unemployed Roma in individual programme or workshop, the job counsellor determines the feasibility of joining the AEP program, as for all other unemployed persons (e.g. personal, professional, work and other skills, possibilities for successful completion of the measure, realistic job opportunities after the completion of the measure, etc.). Priority in inclusion in AEP measures is given to persons receiving unemployment benefit or social security benefits, persons from vulnerable groups in the labour market (including the Roma) and unemployed persons who have not yet been included in any AEP measure.

Around 2,500 Roma are included annually in AEP measures, with a positive trend – in 2014, 2,433 Roma were included in various AEP measures, 2,546 Roma in 2016, and 3,264 Roma in 2017 (but we have to note here that 2,561 of those are visits of Career centres). AEP measures cost approximately 1.2 million EUR annually; and planned inclusion yearly until 2021 is remaining at around 2,500 Roma and 1.5 million EUR both from the state budget and from ESF (1,251,698 EUR was used in 2017, which is 83 per cent of planned costs, out of which 1,112,085 EUR was paid from the state budget and 139,613 EUR from ESF).

Since in Slovenia there are between 7,000 and 12,000 Roma, these numbers are extremely low. That was also the criticism in Council of Europe report in 2018.<sup>9</sup> They have also criticised a lack of an overall scheme to help Roma girls and women to move out of marginalisation (even though some projects targeted at empowerment of Roma girls and women have been put in place by civil society in the Prekmurje region and elsewhere).

Most Roma are involved in counselling procedures, and very few in AEP measures (less than one fifth of Roma registered as unemployed in 2017). Even if they are involved in AEP measures, very few then end up with the long-term employment.

We must also point out that within the AEP there is no specific programme intended exclusively for Roma, i.e., tailor made programme, except in the context of public works, in the framework of which a programme is being implemented for the management of Roma settlements and a programme aimed at helping Roma socialisation),<sup>10</sup> but for vulnerable groups in the labour market.

<sup>8</sup> Relevant strategic documents on this field are the *Catalogue of active employment policy measures*, *Guidelines for the implementation of active employment policy measures* and the *Plan for the implementation of active employment policy measures for a specific budget period*.

<sup>9</sup> Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. 2018. *Fourth Opinion on Slovenia*. Access: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-opinion-on-slovenia-adopted-on-21-june-2017/16807843c7>

<sup>10</sup> The catalogue of public works programmes, which defines the fields of implementation and the content of public works, regularly includes two programmes in which more employment of the Roma population can be expected, but it is not necessary that only Roma be employed there. The first programme is help in arranging Roma settlements where works can be carried out, including assistance in the organisation and maintenance of settlements, in the education of the proper way of collecting waste, collection of rainwater etc. The second programme is helping Roma socialisation, where works can be carried out which are intended for education and learning, organisation and implementation of leisure activities in settlements, in the elimination of

Experience of civil society is that a considerable share of Roma living close to the Austrian border has already moved to work there. Wages are much better, and nobody cares if they are Roma or non-Roma, as opposed to Slovenian employers. They also noted that having low education level and qualifications, Roma can only get the lowest paid jobs and the wage does not bring them much more than financial social assistance for unemployed. In many cases a person needs a car, uniform, etc. to perform a job which means additional costs.

Some additional programmes financed by Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MLFSAEO) in 2015 were "*Romano kher – Roma House*" whose goal was to support Roma, improve their self-image and equip them with the necessary knowledge to successfully enter the labour market. The profile of the so-called employment agent was created, providing Roma with the information needed to enter the labour market, helping to find potential employers, and at the same time allowing employers to come into contact with this target group. Workshops were conducted for training of Roma councillors, since they are representing the interests of the Roma and cooperation at political level is of key importance for equal opportunities in the labour market. Unfortunately, this project finished, and the opinion of NGOs is that no real impact is visible, judging by the number of long-term employed Roma and the fact that the training and support of Roma councillors is not well organised.

In the field of the promotion of social entrepreneurship the following three projects implemented by NGOs were supported by the MLFSAEO: "*Development of tourism on the Korenika eco-social farm project*"; "*Development of social market products in agriculture*" and "*Roma restaurant – Romani kafenava*". The later was considered the most interesting project, as it was a pilot project, with a goal to establish an example of a Roma restaurant in Maribor, and also to extend it to the national, Balkan and European levels as an example of best practices.<sup>11</sup> One project that did not succeed as planned was *Roma Employment Center*, established in 2006. The centre had to be closed in 2016 since not one Roma was employed as a result.<sup>12</sup>

## Fight against discrimination in employment and antigypsyism at workplace

Employment discrimination, prejudice of employers and as well of general public is widespread – the 2017 public opinion poll by the Advocate of the Principle of Equality showed that only 44 per cent of respondents would employ a Roma man or woman in their own company, while 48 per cent of respondents consider that most of Roma live on social assistance and do not want to work.<sup>13</sup> In the NGOs' experience, some discriminatory practices in employment include not calling for job interview persons with specific surnames that are typical for Roma, or from certain areas with addresses where predominantly Roma live. In one the few surveys on this subject, carried out in 2006 in the areas of Dolenjska, Bela krajina, Kočevje, Posavje and Grosuplje, 31 per cent of Roma

linguistic barriers, in establishing dialogue, involving young people and adults in educational programs, connecting with the environment, managing living and infrastructure conditions in settlements, monitoring (access) to official institutions, integrating into the local environment, encouraging a healthy lifestyle, and so forth.

<sup>11</sup> The project of the Roma restaurant was multidimensional, as it influenced the preservation of Roma culture (art, cuisine, the style of Roma decoration, language, etc.), the motivation and integration of the Roma into society and the working environment, the dissemination of knowledge among Roma and encouraging learning between members of the Roma community. The project also contributed to reducing prejudice and stereotypes about Roma among the majority population, connecting the local community and promoting intercultural dialogue and coexistence.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.delo.si/novice/slovenija/neslaven-konec-zavoda-za-zaposlitev-romov.html>

<sup>13</sup> 2017 report of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality. Access : <http://www.zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Poro%C4%8Dilo-2017-.pdf>

respondents stated poor education as a reason for unemployment, 3 per cent professional qualifications, 28 per cent Roma origin and 2 per cent Roma surname.<sup>14</sup>

ECRI reports that legislation in the field of employment provides good protection against discrimination, including racial discrimination, as well as compensation possibilities.<sup>15</sup> However, there continues to be only a very small number of complaints invoking discrimination,<sup>16</sup> so ECRI recommends authorities to inform members of minority groups of the possibility of filing complaints and boost their confidence in the utility of doing so.

### Employment alternatives in areas with limited primary labour market demand

As mentioned above, one of the AEP measures is the public works scheme (under "creation of jobs" sub-measure). Among the vulnerable target groups that can be employed for public works for more than a year, the AEP catalogue also includes Roma, and that was outlined as a positive practice by NGOs working in the field. The rules on the selection and co-financing of public works programmes provide some benefits when the Roma are involved in public works: the Employment Service of Slovenia will provide 95 per cent of the wage of participants in programmes of public works intended for work with the Roma population which will include at least half of the long-term unemployed Roma. It should be noted at this point that the public interest must be shown in order to carry out public works and that only non-profit employers can apply.<sup>17</sup>

ECRI notes that the employment projects outlined in the programme are not exclusively for Roma, but for "vulnerable groups in the labour market".<sup>18</sup> Dissatisfaction has been expressed about this, along with allegations of misuse of funding, namely that funds earmarked for the benefit Roma have been used to assist other disadvantaged communities as well. The authorities have stated that this happens because data on ethnic origin cannot be collected or recorded; therefore, there is no way to ensure that mainly Roma benefit from the measures.

Roma are employed virtually exclusively through job creation through public works, which is temporary employment and paid according to the educational level (for the first level of education only 80 per cent of the minimum wage).<sup>19</sup> Usually there is no transition to

<sup>14</sup> Peace Institute. 2018. *Annual evaluation of the implementation of the National Programme of Measures of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Roma for the period 2017-2021. Final Interim Evaluation Report (the period from the adoption of the document on 25 May 2017 to 1 June 2018)*. Peace Institute, Ljubljana, November 2018. Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija\\_NPUR\\_17-21\\_MI1.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija_NPUR_17-21_MI1.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). 2014. *Report on Slovenia*. Access: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-report-on-slovenia/16808b5c38>

<sup>16</sup> Based on ECRI report, "from 2006 to 2010, the Labour Inspectorate registered only 45 complaints relating to discrimination on any ground. According to the authorities most cases concerned gender and age discrimination and there were seldom cases based on 'race' or ethnic origin. The reason given for the low numbers was either that employees were afraid to report for fear of retaliation, although this is prohibited by law, or that they were unaware that they had suffered discrimination."

<sup>17</sup> Peace Institute. 2018. *Annual evaluation of the implementation of the National Programme of Measures of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Roma for the period 2017-2021. Final Interim Evaluation Report (the period from the adoption of the document on 25 May 2017 to 1 June 2018)*. Peace Institute, Ljubljana, November 2018. Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija\\_NPUR\\_17-21\\_MI1.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija_NPUR_17-21_MI1.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). 2014. *Report on Slovenia*. Access: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-report-on-slovenia/16808b5c38>

<sup>19</sup> Peace Institute. 2018. *Annual evaluation of the implementation of the National Programme of Measures of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Roma for the period 2017-2021. Final Interim Evaluation Report (the period from the adoption of the document on 25 May 2017 to 1 June 2018)*. Peace Institute, Ljubljana, November 2018. Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija\\_NPUR\\_17-21\\_MI1.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija_NPUR_17-21_MI1.pdf)

employment from AEP programmes, so the effectiveness of these measures can be considered insufficient. Employers use two years of the 95 per cent government funding to employ a Roma person under the public works scheme, and after 2 years they do not employ the person, but rather find a new unemployed Roma for the next two years and get the new funding from the state. NGOs experience is also that often non-Roma are employed in public works to help Roma in socialisation. This year NGOs are facing a decreased number of offered public works in Roma organisations.

## HOUSING AND ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES

### Addressing Roma's needs in spatial planning and access to basic amenities

Roma in Slovenia are most severely excluded in the field of housing. This means further exclusion in the fields of employment, education and health, making Roma even more affected by poverty and marginalisation. Several international organizations (UN Independent Expert on Human Rights to Access to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation, Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe,<sup>20</sup> ECRI,<sup>21</sup> Special Rapporteur on minority issues), non-governmental organizations (Amnesty International<sup>22</sup>) and the Ombudsman<sup>23</sup> have confirmed this statement.

There was some progress achieved in the recent years, for example legalisation of some Roma settlements as well as improvements to the communal infrastructure. However, even the government acknowledges that most Roma continue to live in settlements isolated from the rest of society in conditions well below the minimum standard of living, especially in the south-eastern area of Slovenia. Roma frequently live in makeshift wooden huts or trailers, usually set up illegally on state-owned or private land. Public utility facilities are inadequate or non-existent; there is a lack of access to a safe water supply in or near some settlements. Some 20 to 30 per cent of Roma settlements in South-East Slovenia do not have access to water, and 40 per cent do not have access to electricity.<sup>24</sup> ECRI,<sup>25</sup> Council of Europe<sup>26</sup> and Amnesty International Slovenia<sup>27</sup> all report on inadequate living conditions in informal settlements without access to basic infrastructure, as well as tenure insecurity.

One of the most serious issues is the lack of access to a safe water supply in or near some settlements. One example is Dobruška vas settlement where inhabitants must draw water from a polluted stream, which was criticised also by the Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe after the March 2017 visit.<sup>28</sup> Another example is Goriča Vas in Ribnica without water supply, electricity or sewage; and even though President of Republic of Slovenia called the mayor to provide water to the settlement, nothing happened. Two cases concerning access of Roma to basic infrastructure, including water, are pending

<sup>20</sup> The Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Press Release on Slovenia, 2017. Access: <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&id=2455503&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE&direct=true>.

<sup>21</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). 2014. *Report on Slovenia*. Access: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-report-on-slovenia/16808b5c38>

<sup>22</sup> Amnesty International. 2011. *Parallel lives: Roma denied rights to housing and water in Slovenia*. Access: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/32000/eur680052011en.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Ombudsman report for 2018. Access: [http://www.varuh-rs.si/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdf/lp/LP\\_2018.pdf](http://www.varuh-rs.si/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/lp/LP_2018.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Amnesty International Slovenia. 2015. *Strategija za Rome*. Access: <https://www.amnesty.si/romska-strategija>

<sup>25</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). 2014. *Report on Slovenia*. Access: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-report-on-slovenia/16808b5c38>

<sup>26</sup> Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. 2018. *Fourth Opinion on Slovenia*. Access: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-opinion-on-slovenia-adopted-on-21-june-2017/16807843c7>

<sup>27</sup> Amnesty International. 2011. *Parallel lives: Roma denied rights to housing and water in Slovenia*. Access : <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/32000/eur680052011en.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> The Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Press Release on Slovenia, 2017. Access: <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&id=2455503&Site=DC&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE&direct=true>.

before the European Court of Human Rights (Hudorovič v. Slovenia, Application No. 24816/14 and Novak v. Slovenia Application No. 25140/14).

The Law on Local Self-Government and the Spatial Planning Act state that municipalities are responsible for spatial planning at the local level, including the regulation of Roma settlements. The implementation of measures to improve the situation in Roma settlements therefore depends on the political will of each municipality. Local authorities seem to be often uncooperative. And, as Council of Europe reports: *"the central authorities, in turn, appear reluctant to intervene in a manner conducive to achieving results, thereby slowing down the process of identifying appropriate solutions and contributing to the status quo. Notwithstanding the authorities' awareness of the need to amend the 2007 Roma Community Act, there have so far been few concrete attempts to accomplish this."*<sup>29</sup> However, even the existing legal framework (Article 5 of the Roma Community Act) would provide the central authorities with the power to intervene when municipalities do not.<sup>30</sup> Also NGOs report that cooperation between local and national level is very weak and that there is a lot of shifting of responsibility present.

The overall goal in the field of housing in the National Programme of Measures 2017-2021 is to improve the housing situation of Roma, to speed up the arrangement of settlements with majority Roma population, to provide access to public goods, such as access to water and electricity, in accordance with national legal requirements and to encourage the elimination of actual spatial segregation, resulting from the historic settlement of Roma and longer exclusion from social life. There are several measures listed in the program, however it seems that the most important measure was establishment of an Interdepartmental Working Group (IWG) for Resolving Spatial Issues of the Roma. Its work was to improve living conditions in Roma settlements, with the following tasks: preparing a survey of the status of spatial problems by individual Roma settlements in Slovenia; preparing a review and analysis of good practices in spatial planning and housing conditions of Roma; preparing a proposal for measures (legislative, organisational, financial, etc.) for the regulation of spatial issues and the improvement of the living conditions of the Roma.<sup>31</sup> IWG also updated the existing data on locations and situation in Roma settlements. Other main developments, apart from establishing the IWG, include: 1) draft recommendations were prepared for the municipalities where Roma live to address the recorded existing Roma settlements in the process of preparing municipal spatial plans or amendments, 2) enactment of the new Construction Law that brings various legal mechanisms for the legalisation of existing buildings. NGOs view is that measures in the field of housing of the National Programme of Measures 2017-2021 are just words, without specific goals, measurability, activities specified, without budget or timeframe. Similar conclusions were reported by Peace Institute in its 2018 annual evaluation of the implementation of the National Programme of Measures 2017-2021.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. 2018. Fourth Opinion on Slovenia. Access: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-opinion-on-slovenia-adopted-on-21-june-2017/16807843c7>

<sup>30</sup> As it happened in the case of the provision by the central authorities of a temporary solution for access to water (a plastic tank) in the settlement in the Škocjan municipality, following a recommendation by the ombudsperson. However, the solution proved ineffective because water froze in winter and heated up in summer.

<sup>31</sup> Government of the Republic of Slovenia. 2018. *Fifth report of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia on the position of Roma community in Slovenia - report on the fulfilment of obligations under the Roma Community Act in the Republic of Slovenia* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 33/07). Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Peto\\_porocilo\\_Romi.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Peto_porocilo_Romi.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Peace Institute. 2018. *Annual evaluation of the implementation of the National Programme of Measures of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Roma for the period 2017-2021. Final Interim Evaluation Report (the period from the adoption of the document on 25 May 2017 to 1 June 2018)*. Peace Institute, Ljubljana, November 2018. Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija\\_NPUR\\_17-21\\_MI1.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija_NPUR_17-21_MI1.pdf)

## Improving access to secure and affordable housing

In December 2015 a new Resolution on the National Housing Program 2015-2025 was adopted, the main objectives of which are increased affordability and better accessibility of housing for vulnerable groups. Section 4.2 of the new resolution states that the right to housing is one of the fundamental human rights. It talks about housing units for most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, as a temporary solution that provides quality housing and represents a minimal financial burden for its users.<sup>33</sup>

The Housing Act stipulates that Slovenian citizens and EU nationals with permanent residence status whose income does not exceed a certain percentage of the average salary in Slovenia are entitled to apply for the non-profit rented apartments and housing units.<sup>34</sup> Providing non-profit rental apartments is under the jurisdiction of the municipalities that are obliged to carry out a public tender for the allocation of these apartments. Special support to Roma to apply for such tenders was not foreseen.<sup>35</sup> Individuals or families renting non-profit housing are entitled to additional subsidy of the rent if their income is under a specified level. Amnesty International writes in its report *Parallel lives: Roma denied rights to housing and water in Slovenia*<sup>36</sup>, that given the widespread poverty amongst Roma many of them would qualify for this assistance but face difficulties due to shortages in terms of non-profit housing (many smaller municipalities rarely issue public calls). Municipalities can also decide which groups and criteria they prioritize for allocation of housing, even if this excludes the most disadvantaged groups such as the Roma.<sup>37</sup>

In some municipalities where the Roma live, municipalities have endeavoured to provide Roma families with access to apartments outside Roma settlements, but none of the municipalities where Roma live, have so far applied for co-financing under the Co-financing Programme for the provision of public rental apartments in 2016 until 2020, under the responsibility of the Housing Fund of the Republic of Slovenia (HFRS).<sup>38</sup>

## Effectiveness of housing benefits and social assistance to access and maintain housing

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Housing Act enables the allocation of non-profit apartments (Article 87) to individuals with the most difficult social problems as a permanent form of resolving housing and social conditions, and the allocation of housing units (Article 88) as a temporary form of resolving housing and social conditions.

<sup>35</sup> Government of the Republic of Slovenia. 2018. *Fifth report of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia on the position of Roma community in Slovenia - report on the fulfilment of obligations under the Roma Community Act in the Republic of Slovenia* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 33/07). Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Peto\\_porocilo\\_Romi.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Peto_porocilo_Romi.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Amnesty International. 2011. *Parallel lives: Roma denied rights to housing and water in Slovenia*. Access : <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/32000/eur680052011en.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Example of this is described in the Amnesty International 2011 report: the case of the public call to apply for non-profit rented housing issued in Novo mesto in 2007: 'Rather than prioritizing the most disadvantaged groups, the municipality's ranking criteria gave significant advantage to those permanently employed and those with higher education. The ranking system awarded the following points to existing priority categories: 50 points for young families, 50 points for families with more than three children, 50-70 points for persons with disabilities, 50 points for families where only one or no family members is employed, 50 points for victims of domestic violence, 50 points for victims of war, and 150 points for applicants with longer length of employment (13 years for men, 12 years for women). However, two categories with high points were introduced as priority criteria: higher education with 70 – 85 points and regular employment in the last six months with 130-150 points. These two criteria particularly disadvantage Romani individuals who, as discussed earlier, largely lack higher education and regular employment.'

<sup>38</sup> Government of the Republic of Slovenia. 2018. *Fifth report of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia on the position of Roma community in Slovenia - report on the fulfilment of obligations under the Roma Community Act in the Republic of Slovenia* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 33/07). Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Peto\\_porocilo\\_Romi.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Peto_porocilo_Romi.pdf)

If there is no public call to apply for non-profit housing in the municipality of permanent residence for more than a year, the resident can also apply for a subsidy to the rental fee if he/she is renting at market prices and would meet the criteria for non-profit housing. However, this system does not offer the same subsidy as when renting non-profit housing accessed through public calls.<sup>39</sup> Even though there are severe limitations of available non-profit housing in many municipalities, this subsidy would be the only possibility for subsidised housing for Roma. However, in smaller municipalities with a scarce rental market this poses a problem for Roma due to the discrimination. Amnesty International writes in 2011 report that only around 300 people applied for this subsidy in 2009, therefore we can conclude that many people are not aware of this possibility.

NGOs report about the discrimination in case of social assistance for heating costs for Roma. Centres of Social Work have allegedly turned down Roma when applying for this benefit, stating that they already received enough other benefits.<sup>40</sup>

### Fight against discrimination, residential segregation and other forms of antigypsyism in housing

There are reports of a legalisation of 55 per cent out of 130 Roma settlements by the end of 2013,<sup>41</sup> however, NGO representatives claim that many of those "legalised" Roma settlements still have illegal parts.

Some Roma settlements were established in industrial zones that cannot be transformed into residential areas, so they may face potential relocation on which some have not been informed or consulted with. Threat of forced eviction is present for many Roma, e.g. in Loke settlement in Krško municipality.<sup>42</sup> In 2009 and 2010 Amnesty International identified several cases where evictions from Roma settlement land were planned or appeared likely to happen. These include settlements Trata pri betonarni, Mestni log, Loke and Dobruška vas. Amnesty International's research indicated that no consultation was taking place with affected communities.

Widespread discrimination often prevents Roma families from buying or renting accommodation. NGOs experience that some Roma want to move out of the settlements, but then non-Roma do not accept them as their neighbours. Amnesty International received reports of citizens refusing to sell to Roma individuals from Roma and municipal authorities in Grosuplje, Krško, Novo mesto, Ribnica, Semič, Šentjernej and Škocjan municipalities. A representative of Krško municipality told Amnesty International: "*If people in the village found out that Roma were attempting to buy a property, someone else would buy it just so that Roma couldn't.*"<sup>43</sup>

### Improving housing conditions and regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods

Many municipalities have already completed improvements to the communal infrastructure. Financial incentives were provided through public tenders (national funding) for municipalities where Roma live. Public tenders in this area are prepared and implemented by the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology (MEDT). The last public tender for the co-financing of basic municipal infrastructure projects in Roma

<sup>39</sup> Amnesty International. 2011. *Parallel lives: Roma denied rights to housing and water in Slovenia*. Access: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/32000/eur680052011en.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Interview with a Roma NGO representative in Murska Sobota, February 2019.

<sup>41</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). 2014. *Report on Slovenia*. Access: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-report-on-slovenia/16808b5c38>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.dnevnik.si/1042733442>

<sup>43</sup> Amnesty International. 2011. *Parallel lives: Roma denied rights to housing and water in Slovenia*. Access: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/32000/eur680052011en.pdf>.

settlements in 2016 and 2017 was announced in 2016. The purpose of the call was the construction of basic municipal infrastructure in Roma settlements. Tender was for total of 2,000,000 EUR (1,000,000 EUR for 2016 and 1,000,000 EUR for 2017). In total, 11 projects were co-financed: in seven Roma settlements faecal or meteoric sewage was constructed, in two Roma settlements plumbing was constructed, in one Roma settlement public lighting was provided, in three Roma settlements new roads or pavements were constructed, in one municipality the land was purchased for the rounding of the Roma settlement.<sup>44</sup>

MEDT and the Development Council of the South Eastern Slovenia Development Region signed a South-eastern Slovenia Development Partnership Agreement in November 2017, with the agreement on the implementation and financing of the spatial-planning arrangement of the Roma settlement Žabjak-Brezje, which is the project of the Novo mesto municipality. The project is currently being implemented and will be completed in 2020. The value of the project is 3.65 million EUR, with the state contributing 3.1 million EUR. Other tender activities regarding the regulation of municipal infrastructure in Roma settlements MEDT were not implemented since 1 January 2017.<sup>45</sup>

NGOs claim that this project was one of the best projects lately in the field of housing, however, that consequently other municipalities cannot receive funds.

NGOs criticise that public tenders so far did not allow for displacement of illegal settlements – as an example they provide the refusal of the application by the Krsko municipality to the public tender 2016-2017 to finance the purchase of land for Roma family, because the land was outside of the Roma settlement.

<sup>44</sup> Government of the Republic of Slovenia. 2018. *Fifth report of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia on the position of Roma community in Slovenia - report on the fulfilment of obligations under the Roma Community Act in the Republic of Slovenia* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 33/07). Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Peto\\_porocilo\\_Romi.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Peto_porocilo_Romi.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> Peace Institute. 2018. *Annual evaluation of the implementation of the National Programme of Measures of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Roma for the period 2017-2021. Final Interim Evaluation Report (the period from the adoption of the document on 25 May 2017 to 1 June 2018)*. Peace Institute, Ljubljana, November 2018. Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija\\_NPUR\\_17-21\\_MI1.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija_NPUR_17-21_MI1.pdf)

## IMPACT OF HEALTH CARE POLICIES ON ROMA

### Ensuring equal access to public health care services

Roma have the same right to healthcare as other citizens, but sometimes they do not or cannot exercise these rights. Roma are not aware of their rights, there are systematic measures missing for awareness raising about right to healthcare services. The condition for the right to health care is having a compulsory health insurance. Important share of the Roma who are unemployed are included in the compulsory health insurance as a person without payment, which means that their contributions for compulsory health insurance are paid from state funds. As for the voluntary health insurance, the amendment to the Health Care and Health Insurance Act of 2008 provides for the socially most deprived individuals and their families who are not covered by fully secured health insurance entitlements – if they fulfil the conditions for obtaining financial social assistance, from 1 January 2009, they can exercise the right to payment of the difference to the full value of health services, provided by the Budget of the Republic of Slovenia.

The frequent social exclusion of Roma and the absence of supportive social networks are often also conditioned by exclusion from health care systems and deepening of an unhealthy lifestyle. The poor health status is most often attributed to less adequate health care, financial barriers to the use of health services and non-financial barriers to the use of health services (psychological (e.g. trust issues) and social factors). To this we should add the health threatening lifestyle due to housing conditions and life in an unstable environment, exposed to unpredictable factors. Therefore, along the particularities of Roma culture and tradition, health of Roma communities depends on improving housing and living conditions, hygiene, education, employment and greater social security.

The results of the research "*Risk factors for non-communicable diseases in adult Roma populations*"<sup>46</sup> done by the Institute of Public Health Murska Sobota in 2005-2006 confirmed the assumptions about some of the characteristics of the Roma community: low educational structure, high unemployment rate, poor socioeconomic situation, insufficient participation in preventive programmes and the presence of chronic diseases all contribute to inequalities in the health of Roma. The study showed poorer health results, less healthy lifestyle and worse self-evaluation of health of the Roma population in Slovenia. The following priority public health problems stand out: low health literacy and awareness, insufficient use of services aimed at health promotion and disease prevention, lower access to health services (geographical, financial, social) and communication problems with health professionals. There are also unsuitable living conditions in many Roma settlements, which consequently prevent equal participation in society and negatively affect health. The study of the health-related lifestyle of the Roma in Pomurje showed that it is highly unhealthy (unhealthy diet, insufficient physical activity, smoking, alcohol consumption, stress). The data obtained in this study also showed that the Roma most commonly suffer from respiratory, gastrointestinal, circulatory, nervous and sensory diseases. Roma for various reasons come for medical care only when their health condition is so bad that others must bring them there, or when they come themselves for emergency relief.

The overall goal in the field of health care in the National Programme of Measures 2017-2021 is to improve the health care services, to bring them closer to Roma and to

<sup>46</sup> Institute of Public Health Murska Sobota. 2015. *Health Related Lifestyle of Roma – Contribution to Reducing Inequalities in Health. Report about the 2005-2006 research on "Risk Factors for Non-Communicable Diseases in Adult Residents of the Roma Community"*. Access: [http://rak-ms.si/media/publikacije/ZZV\\_zivljenski\\_slog\\_romov\\_SLO\\_TISK\\_zmajnsano.pdf](http://rak-ms.si/media/publikacije/ZZV_zivljenski_slog_romov_SLO_TISK_zmajnsano.pdf)

improve their awareness on the issues relating to health and health care, particularly emphasizing the health of women and children. The program lists two measures:

- 1) Proliferation of health thematic areas, programmes, workshops, trainings and transfer of best practices intended for Roma in the communities where they live; education and awareness raising of the specialised public and medical staff about Roma and health; implementation of research and evaluations.
- 2) Improvement of health workers' competences, integration and strengthening of the cooperation between health workers and the Roma assistants and promotion of healthy lifestyle among the Roma population.

The aims of improving the health status of Roma community as one of the vulnerable groups of the population are in line with the guidelines of the *Resolution on the National Health Care Plan 2016-2025 "Together for a Healthy Society"*<sup>47</sup>. This is the central strategic document of the Republic of Slovenia, which is the basis for the development of health care in Slovenia in the next ten years. It maintains a vision of quality and accessible public health, places it at the heart of the user and the provider, and strives for better health and well-being for all, advocates reducing health inequalities, optimizing healthcare in terms of access to the same quality and safe care, and the success of the health system with greater justice and the preservation of solidarity.

Article 7 of the Health Care and Health Insurance Act states that the Republic of Slovenia provides funds from the budget for: studying and monitoring the health status of the population; activities of humanitarian, disability, professional and other societies and organizations, in accordance with the definitions in the healthcare plan.

The Ministry of Health (MH) implements measures to improve the health care of Roma, and the National Institute of Public Health (NIPH) takes care of the regular implementation of measures in the areas where the Roma live. In the past period, the measures were assessed annually on the basis of the organization of national annual conferences on reducing inequalities in the health of the Roma population, the health of Roma women and the health of Roma children, programmes for the promotion of health among Roma, improving the immunisation, speeding up of searching for assistance in healthcare activities, taking into account the instructions of health professionals and the organization of workshops with a focus on health in Roma settlements.

Since 2014, the Institute of Public Health in Murska Sobota continuously cooperated and implemented health promotion activities in the Roma community, and have established good mutual cooperation with Roma communities. The health promotion team includes a Roma representative employed at the Institute. They obtained and evaluated qualitative data on health needs and are developing a programme for promoting a healthy lifestyle in the Roma community. They have prepared, in cooperation with the Flemish Institute for Health Promotion, within the co-operation programme between Flanders and the Candidate Member States of Central and Eastern Europe, the *"Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan for Tackling Health Inequalities in the Pomurje Region"*.<sup>48</sup> Although the

<sup>47</sup> Government of the Republic of Slovenia. 2016. Resolution on the National Health Care Plan 2016-2025 "Together for a Healthy Society". Official Gazette RS, No. 25/16; ResNPZV. Access: <https://www.uradni-list.si/glasilo-uradni-list-rs/vsebina/2016-01-0999?sop=2016-01-0999>

<sup>48</sup> The overall objective of this strategic plan is to improve the health status of the regional population, thereby reducing health disparities between regions, and on the other hand, the plan also addresses inequalities in health within the region. With the help of a health promotion programme that focuses primarily on individuals and vulnerable groups of the population, it seeks to influence health inequality. The strategy is based on an analysis of the current situation and on the priorities of the region. The Strategy is included in the Regional Development Programme (RDP). As a target group, the strategy also defines the Roma. The aim of 4.8, which encourages the development of a healthier lifestyle for minorities and ethnic groups, lists four specific objectives: 1) mobilising Roma community on health issues through empowerment approach activities,

plan is specifically designed for the Pomurje region, it can serve as an initiative and as an example of using the strategic planning approach for setting priorities, designing strategies and objectives for the development of measures to reduce inequalities in the health of vulnerable groups of the population, including the Roma population.

In 2013, the MH published a public tender for the co-financing of health care programmes and improvements for 2013 and 2014, and a public tender for co-financing assistance, counselling and care programmes for persons without compulsory health insurance for the period 2013-2014 and 2015-2016. Roma associations have been successful in the tendering process and independently carry out some activities for the protection and improvement of health in Roma communities.

In 2015 the MH funded the project of the Romani Union Association, which acquired the status of a humanitarian organisation, in the framework of which workshops were held for Roma, focusing on health and assistance of older Roma. In practice, the workshops were attended by all Roma from Roma settlements where activities were held. The objectives of the project were: raising awareness and improving the communication skills of health professionals working with Roma; providing information to the Roma population and increasing their awareness in the field of health; providing Roma population with adequate information on the possibilities and use of preventive and curative health services; developing appropriate approaches and programmes with special care for Roma culture to promote a healthy lifestyle, the importance of health and awareness in this area in the areas where Roma live; eliminating discrimination and stigmatisation of the Roma population; promoting the exchange of good practices in the environment where the Roma live. Every series of workshops was prepared and carried out at three different locations in Slovenia, where the Roma live (Prekmurje, Styria and Dolenjska) – workshops were held in Roma settlements on public places or directly in the homes of the Roma, and were very practical. The project was implemented by healthcare programme providers and health workers who were Roma and non-Roma. It is estimated that the project benefited about 300 Roma. However, NGOs criticise the fact that for example health centres in Dolenjska region are not involved in organisation and delivery of those workshops – instead of supporting a network of local health centres to go to Roma settlements (as a systematic measure, not a project activity), “they give money to the main Roma organisation and claim that everything is regulated in this area.”<sup>49</sup>

In November 2015, an all-day professional conference was held on the topic of “Roma women – from childhood to parenthood” organised by the Ministry of Health and the Union of Roma of Slovenia, focusing on the reproductive health of Roma women, pregnancy and family planning, work with mothers and children and activities for Romani girls. The conference presented the conclusions of a study on forced marriage of Roma girls and some personal experiences of members of the Roma community on this issue.

In October 2016, a national conference on the topic “Socio-economic determinants of the health of the Roma” was held in Brdo pri Kranju, organised by the NIPH in cooperation with the Union of Roma of Slovenia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the event, participants discussed various aspects that affect the health of Roma people and their healthy lifestyle, obstacles, as well as experiences and examples of good practices.

In November 2017, in Novo mesto, organised by the NIPH, a professional meeting was held on the topic “Access to the health system for members of the Roma ethnic community”, where experts were presented the most pressing health problems and health situation in Roma communities, rights Roma from compulsory health insurance, access to

2) identifying the health needs of Roma communities, 3) increasing the level of culturally appropriate health promotion for Roma communities and 4) increasing utilisation of preventive health care services by Roma communities.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with an NGO expert on Roma inclusion in Slovenia.

primary health care services as a challenge for healthcare professionals and further needs, as well as empowerment for health protection and enhancement. On the side of the Union of Roma of Slovenia, challenges were presented for the members of the Roma community regarding access to health services.

NGOs are critical of the impact the conferences have – they think that those are organised in vain, but Roma are left alone in their settlements. They give an example of Grosuplje, where there are no check-ups of Roma children in the settlements done by local health centres, so then schools are left to deal with this issue, with the voluntary help of NGO representatives and Roma councillors.

The project, which was implemented by the Kočevje People's University and its partners from February 2015 to April 2016, was especially important for the territory of the South-Eastern Slovenia, especially Novo mesto and Kočevje. The project was co-financed by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014 and was called "*Cooperation for Roma Health (SORO)*". Partners in the project were also the Municipality of Novo mesto, the Municipality of Kočevje and the health facilities in this area. The main objective of the project was to develop and test programmes for vulnerable groups of Roma in order to reduce the gap and health inequalities between Roma and the general population. To this end, the following activities were carried out: training programmes for health professionals and the professional public; presentation of the healthcare and health insurance system; healthy food workshops; health care programme for preschool Roma children; promoting a healthy lifestyle in order to prevent different types of addiction. Target groups of the project were vulnerable Roma, as well as healthcare professionals and professionals working with Roma. During the project, among other things, a health care program has been developed in Roma settlements, whereby in the future Roma will be provided with health services and preventive activities. The purpose of the project was to improve the communication of civil servants working with Roma and to coordinate and strengthen interinstitutional cooperation.

In the last six years, the Institute of Public Health in Murska Sobota has implemented a health promotion programme within the Roma community, called "*Khetaun ži sastipe – Together for Health*", in the form of weekly radio programmes broadcast on the Roma Radio ROMIC and whose goal is to strengthen the health of Roma in the community.

In 2016, health-educational workshops financed by the MH and carried out by the Romani Union Association from Murska Sobota in cooperation with health professionals took place. The workshops started in May 2016 and ended in September 2016. During this period, professional teams (nurses, nurses-carers, experts in the field of nutrition (food technologists), pharmacists and others) visited 12 Roma settlements all over Slovenia. Based on the workshops conducted, it was found that more incentives should be devoted to when Roma are invited to health facilities (attitude to vaccination, antibiotics, developmental problems of children, mental health care). From the conversations, it was felt that the Roma's distrust of the medical staff was increasing because they often feel discriminated against. The most vulnerable population within the Roma community are children and women. Through the implementation of preventive measures in health workshops, it was found that such workshops are very important and necessary in order to improve the health status of Roma, they are practically the only form through which these contents can reach them, represent the health content in the immediate environment of the Roma in a comprehensible way. This programme aims to educate Roma to become aware of the importance of health, to be aware of the importance of a healthy diet, to identify signs of illness in a timely manner, and to seek appropriate help.

The project "*Successful integration of the Roma into the environment – a healthy lifestyle*" as part of the Operational programme for the implementation of European cohesion policy for the period 2014-2020 started in 2016 and was carried out by the NIPH in Murska Sobota, aimed at raising the competencies of health professionals for more competent

work with the Roma in delivering healthcare to the Roma population, cooperation of health workers with Roma assistants on the field of health of the Roma, promotion of a healthy lifestyle for Roma community in a customised way. It is financed by European Social Fund (45,000 EUR) and state budget (15,000 EUR), in 2017, 23,546 EUR was used for trainings and workshops for 28 Roma assistants and 40 participants from Roma communities.

### Fight against discrimination and antigypsyism in health care

There is an institute of Advocate of Patient's Rights in Slovenia.<sup>50</sup> From the available reports of regional advocates it seems that there are no cases involving antigypsyism.<sup>51</sup>

Red Cross was criticised for not letting Roma into their supply warehouses when they come for the assistance packages (in Novo Mesto), or for telling Roma that they are not entitled for one-time social assistance.<sup>52</sup>

### Addressing needs of the most vulnerable groups among Roma

The 2009 study "*Evaluation of the Use of Health Services in Population of Roma Women and Children in Slovenia – Contribution to Reducing Inequality in Health*"<sup>53</sup> showed that 90% of Roma women are included in the compulsory health insurance, with no difference between regions. Those that did not have compulsory insurance either have a status of alien in Slovenia or have no Slovenian citizenship. 74.2 per cent of Roma women from Pomurje region and 69 per cent of Roma women from other regions are also included in the supplementary (private) health insurance system. This is quite a low number considering the fact that supplementary health insurance is free of charge for individuals receiving financial social assistance in Slovenia. However, the report is from 2009, same year as this new policy was introduced. More than 90 per cent of Roma women and children have a selected general physician/paediatrician, most of them in 2-5 km range. 80 per cent of Roma women have a selected gynaecologist. 96.6 per cent Roma women from Pomurje region and 89.5 per cent Roma women from other regions said that they get health care when they need it. 91 per cent of Roma women from Pomurje region and 75.2 per cent of Roma women from other regions think that they get the same health care as non-Roma women. 94 per cent Roma women from Pomurje region and 86 per cent of Roma women from other regions can successfully communicate with health care practitioners and understand their instructions and advice. They also cite some examples of inappropriate behaviour of Roma and at the same time discriminatory behaviour of doctors. The cause of conflicts is in most cases waiting times, specific requirements of the Roma regarding what they want from a doctor (a referral, a specific medicine) and at the same time a misunderstanding of doctors. The illiteracy of the Roma population and understanding the language is also a major problem, which is also reflected in the understanding of the instructions.

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[http://www.mz.gov.si/si/pogoste\\_vsebine\\_za\\_javnost/pacientove\\_pravice/zastopniki\\_pacientovih\\_pravic/](http://www.mz.gov.si/si/pogoste_vsebine_za_javnost/pacientove_pravice/zastopniki_pacientovih_pravic/)

<sup>51</sup> For Prekmurje 2016:

[http://www.mz.gov.si/fileadmin/mz.gov.si/pageuploads/pacientove\\_pravice/Letno\\_porocilo\\_zastopnikov\\_2016/Porocilo\\_2016\\_ZPP\\_Raj.pdf](http://www.mz.gov.si/fileadmin/mz.gov.si/pageuploads/pacientove_pravice/Letno_porocilo_zastopnikov_2016/Porocilo_2016_ZPP_Raj.pdf) and for Dolenjska 2017:

[http://www.mz.gov.si/fileadmin/mz.gov.si/pageuploads/pacientove\\_pravice/Porocila\\_2017/Porocilo\\_Zlata\\_Reb\\_olj.pdf](http://www.mz.gov.si/fileadmin/mz.gov.si/pageuploads/pacientove_pravice/Porocila_2017/Porocilo_Zlata_Reb_olj.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> Interview with an NGO expert on Roma inclusion in Slovenia.

<sup>53</sup> Šelb, Jožica. 2009. *Evaluation of the Use of Health Services in Population of Roma Women and Children in Slovenia – Contribution to Reducing Inequality in Health*. Access: <https://www.dlib.si/stream/URN:NBN:SI:DOC-WG7BOOBP/2d247d08-9e35-4976-ab38-bf5a813d55a0/PDF>

In 2017, in accordance with the objectives of the National Programme of Measures 2017-2021, the Ministry conducted a public tender for co-financing health care programmes with an emphasis on the health of Roma youth, women and children. The tender provided co-financing for the years 2017 and 2018. The tender was aimed at providing assistance, counselling and care for vulnerable Roma groups, especially women and girls. The subject of the public tender included content related to sexual education, care for general and personal hygiene, contraception, breast self-examination, health, social and legal protection of teenage mothers and their children, the role of women in connection with her decision-making rights regarding birth, attitudes towards and education of children. Special attention was paid to frequent pregnancies and abortion of minor girls and to chronic respiratory diseases of young children. Activities under this call for tenders were to take place in Roma settlements or wherever the target groups can be included as much as possible. Three organisations applied for the tender:

- 1) Romani Union Association, which registered the programme *LRoma woman – healthy, equal, determined*” which included advising and care of 59 women in 3 Roma settlements in Pomurje (Murska Sobota, Vanca vas-Borejci, Kamenci);
- 2) The Red Cross of Slovenia (unit Novo mesto) with the program *“Health education of Roma women - Health”* which included 160 Roma (60 per cent women) in activities such as preventive health workshops in primary school Brsljin, preventive measurements of health pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol, workshops on first aid, mobile counselling unit etc., and
- 3) the National Institute of Public Health with the program *“Reproductive Health and Healthy Sexuality – Awareness and Education Program for Roma Assistants”*, which included five workshops for 20 Roma assistants and 20 Roma women.

The programmes of all three providers are fully funded in accordance with the requested funds (110,000 EUR in total, each program received up to 27,500 EUR). Experiences show on one hand that workshops and activities are well accepted and very much needed, but on the other hand that the sexuality and sexual health topic is still a taboo topic, negative experiences do happen in the health system (due to cultural differences, communication barriers), housing situation has a strong negative effect.

However, NGO experience shows that there are still a lot of measures lacking in the field of reproductive health. They give an example of a Roma mother of 15 children, who has never in her life visited a gynaecologist, and nobody ever spoke to her (or any other Roma women they know) about contraception. NGO staff who were implementing health education workshops in Roma settlements noticed that Roma women and Roma in general were not well informed about prevention in health in general; that they fear or do not trust institutions; and especially that for many of them the biggest barrier is the knowledge and understanding of the complex medical language. They recommended that Roma Assistant should be multiplied in the field of health as well.

## EDUCATION

Low access of Roma children to quality education affects their employment opportunities, housing conditions and health. Access of Roma children to (primary) education in Slovenia has been researched in 2006 by Amnesty International,<sup>54</sup> in 2004 by Peace Institute<sup>55</sup> etc. Some of the most important issues in the area of access to education of Roma are:

- 1) Low inclusion in preschool: consequently, Roma children have fewer opportunities to learn the Slovenian language and acquire other skills and knowledge.
- 2) Bad housing conditions also contribute to poor integration of Roma children in education and poor success. Taking care of personal hygiene or doing homework without electricity is difficult for Roma children who live in illegal Roma settlements, without access to public infrastructure.
- 3) Education is still not sufficiently valued by some Roma parents, due to the fact that it is not seen as improving the chance to get an employment afterwards.<sup>56</sup>

The overall goal in the field of education in the National Programme of Measures 2017-2021 is to improve the educational structure of Roma, to improve the attendance of Roma children at preschool institutions, to increase the number of Roma children in compulsory education and to increase the integration of young people and adults in continuing educational processes in accordance with the lifelong learning principle. Education is the only field where Slovenia has a separate strategy. First measure of the National Programme of Measures 2017-2021 in the field of education is to reform of the *Strategy of education of Roma in the Republic of Slovenia*. The Strategy from 2004 was already amended in 2011 – the new Strategy focuses on the areas that the 2004 Strategy has not, in more detail, i.e. preschool education and secondary education, and it also touches university level, postgraduate and adult education. Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (MESS) plans to reform it again.

Projects focusing on education have already been implemented before 2017. With the project "*Raising Social and Cultural Capital in areas populated by members of the Roma community*" (2010-2013), an important step has been made in the development of innovative and creative forms of educational work in the Roma community, with special emphasis on preschool education, education and training of teachers, social workers and other professionals, and professionals from non-governmental organisations working with Roma children and adolescents; and for the development and implementation of extra-curricular activities for Roma children, youth and parents in the Roma community. That was continued and upgraded by the project "*Together to Knowledge – Implementation of the Objectives of the Strategy for the Education of Roma in the Republic of Slovenia*" (2014-2015), which operated in three basic areas: Roma assistants, Roma educational incubators and extra-curricular activities.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Amnesty International. 2006. *False starts: The exclusion of Romani children from primary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia*. Access : <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/76000/eur050022006en.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> Peace Institute. 2004. *Roma in Public Education*. Access : [http://www2.arnes.si/~ljmiri1s/slo\\_html/publikacije/Roma\\_Slovenia.pdf](http://www2.arnes.si/~ljmiri1s/slo_html/publikacije/Roma_Slovenia.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. 2018. Fourth Opinion on Slovenia. Access: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-opinion-on-slovenia-adopted-on-21-june-2017/16807843c7>

<sup>57</sup> Government of the Republic of Slovenia. 2018. *Fifth report of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia on the position of Roma community in Slovenia - report on the fulfilment of obligations under the Roma Community Act in the Republic of Slovenia* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 33/07). Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Peto\\_porocilo\\_Romi.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Peto_porocilo_Romi.pdf)

MESS prepared in 2016 a comprehensive five-year project "*Together for Knowledge: implementation of activities of support mechanisms for acquiring knowledge for members of the Roma community*"<sup>58</sup> which is mainly financed by ESF, implemented until 2021 and focuses on the motivation of Roma children for greater participation, inclusion and performance in the educational system through Roma assistants, educational incubators or multipurpose centres or through extra-curricular activities.

### Improving access to quality preschool education and care

One of the most important measures in the National Programme of Measures 2017-2021 is the early integration into the educational system, specifically the creation of new models of preschool education in Roma settlements, and integration of Roma assistants in kindergartens.

The system of preschool education is set up unified for all children age one to six or compulsory school age, and it is state-subsidised. All children of 11 months and beyond have the right to a place in a kindergarten. The inclusion of a child is not compulsory; it is the decision of parents. Parents pay for kindergarten. The fees are means-tested (in 2015/2016, 4.3 per cent of children attended kindergarten for free, while the highest monthly fee was 530 EUR, meals included). Parents are required to pay 0 to 80 per cent of the full programme price in dependence of their financial situation. Fees for parents are determined by the social work centre on the basis of the national scale which ranks parents by pay classes in accordance with the income and wealth of the family. If more than one child from a family attends kindergarten, the fees are reduced for the second child (30 per cent of the full price) and waived for the younger children.<sup>59</sup>

One of the main goals of both the strategy and the project "*Together for Knowledge: implementation of activities of support mechanisms for acquiring knowledge for members of the Roma community*"<sup>60</sup> is early integration into the educational system, namely the inclusion of Roma children in preschool education in kindergartens for at least two years before the beginning of the primary school, i.e. at the latest at the age of four. The goal of integration into kindergartens is above all the learning of the language (both Slovene and Romani) and socialisation in an educational institution, where the child gets experience and behavioural patterns that enable easier entry and inclusion in primary school and an increase in the proportion of preschool Roma children in integrated/classical kindergartens, especially in the last year or two before entering primary school. On the basis of analysis of Roma inclusion in preschools in the project areas, the agreements with certain kindergartens were concluded. Roma assistants were actively involved in project activities – they regularly participated in the work of kindergartens or in the implementation of programmes for preschool children in multipurpose centres or in the field of extra-curricular activities (175 children participated in total, 78 in programmes for preschool children and 146 children in extra-curricular activities). Activities were organised aimed at increasing the enrolment of preschool children in kindergartens, such as, for example, weekly visits to nearby kindergartens for the purpose of joint activities with enrolled children, occasional joint activities with kindergarten educators and children in settlements, parental communication on the importance of preschool education for easier integration into the educational system, etc. In 2017 the successful work of the preparatory kindergarten in the Roma settlement Kerinov grm (Krško municipality) continued, and they marked a certain increase in the enrolment of children (15-20 children attended monthly) and longer daily attendance. In the framework of this kindergarten, based in the Roma settlement, special attention was paid to the activities of parallel

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.skupajznanje.si/>

<sup>59</sup> [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/early-childhood-education-and-care-77\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/early-childhood-education-and-care-77_en)

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.skupajznanje.si/>

integration into integrated kindergartens, which are usually conducted on a weekly basis and are carried out in the form of joint activities in various units of the Kindergarten at the Leskovec Primary School near Krško.

One of the measures in the National Programme of Measures 2017-2021 is also "increasing social and cultural capital in Roma settlements with implementation of educational incubators (study assistance, educational and extracurricular activities". In the framework of the *Together for Knowledge* project the implementation continued of various educational, creative and sports activities for preschool children, primary school children and pupils in eight multipurpose centres.<sup>61</sup> Main activities organised in multipurpose centres are educational activities, such as additional learning assistance for Roma pupils and students, and various other leisure activities for pupils, preschool children and their parents. Through these activities, multipurpose centres and thus Roma settlements connect with primary schools, kindergartens and other local institutions in the local environment. Providers of activities in multipurpose centres encourage children and young people to successfully participate in the educational process, to create professional goals, to increase motivation and interest in completing primary school or continuing education. The multipurpose centres in the Roma settlements, in the first place, provide children with quality leisure time. Children attending centres have the opportunity to experience success, relaxation, satisfaction, friendship and recognition, and gain experience of group dynamics and interaction, performance in small groups, and last but not least, a sense of responsibility and autonomy. The inclusion and active participation of Roma children in multipurpose centres contributes to the increase of their social and cultural capital. In the premises of multipurpose centres, programmes for preschool and extra-curricular activities are also carried out, and the providers also connect with Roma assistants and other professional staff in schools and kindergartens. In total, 925 children were included in those activities by the end of 2017 (517 children participated in activities of multipurpose centres, and 638 children participated in extra-curricular activities).

The MESS estimates that the most important achievement due to above-mentioned programmes in the field of education was the increased trust of the Roma community in the activities of preschool and elementary education, and a more positive attitude of the Roma towards education in general.<sup>62</sup> Progress can be observed in particular in changing of the attitude of Roma children and their parents, in better acceptance of Roma assistants, educational activities in multipurpose centres and people carrying out extra-curricular and leisure activities.

Project activities were assessed as appropriate and necessary, especially because of daily presence in settlements and work on building the trust of the Roma population; because of socialisation and enabling the learning of Slovene language; and because the activities include mechanisms for the gradual integration of Roma children into regular kindergartens and encourage Roma parents to include children in regular forms of preschool education.<sup>63</sup> These project activities were assessed as necessary support for more systemic measures.

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.skupajzaznanje.si/vecnamenski-centri/>. The eight multipurpose centres are: VNC Vanča vas - Borejci, VNC Smrekec, VNC Vejar, VNC Šmihel, VNC Brezje, VNC Dobruška vas, VNC Kerinov grm, VNC Boriha.

<sup>62</sup> Government of the Republic of Slovenia. 2018. *Fifth report of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia on the position of Roma community in Slovenia - report on the fulfilment of obligations under the Roma Community Act in the Republic of Slovenia* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 33/07). Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Peto\\_porocilo\\_Romi.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Peto_porocilo_Romi.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> Peace Institute. 2018. *Annual evaluation of the implementation of the National Programme of Measures of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Roma for the period 2017-2021. Final Interim Evaluation Report (the period from the adoption of the document on 25 May 2017 to 1 June 2018)*. Peace Institute, Ljubljana, November 2018. Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija\\_NPUR\\_17-21\\_MI1.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija_NPUR_17-21_MI1.pdf)

The problem remains the integration of Roma children into integrated kindergartens outside Roma settlements. The problem is mostly the payment of kindergarten – while preparatory kindergartens and incubators are free, integrated kindergartens are not – Roma families are usually included in 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> payment grade), and the organisation of transport. In NGOs experience one barrier for parents to enrol their children in preschool is also the fact that parents are mostly unemployed and do not need someone else to take care of their children, the parents do not see the added value of preschool education, and also that they get a higher social assistance if their children are not enrolled in preschool.

NGOs have criticised the fact that preschool children in above mentioned projects are not enrolled in state kindergartens, but in project run kindergartens that are not part of the state educational system, so nobody knows what will happen after 2021 after EU's financial perspective ends and with it also many projects. Also, in its report of 2017, the Ombudsman stated that incubators (preschool multipurpose centres) are indirectly discriminatory. Not only they are substandard, with the exception of Krsko (Kerinov Grm), they also do not yield long-term effects, e.g. how many students finish primary school. NGOs provide an example of Primary school Bršljin in Novo Mesto where 1 per cent of Roma children finish primary school, even though kindergarten has been in the Roma settlement for decades and many stakeholders are actively working on the subject. The opinion of NGOs is that without the involvement of other sectors there will be no long-term results.

### Improving quality of education until the end of compulsory schooling

Even though education is the only field where Slovenia has a separate governmental strategy, and government reports about visible improvement, participation in education among Roma is still low, especially after primary education, and school attendance varies among regions (in Prekmurje region majority of Roma children attend primary education and some continue to secondary and higher education, but in south-east region and urban centres both attendance and success rates are much lower).<sup>64</sup> Primary School Bršljin Novo Mesto said in September 2016 that, in this school, only 1 per cent of about 20-25 Roma pupils yearly finish primary school. Overall, in the school year 2014/2015, in the region of Dolenjska and Bela Krajina, just 14 per cent of Roma children completed basic education.<sup>65</sup>

Compulsory basic education in Slovenia is organised in a single structure nine-year basic school attended by children aged six to fifteen years. Basic education is provided by public and private schools (however less than 1 per cent of students attend private schools) and educational institutions specialising in children with special needs. Adult students pursue basic education for adults at folk high schools.<sup>66</sup>

One important feature of compulsory basic education in Slovenia is that it is not obligatory to successfully finish the ninth grade of primary school, but only to fulfil the elementary schooling obligation – which means that someone can only be enrolled for nine years and end up without even the primary education. A huge problem is a large dropout of Roma pupils, e.g. in Trebnje primary school there were 10 Roma children in the first class in 2017/18, and none in the ninth grade. In the school year 2016/2017 there were 11 Roma children in the first grade at the Metlika primary school, and none in the ninth grade; at

<sup>64</sup> Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. 2018. Fourth Opinion on Slovenia. Access: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-opinion-on-slovenia-adopted-on-21-june-2017/16807843c7>

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.mladina.si/169183/napredek> and <https://www.amnesty.si/podatki-o-solskem-uspehu-romskih-otrok-kazejo-da-se-jih-pusca-na-cedilu.html>

<sup>66</sup> [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/single-structure-education-integrated-primary-and-lower-secondary-education-35\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/single-structure-education-integrated-primary-and-lower-secondary-education-35_en)

the Milan Jarc primary school in Črnomelj there were 12 Roma children in the first grade, and only two in the ninth grade.<sup>67</sup>

There is an overall lack of data on school attendance and early drop-out of Roma children,<sup>68</sup> only Amnesty International Slovenia and weekly political magazine Mladina collect annually this information by directly calling schools with Roma students. The Ministry does not have any analysis of the situation, no data, but on the other hand the give funds to remedy it.

Between 2008 and 2015, on the basis of the 2004 Strategy and the 2011 Strategy, the MESS carried out several national projects through which commitments and measures were implemented from both strategies. Projects "Successful integration of Roma in Education I" (2008-2011) and "Successful Integration of Roma in Education II" (2011-2014), funded by the ESF, introduced and upgraded the work of Roma assistants in primary education and has contributed to addressing the challenge of school absenteeism and achieving better school performance.

Legislation has also been amended, with changes allowing better conditions for working with Roma, and on this basis, additional funds are provided (e.g. Articles 25, 81 and 84 of the Act on Organization and Financing of Education and Training, including providing funds for the preparation for and subsidisation of the price of textbooks and learning accessories for primary schools; specific regulations and standards for education and training of Roma children).<sup>69</sup> Therefore schools that educate Roma children are eligible for special benefits, such as additional funds for individual or group work with Roma children; lower number of students in a class; funds for meals, textbooks and excursions for Roma pupils; scholarships for all Roma students engaged in teaching studies.

One of the most important measures from the National Programme of Measures 2017-2021 is the inclusion of Roma assistants in primary schools. In 2018, 27 Roma assistants worked in 32 elementary schools and 9 kindergartens, in the framework of the project *Together for Knowledge*. By the end of 2017, a total of 19 Roma assistants had reached the 5th level of education in the field of preschool education; 5 Roma assistants continued their studies in the higher education program on preschool education; 26 Roma assistants obtained the national vocational qualification and 12 Roma assistants had passed a professional examination in the field of education.<sup>70</sup> The promising practice of including

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.mladina.si/169183/napredek> and <https://www.amnesty.si/podatki-o-solskem-uspehu-romskih-otrok-kazejo-da-se-jih-pusca-na-cedilu.html>

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Act on Organisation and Financing of Education and Training stipulates in Article 25 that one of the competences and tasks of the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education is to "define the programme of supplementary education for Roma children". Article 81 states that the state budget provides for "funds for the preparation for and subsidisation of the price of textbooks and learning accessories for primary schools, for the education of the national community and for the training of members of the Slovene nationality in foreign countries and Roma" and "part of the funds for primary education of the Roma". Article 84 states that the Minister determines specific regulations and standards for education and training of Roma children. Kindergarten Act stipulates in Article 7 that preschool education of Roma children is carried out in accordance with this Act and other regulations; and Article 14 stipulates that special regulations and standards shall be adopted for the upbringing of children of Roma. Law on Primary School stipulates in Article 9 that elementary education of members of the Roma community in Slovenia is carried out in accordance with this Law and other regulations, while the specific regulations shall set specific rules for performing the activities of preschool education, methodology for pricing of the programmes in kindergartens implementing the public service, and norms and standards for the implementation of the elementary school programme.

<sup>70</sup> Peace Institute. 2018. *Annual evaluation of the implementation of the National Programme of Measures of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Roma for the period 2017-2021. Final Interim Evaluation Report (the period from the adoption of the document on 25 May 2017 to 1 June 2018)*. Peace Institute, Ljubljana, November 2018. Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija\\_NPUR\\_17-21\\_MI1.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija_NPUR_17-21_MI1.pdf)

Roma assistants is acknowledged from many sides, including ECRI report on Slovenia from 2014,<sup>71</sup> and Council of Europe 4<sup>th</sup> opinion on Slovenia from 2018.<sup>72</sup>

However, Roma assistants are employed through a project until 2021, and NGO representatives have criticised that out of 60 project employees there are only 20 Roma, and out of all Roma assistants only about 15 are Roma, even though Roma are interested to become Roma assistants and would go through re-training if needed. If a non-Roma comes to the settlement, NGO representatives mentioned that sometimes there is mutual distrust present.

Within the framework of regular training of professionals working with Roma pupils, the Institute of Education of the Republic of Slovenia conducted in December 2017 and January 2018 two 16-hour seminars on "*Education and training of Roma pupils in elementary schools*" (one in Novo mesto and one in Moravske Toplice). 28 professional workers applied for the seminars. Given the fact that the national programme does not foresee further trainings of professionals working with Roma pupils, it was estimated that measures in this area are inadequate.<sup>73</sup>

NGO representatives say that many of the state-run projects do not really make sense, that they do not have a real effect (except that employees get paid), that unnecessary activities are financed, and, especially, that state should be providing projects systematically for all Roma settlements, including or especially small ones that do not even have water access, not only in largest settlements where activities already exist. The problem lies also in that the state has no measurable goals, e.g. by what time will 50 per cent (or 60, 70, 80 per cent) of Roma primary school students on a regular basis complete the 9<sup>th</sup> grade of the primary school. NGOs are also critical of the scholarship offers for Roma – they have heard of denied scholarships before – as well as place for Roma high school students in accommodation facilities.<sup>74</sup>

NGOs also point out that the issue of early, forced and arranged marriages should be linked to education as well, since this is the way how often the educational path ends for a Roma girl – she leaves school, leaves her family to go live with her partner's family and usually gives birth soon afterwards. A 2014 study done by the Institute of Social Protection of the Republic of Slovenia<sup>75</sup> found that the extent of child and forced marriage in Slovenia is far from negligible, with the motives for forced marriage primarily arising from the patriarchal social order and are institutionalised through social and cultural norms. NGOs opinion is that that the government organizes conferences about the issue, but nothing is done in reality, no prevention programs, especially in Dolenjska region where this happens more often. One way that the government addressed is this issue is that in June 2017, the Community of the Centres for Social Work of Slovenia prepared written guidelines and recommendations for the work of CSW professionals in the cases of the escape of minors into harmful environments.

<sup>71</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). 2014. *Report on Slovenia*. Access: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-report-on-slovenia/16808b5c38>

<sup>72</sup> Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. 2018. Fourth Opinion on Slovenia. Access: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-opinion-on-slovenia-adopted-on-21-june-2017/16807843c7>

<sup>73</sup> Peace Institute. 2018. *Annual evaluation of the implementation of the National Programme of Measures of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Roma for the period 2017-2021. Final Interim Evaluation Report (the period from the adoption of the document on 25 May 2017 to 1 June 2018)*. Peace Institute, Ljubljana, November 2018. Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija\\_NPUR\\_17-21\\_MI1.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija_NPUR_17-21_MI1.pdf)

<sup>74</sup> [https://www.amnesty.si/modules/uploader/uploads/revija/file/AMNESTY\\_AKCIJA\\_3\\_2018\\_web.pdf](https://www.amnesty.si/modules/uploader/uploads/revija/file/AMNESTY_AKCIJA_3_2018_web.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> Institute of Social Protection of the Republic of Slovenia. 2014. *Forced marriages of Roma girls*. Access: <https://www.irssv.si/upload2/Prisilne%20poroke%20romskih%20deklic.pdf>

## Support of secondary and higher education particularly for professions with high labour market demand

Upper secondary education in Slovenia takes two to five years (typical age of students is 15-19 years). Educational programmes include vocational, professional and “gymnasia” (general) programmes.<sup>76</sup>

The 2011 amended Strategy of Education of Roma in the Republic of Slovenia<sup>77</sup> proposed that Roma pupils should be encouraged to continue their education in secondary schools, not only in vocational schools of various types, but also for continuing their education in gymnasiums (general secondary programme). The strategy mentions that in the field of secondary education it is primarily necessary to provide opportunities for schooling (stay in student dormitories, scholarships) and learning aid measures. However, there are no detailed measures listed. Roma assistants are not present in secondary schools for now.

On the basis of Article 12 of the Scholarships Act, which specifies the general conditions for obtaining a scholarship, members of the Roma community may apply for a scholarship. Scholarships are awarded for secondary and tertiary education, which encourages members of Roma communities to continue their education after completing compulsory primary education. Stipends are awarded for taking part in an educational programme for the acquisition of a diploma and are intended to cover partially the costs related to schooling. The Programme of Measures 2017-2021 includes a measure to promote scholarships to the members of the Roma community. It is foreseen that this measure will be implemented through primary schools, social work centres and local communities in the regions where the members of the Roma community are studying. However, NGOs experience is that many Roma pupils are not aware of this possibility. They mention occasions when scholarships were denied to Roma pupils, they are also concerned with lack of spaces in dormitories for Roma students.

The Centre for Vocational Education and Training which is the beneficiary of the ESF project “*Renewal of the Vocational Education and Training system 2016-2021*”, was invited to consider the possibility of including Roma assistants. The International Conference on Apprenticeship took place on 28 September 2017; representatives of Roma organisations were invited but did not attend. The experimental introduction of the apprenticeship form of secondary vocational education began in the beginning of 2017 with seven schools included in the pilot project.

NGOs mention that there are mechanisms lacking for career orientation for high school students and graduates, so sometimes even if Roma pupils finish high school or vocational school, they are unemployed because they chose a profession with a low labour market demand.

In line with the vision and goals of *Resolution on National Program for Adult Education in the Republic of Slovenia for the period 2013-2020 (ReNPIO13-20)*<sup>78</sup> attention has also been paid to the implementation of counselling and information activities for vulnerable

<sup>76</sup> [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/upper-secondary-and-post-secondary-non-tertiary-education-34\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/upper-secondary-and-post-secondary-non-tertiary-education-34_en)

<sup>77</sup> Government of the Republic of Slovenia. Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. 2011. *Strategy of Education of Roma in the Republic of Slovenia (Amendment to Strategy 2004)*. Access: [http://www.mss.gov.si/fileadmin/mss.gov.si/pageuploads/podrocje/razvoj\\_solstva/projekti/Strategija\\_Romi\\_dopolnitev\\_2011.pdf](http://www.mss.gov.si/fileadmin/mss.gov.si/pageuploads/podrocje/razvoj_solstva/projekti/Strategija_Romi_dopolnitev_2011.pdf)

<sup>78</sup> One of the most important documents in the field of adult education is the *Resolution on National Programme for Adult Education in the Republic of Slovenia for the period 2013-2020 (ReNPIO13-20)* which strives to enable every adult citizen of Slovenia equal opportunity for quality education at all stages of life. Implementation of this resolution aims to eliminate the biggest development backlogs until 2020, in particular on the level of basic and professional skills of the adult population, its education and participation in lifelong learning. One of the target groups of the resolution are vulnerable adults, including Roma.

groups of adults (including Roma), implementation of publicly recognised programmes for less educated, vulnerable groups, and drop-outs; and other informal programmes to improve the basic capabilities.<sup>79</sup>

In the area of higher education, we have to mention the *Roma Academic Club*,<sup>80</sup> founded in 2008 as an NGO that strives primarily to promote the importance of education for Roma and in general. Their members are mainly Roma university students or graduates, and they organize additional learning aid for pupils and students, creative and educational workshops, lectures, charity campaigns, political participation, participation in international exchanges etc.

### Fight against discrimination, segregation and other forms of antigypsyism in education

Slovenian legislation protects the right to education and prohibits discrimination, but in law and in practice there are differences between "autochthonous" Italian and Hungarian minorities who have the right to education and schooling in their own language and enjoy the highest level of minority protection, "autochthonous" Roma communities enjoying a lower level of protection and "non-autochthonous" Roma whose minority rights are not protected.

Although formally segregation is no longer practiced, on-site educational facilities and state-funded kindergartens in Roma settlements (Pušča in Murska Sobota municipality, Vejar in Trebnje municipality, Brezje in Novo mesto municipality and Kerinov Grm in Krško municipality) raise concern,<sup>81</sup> since they are not encouraging inclusion. Authorities are aware of this concern and plan to promote the inclusion of Roma children in integrated preschools as much as possible. For example, when implementing project activities of "Together for Knowledge" project, cooperation is established with some local kindergartens. Professional staff of local kindergartens are visiting project activities and, together with other providers, carry out activities for both Roma children and their parents. They want to get parents acquainted with the work of local kindergartens, gain their trust and encourage them to enrol children in regular kindergartens. Roma children who are included in the program in Dobruška vas and who do not attend regular kindergartens are also periodically involved in joint activities carried out in regular units of the local kindergarten, thus encouraging their increased involvement in regular preschool education. In order to encourage enrolment in regular preschools, Roma children of Preparatory kindergarten in the Roma settlement Kerinov Grm are involved once in a week in joint activities carried out in regular units of the local kindergarten. Transport for Roma children is provided within the project as many Roma parents cannot afford it.<sup>82</sup>

The proportion of Roma children who are sent to special needs schools remains problematic. In the school year 2017/2018, 6.18 per cent of the majority population and 12.2 per cent of Roma were in special needs schools.<sup>83</sup> Other sources mention 1.5 in 100

<sup>79</sup> Government of the Republic of Slovenia. 2018. *Fifth report of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia on the position of Roma community in Slovenia - report on the fulfilment of obligations under the Roma Community Act in the Republic of Slovenia* (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 33/07). Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Peto\\_porocilo\\_Romi.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Peto_porocilo_Romi.pdf)

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.rtv slo.si/lokalne-novice/romski-akademski-klub-praznuje-prvih-deset-let/464031>

<sup>81</sup> Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. 2018. Fourth Opinion on Slovenia. Access: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-opinion-on-slovenia-adopted-on-21-june-2017/16807843c7>

<sup>82</sup> Peace Institute. 2018. *Annual evaluation of the implementation of the National Programme of Measures of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Roma for the period 2017-2021. Final Interim Evaluation Report (the period from the adoption of the document on 25 May 2017 to 1 June 2018)*. Peace Institute, Ljubljana, November 2018. Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija\\_NPUR\\_17-21\\_MI1.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija_NPUR_17-21_MI1.pdf)

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.mladina.si/169183/napredek> and <https://www.amnesty.si/podatki-o-solskem-uspehu->

children are enrolled in special needs schools (every sixty-sixth child), while for Roma the number is every eleventh child.<sup>84</sup>

In accordance with Slovenian legislation, primary schooling is compulsory and free, but the availability of elementary schooling for Roma is limited due to the lack of adequate teacher training. Teachers working with Roma children rarely receive specific training, such as Roma culture and language, which would help to integrate Roma children and eliminate negative stereotypes and low expectations.

Due to negative stereotypes, teachers have low expectations toward Roma children. Existing curricula do not represent Roma culture and tradition to all pupils. The multicultural curriculum foreseen in the Strategy of Education of Roma is still not implemented. It seems that the activities organised by primary schools and kindergartens in relation to Roma culture depend on the commitment of a particular school or teacher. They are often limited to activities in the framework of the International Roma Day or to playing and singing Roma music.<sup>85</sup>

Both ECRI report on Slovenia from 2014,<sup>86</sup> and Council of Europe 4<sup>th</sup> opinion on Slovenia<sup>87</sup> from 2018 noted the optional subject in the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade of primary education called 'Roma culture' for which teaching materials have been prepared by Roma. Due to lack of qualified teachers and a lack of interest from Roma children, the subject is however offered in a limited number of schools. Roma language is taught as well through extracurricular activities, workshops and seminars, and in Roma settlement kindergartens. Another barrier to teaching Romani language is also the ongoing standardisation of the language. In October 2018, a smart phone application was developed that helps gain vocabulary in Slovenian and Romani language through play. For now, only Prekmurje dialect of Romani language is included, and they plan to include the Dolenjska dialect in the future.<sup>88</sup>

[romskih-otrok-kazejo-da-se-jih-pusca-na-cedilu.html](https://www.mladina.si/176265/romi-s-posebni-potrebami)

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.mladina.si/176265/romi-s-posebni-potrebami>

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/76000/eur050032006sl.pdf>

<sup>86</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). 2014. *Report on Slovenia*. Access: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-report-on-slovenia/16808b5c38>

<sup>87</sup> Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. 2018. Fourth Opinion on Slovenia. Access: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-opinion-on-slovenia-adopted-on-21-june-2017/16807843c7>

<sup>88</sup> Peace Institute. 2018. *Annual evaluation of the implementation of the National Programme of Measures of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Roma for the period 2017-2021. Final Interim Evaluation Report (the period from the adoption of the document on 25 May 2017 to 1 June 2018)*. Peace Institute, Ljubljana, November 2018. Access: [http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija\\_NPUR\\_17-21\\_MI1.pdf](http://www.un.gov.si/fileadmin/un.gov.si/pageuploads/Evalvacija_NPUR_17-21_MI1.pdf)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Employment

- 1) Government should develop an employment strategy for Roma which should include adjustment of employment programmes to Roma needs with special focus on Roma women.
- 2) Public works for Roma should be unlimited in timing and remuneration should be equalised with minimal pay.
- 3) Tailor-made programmes for Roma should be introduced in the field of employment.
- 4) There should be more subsidies for employers who employ Roma.
- 5) More should be done to inform, motivate and enable adult Roma to finish at least primary school level of education through adult education programmes.
- 6) Roma should be informed on how to file claims when they feel discriminated against by potential and current employers.
- 7) General public and employers should be further informed and educated about racial discrimination in employment.
- 8) Social assistance system and minimal wage versus social assistance ratio should be revised, or other changes made to remove the disincentives for employment.
- 9) Maximising public work places offered to Roma organisations.

### Housing and essential public services

- 10) Government should develop a housing strategy for Roma, including concrete goals and measures with timelines and budget.
- 11) Effort to continue legalisation of Roma settlements wherever possible should be made.
- 12) Municipalities should be pressured to include Roma settlements in their spatial plans and fulfil their legal and financial obligations towards Roma communities.
- 13) Access to basic infrastructure and amenities should be guaranteed to all Roma settlements regardless of their status.
- 14) The promising practice of infrastructure development plan of the Roma settlement Žabjak-Brezje should be applied to all Roma settlements as necessary.
- 15) Roma should be informed on how to file claims when they feel discriminated against on the real-estate market.
- 16) It should be compulsory for municipalities to publish calls for non-profit housing in a set period of time and made sure the criteria to receive the non-profit housing are not discriminatory and that all people are treated equally in assessing their status.
- 17) Inform Roma about the possibility of application for the subsidy to the rental fee in case there is no non-profit housing calls in their municipality.

### Impact of health care policies on Roma

- 18) Government should develop a health care strategy for Roma.

- 19) Health education and prevention projects should happen regularly and systematically in all Roma settlements.
- 20) The institute of Roma health mediators/assistants should be introduced based on the promising practice of Roma assistants in preschools and primary schools
- 21) Roma should be effectively informed about complementary health insurance and the fact that it is covered by the state if a person is receiving financial social assistance.
- 22) Health information leaflets and other health related materials should be published also in Romani language.
- 23) Government should continue to support health care and health education activities that focus on health of Roma girls and women.
- 24) More should be done on training health care professionals that work with Roma.

## Education

- 25) Roma parents should be informed about the importance of preschool education.
- 26) Employment opportunities should be created for Roma parents, in order to improve the standard of living and the children's attendance in preschool.
- 27) Roma children should be included in integrated preschools for at least couple of years before they enter primary school.
- 28) Roma assistants should be included in all preschools with Roma children.
- 29) Successful educational projects should be multiplied systematically to all Roma settlements.
- 30) Government should start gathering and monitoring data on school attendance, success rates and early drop-out of Roma children.
- 31) Regular, systematic and compulsory teacher trainings for teachers working with Roma children should be introduced.
- 32) The issue of early, forced and arranged marriages in Roma communities should be addressed more effectively.

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