



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

*Identifying blind spots
in Roma inclusion policy*

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

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIPY	Agency for International Programs for Youth
CAHROM	Council of Europe Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues
CSB	Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia
EC	European Commission
EEA	European Economic Area
ESF	European Social Fund
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoC	Ministry of Culture
NEETs	Not in Education, Employment or Training (young people)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SEA	State Employment Agency
SEDA	State Education Development Agency
SEQS	State Education Quality Service
SIF	Society Integration Foundation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the areas of youth and civil society, there are no national programmes specifically targeting Roma in Latvia; although Roma and Roma youth particularly are not specifically targeted, they presumably fall under the larger group of those at risk of social exclusion who are targeted by the national strategies, programmes and projects implemented in that area by governmental institutions. The topics covered by this report focus on the challenges that young Roma face in the transition process from education to employment and on Roma civic participation.

Based on the findings of this report and on general observations of the authors, it is recommended that the government:

1. develops and implements measures to empower young Roma, and develops instruments to remove the existing institutional barriers in accessing services, particularly in education, employment and extra-curricular activities;
2. implements measures for combating antigypsyism and structural discrimination against Roma youth and women; and
3. implements focused activities that promote the capacity-building for Roma NGOs and activists, with special support for promoting the participation and self-organisation of Roma youth and women.

Transition between childhood and adulthood

The Youth Policy Implementation Plan for 2016-2020 targets youth that is not in education, employment or training (NEETs), some of whom are Roma.¹ Access to education, employment, social and civic participation are important aspects of promoting the inclusion of Roma youth in society.

Education measures implemented in Latvia that impact Roma cannot be fully evaluated due to the lack of data on the school attendance and success of Roma children and the lack of data as to the number of Roma children who drop out of education.² Compulsory education in Latvia includes two years of preschool education, which generally starts at about age five, and continues with nine years of elementary education, until age 15 or 16.³ Information about higher education attendance by Roma youth is also not collected. Roma youth use relatively few of the employment services (mainly paid temporary public work and the Youth Guarantee Programme) provided by the State Employment Agency (SEA). Other institutions implementing projects under the Youth Guarantee Programme do not collect data disaggregated by ethnicity, which makes it impossible to determine the number of Roma young people who take part in the activities.

Roma participation, empowerment and self-organisation

There is little data available on how the Roma population is involved in the civil society sector in Latvia, particularly knowing that Roma NGOs lack capacity and their numbers are small. A 2017 analysis of the actual activities of registered NGOs found that 6 per cent of all active NGOs in Latvia are Roma NGOs.⁴ Another obstacle for Roma's more active citizen

¹ Document available: <http://polsis.mk.gov.lv/documents/5549>

² Education in Latvia is analysed in detail in the second RCM report, available at: <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-2-latvia-2018-eprint-fin.pdf>

³ More details: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/latvia_en

⁴ MoC/Institute of Sociology, University of Latvia, Analytical Report "Minority Participation in Democratic Processes in Latvia", 2017. See:

participation is that there is a lack of Roma representatives who could take on the role of coordinator or mediator. There is still a lack of understanding of various aspects of Roma inclusion at the municipal and local community level and a need to improve cooperation between different institutions in Latvia with respect to Roma participation.

There are several weaknesses in the active participation, empowerment, and self-organisation of the Roma community. For example, the public funding available is only for the short term, such as for small events or activities, not for the mid- and long-term implementation plans, which is even more constraining for the few active Roma NGOs given that they have fewer resources and capacities than mainstream NGOs.

INTRODUCTION

According to provisional data from the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (CSB),⁵ at the beginning of 2018 there were 5,082 Roma people living in Latvia, which represents about 0.3 per cent of the total population, of whom 19 to 22 per cent are young people. However, according to unofficial data by the Roma community up to 15,000 Roma were estimated to be living in Latvia back in 2005.⁶ Thus, despite a lack of fully reliable and comparable data, a gradual decrease in the number of Roma has been observed in the recent years, one of the reasons being that Roma have emigrated to foreign countries in search of employment.⁷

The set of policy measures and activities related to Roma integration policy in Latvia are outlined in the mainstream policy document – Implementation Plan for National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy 2019-2020.⁸ Its Priority 1.3 focuses on promoting tolerance and social integration of groups at risk of social exclusion and foresees inclusion measures aimed at the inclusion of groups at risk of social exclusion in the education system, including developing the skills of the target group of young people and promoting their involvement in education and employment.

The EC Communication “Report on the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies 2019” identifies as a priority addressing the empowerment of Roma people in political, cultural, and social life at all stages of the policy processes.⁹ According to the Implementation Plan, the Ministry of Culture (MoC) annually supports regional NGOs, including through capacity building of Roma NGOs, cooperation between NGOs, and their dialogue with local authorities and institutions. Projects funded by the MoC at the regional level are contributing to the activities of Roma NGOs, while the projects implemented during the 2018-2019 period by the MoC and currently funded by the EC are contributing to the capacity building of Roma representatives, including young people.

A report from thematic visit on Roma integration, policy development and coordination practices in countries with small Roma populations adopted by the Council of Europe Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM) from 21 October 2019 identifies specific problems concerning the effective collaboration between the MoC, which is responsible for the development and implementation of the national Roma Integration policy, with other ministries on other issues unrelated to culture, such as education and housing.¹⁰ According to CAHROM, Roma women and youth “as drivers of changes”¹¹ should be empowered to engage more broadly with local policy planning, implementing and monitoring processes. This report draws a specific conclusion about the Latvian situation:

⁵ Unpublished data by CSB provided to the authors upon request.

⁶ More details can be found on the ‘Information on Roma integration policy measures in Latvia’ document available at:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/latvia_national_strategy_roma_inclusion_en.pdf

⁷ Document available at: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/integracija-un-sabiedriba/integracija-un-sabiedriba/dokumenti>

⁸ Document available at: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/integracija-un-sabiedriba/integracija-un-sabiedriba/dokumenti>

⁹ Document available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8c81fdf1-d093-11e9-b4bf-01aa75ed71a1/language-lv/format-PDF>; <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8c81fdf1-d093-11e9-b4bf-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF>

¹⁰ Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM), CAHROM Thematic visit on Roma integration, policy development and coordination practices in countries with small Roma population Riga - Jelgava - Jurmala, Latvia, 3-5 October 2018, FINAL DRAFT THEMATIC REPORT: <https://rm.coe.int/thv-latvia-final-report-version-21102019-006-/168098fb74>

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21

the public budget, including municipal budgets, should establish the main, solid basis for implementing Roma inclusion strategy, while EU grants should be allowed to play a complementary role.

The topics covered by this report focus on two issues: the challenges young Roma people at risk of social exclusion face in the transition process from education to employment; and Roma civic participation, empowerment, and self-organisation. The urgency of focusing on Roma youth is justified by the context in which more than two-thirds of Roma are excluded from the labour market, a context that also limits their access to employment support measures due to their low levels of education.¹² The essentiality of the theme of Roma participation is based on the relatively low engagement and participation of Roma NGOs, which is related to general tendencies of Latvian civil society. A relatively low proportion of the general population is involved in the NGO sector (4.7 per cent of the population were NGO members in 2015).¹³ However, the specificity of the Roma population is characterised by an even lower proportion of organised civic activity and by a low number of Roma involved in civil society activities.

This report is prepared on the basis of an analysis of the current situation, including consultations with civil society representatives during the development of the report, collecting a variety of opinions and describing the challenges to Roma inclusion. Data and facts were collected and analysed using the following methods: six interviews with officials (politicians, officers) responsible for the implementation of the Roma integration policy, and interviews with civil society (Roma and non-Roma NGOs) and Roma mediators; critical analysis of policy documents, research, statistics, reports and other documents; analysis of data provided by the State Employment Agency (SEA); and a survey conducted among Roma mediators that was developed for the purpose of this report.

This report is a continuation of the first and second cycle of the [Roma Civil Monitor \(RCM\) project](#) monitoring implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS). The [first RCM report](#) analysed the key structural preconditions of NRIS's successful implementation: governing processes and its overall policy framework, and fighting antidiscrimination and antigypsyism. The [second RCM report](#) focused on the NRIS's key policy areas of employment, housing, health care and education.¹⁴

¹² Data available at: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/291179?&search=on>

¹³ Civic Alliance – Latvia, The Review of the NGO Sector in Latvia, 2015. See : https://www.sif.gov.lv/images/files/nodevumi/EEZ-2009-2014/Petijums_NVO_2015_EN.pdf

¹⁴ All reports are available at: <https://cps.ceu.edu/roma-civil-monitor-reports>

TRANSITION BETWEEN CHILDHOOD AND ADULTHOOD

Definition of the problem

While an effective transition from childhood to adulthood is a major challenge for everyone, it is even more so for members of vulnerable groups at risk of social exclusion, particularly for young Roma. While Latvia has identified the transition from childhood to adulthood as one of the main priorities to be addressed as part of the Youth Policy Implementation Plan for 2016-2020 (Youth Plan)¹⁵ it is difficult to ascertain to what extent young Roma benefit from the measures intended to ease these transitional challenges.

Young¹⁶ Roma in Latvia face serious challenges in effectively transitioning from education to employment. In terms of education, young Roma still struggle with school enrolment, attendance, and graduation; however, it is impossible to describe the extent of their difficulties due to a lack of data disaggregated by ethnicity. Information on Roma in higher education is also not collected.¹⁷

In contrast, the State Employment Agency (SEA) collects disaggregated data by ethnicity during the registration process, based on the self-declaration of the registered individuals. In 2019, Roma represented about 1.5 percent of the youth aged 15-24 who are unemployed in Latvia. SEA data show that a total of 3,131 young unemployed persons aged 15-24 were registered within the first nine months of 2019, which is 6 percent of the total number of unemployed persons and out of them, 48 were Roma. The proportion of Roma youth unemployed is about 1 percent of the total Roma population.¹⁸

Background and cause of the problem

Challenges faced by Roma in education

In Latvia, Roma children tending to drop out of school is still a matter to be addressed. According to the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) monitoring data¹⁹ on general education, 15.9 percent of Roma children are early school leavers, even though 98.8 percent of Roma parents admit it is important for their children to be literate and 97.5 percent want their children to acquire a primary education.²⁰ The latest available MES data show that in the school year 2012/2013, 15.9 percent of Roma children dropped out of school without completing primary education – most from grade 7 (six girls and 20 boys), although a great number of dropouts are already from grade 1 (11 boys and as many girls); in grade 6 there is also quite a high number of dropouts (seven girls and 14 boys).²¹

The reasons for early school leaving among Roma are various, but very often they are linked to socioeconomic conditions, low academic performance, the attraction of the labour

¹⁵ Document available at: <http://polsis.mk.gov.lv/documents/5549>

¹⁶ Pursuant to Article 1 of the Republic of Latvia's Youth Law, a person between 13 and 25 years of age shall be considered a "young person", but the Youth Guarantee defines its target group as those aged 15 to 29 (inclusive).

¹⁷ Market and social research centre "Latvian Facts", research "Roma in Latvia", 2015, p 55. See: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/Papildu/romi_latvija_petijums_LV.pdf

¹⁸ Unpublished data from SEA provided to the authors upon request. Data for 2019 compiled for just nine months at that point.

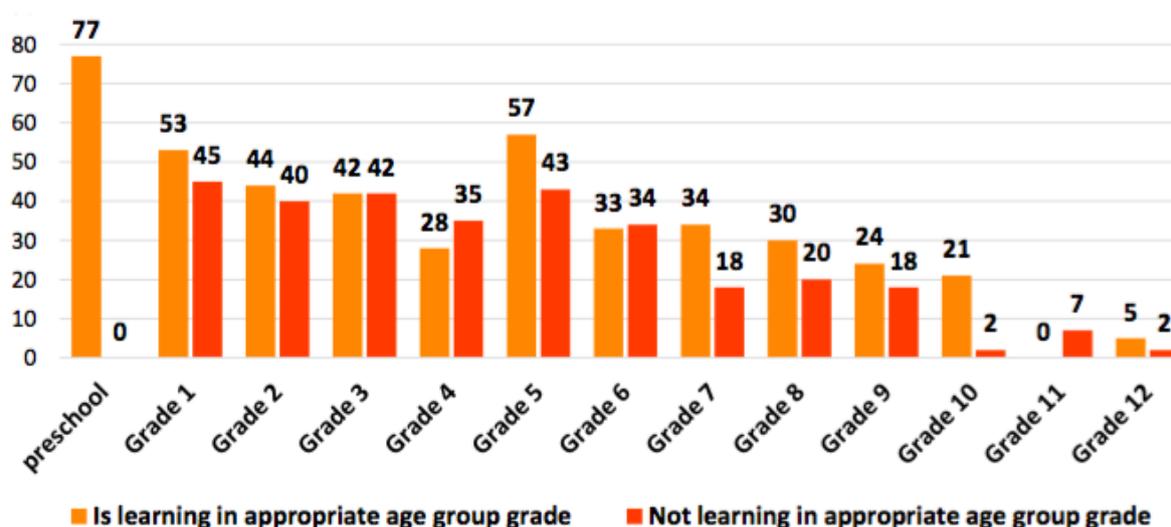
¹⁹ Unpublished data by MoES provided to the authors upon request

²⁰ Market and social research centre "Latvian Facts", research "Roma in Latvia", 2015, p 38. See: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/Papildu/romi_latvija_petijums_LV.pdf

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42

market (the wish to earn money), family emigration abroad in search of employment, early marriages, adolescence and a lack of inner motivation, as well as the teachers' attitude and teachers' motivation. One specific factor that discourages young Roma from continuing their education is being placed in a grade that does not correspond to their age, which indeed creates the risk of their dropping out of school, most often at the age of 13-14, without completing their primary education. According to the available data (see figure below taken from MES 2015 report), 250 Roma children were enrolled in classes not corresponding to their age in the school year 2013/14, starting already in grade 1, as can be seen from the figure below,²² and continuing to grade 6. The reasons for being placed in different classes than the ones corresponding to their age are not clearly stated and should be further analysed together with the management at the respective schools along with the other complex factors driving dropout.

Figure 3.2.4. Number of Roma pupils in school year 2013/ 2014 who are learning in age group appropriate and inappropriate class



Source: MoES (2015)

According to the data resulting from a 2015 survey conducted as part of the research "Roma in Latvia",²³ half (49.7 per cent) of the respondents pointed out that an essential factor for Roma children not attending school or leaving it early is their family's financial conditions, stating that Roma parents cannot afford to purchase everything their children need at school or to prepare them for school. Slightly less than one-fourth (22.8 per cent) of the respondents pointed out another factor, namely, that Roma start a family earlier compared to the ages of first-time parents who are not Roma in Latvia, as well as the learning difficulties experienced during the study process (22.2 per cent). Moreover, other reasons revealed in the same survey found that more than one-fifth (21.4 per cent) mentioned a negative, prejudiced attitude toward Roma at school. Educational experts interviewed in the same survey stated:

"Roma children find it difficult to brace themselves for studying if they experience [a] bad attitude from others. They take it to heart, and it reflects in their performance. A child

²² Market and social research centre "Latvian Facts", research "Roma in Latvia", 2015, p 44 See: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/Papildu/romi_latvija_petijums_EN_G.pdf

²³ This Research has been produced with the financial support of the PROGRESS Programme of the European Union Project „Different people, various experiences, one Latvia II” No. JUST/2013/PROG/AG/4978/AD by the Society Integration Foundation and the market research company "Latvian Facts".

chooses ... not to go to school [rather] than ... suffer... because of his/her nationality [meant in the sense of ethnicity; RCM's clarification]. And parents also don't insist on the child going to school."

*"It's quite often that nobody makes friends with the Roma child, sometimes even won't give a hand. As it is among children, mocking takes place as well. The child suffers and a moment comes when he/she can't stand it any longer and stops going to school."*²⁴

Roma children's wish to attend school is also hampered by the material conditions in the family – one-fifth (19.5 per cent) of respondents gave the need to start working to earn some money as a reason for not attending school, 18.3 per cent said they could not afford to pay for meals at school, and 14.4 per cent lacked money to pay the transportation fares to attend school. Dropout most frequently happens at the age of 13-14, when many Roma adolescents start a family, even though the legal age of marriage is 18, and decide to leave school and start doing simple jobs that do not require a definite level of education.²⁵ There are no specific studies on early marriage in Latvia, thus no data on the situation of the Roma are available.

The survey conducted with the Roma mediators in Latvia for the purpose of preparing this report indicated that the motivation of Roma young people to attend school and gain a profession has increased in recent years.

Challenges faced in employment

The challenges faced by young Roma in Latvia in employment and participation in the labour market can be explained by their inadequate levels of education, by their qualifications and skills not matching the requirements of the labour market, and by stereotypes against Roma, who are perceived as unreliable employees by employers.²⁶

According to the SEA data, a total of 173 unemployed young Roma started work between 2015 and 2019, 93 women and 80 men. It should be noted that mostly women are registered as unemployed by the SEA which in general accounts for a large proportion of the Roma youth unemployed. In addition, unemployed young Roma women tend to have lower levels of education than young Roma men, and most young Roma women have not acquired a profession.

Generally, young Roma rely on just a few employment services; a large majority of them chose mainly paid temporary public work and the Youth Guarantee Programme, and very few apply for other services such as long-term professional training and courses (even in cases when their level of education would allow it) due to unsolved social issues and lack of faith in being able to find jobs upon completion of the long-term courses.²⁷

The 2017 research project "Profiling of potential target groups for motivation and support services and the needs assessment study", conducted in 2017, points out that discrimination against Roma in labour relations is linked to very strong stereotypes about

²⁴ Market and social research centre "Latvian Facts", research "Roma in Latvia", 2015, p 48 See: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/Papildu/romi_latvija_petijums_EN_G.pdf

²⁵ Market and social research centre "Latvian Facts", research "Roma in Latvia", 2015, p 4. See: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/Papildu/romi_latvija_petijums_EN_G.pdf.

²⁶ Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, Profiling of potential target groups for motivation and support services and the needs assessment study, 2017, p 6. See: http://petijumi.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/title_file/petij_sif_motivac_paaugst_un_atbalst_pakalpoj_potencial%2Bmerka%2Bgrup_profiles_un_vaj_izpete.pdf

²⁷ Social research centre "Latvian Facts", Roma in Latvia, research report, 2015, p 69. See: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/Papildu/romi_latvija_petijums_EN_G.pdf

Roma in Latvian society, which mean Roma are perceived as unreliable employees by employers. The study concludes that, in order to combat the social exclusion and discrimination of Roma, it is necessary to develop individual support for Roma people aiming to develop their capacities, their individual problem-solving abilities, and the motivation or desire to change their current situation for the better.²⁸

During the interview with the President of the International Roma Union it was stated that just a few young Roma attain higher education nowadays in Latvia, and good practices need to be considered in order to encourage other Roma youth to become more educated, as this could promote a change in public opinion about Roma. Young Roma people feel demotivated, lack self-confidence, and thus fail to enter or continue education, starting from primary to higher education, for example, in order to make a career. Public mistrust of Roma (and even fear of them)²⁹ causes Roma to avoid revealing their ethnic identity, and in some cases it is reasonable to assume that some Roma young people may choose not to reveal their ethnic identity during their education and to continue hiding it during their career, which leads to Roma identity loss and a lack of role models. The Roma representatives pointed to the idea of a national Roma employment programme, implemented in cooperation with municipalities, as a possible solution for increasing the motivation of Roma youth to acquire an education and a profession.³⁰

Policy answer to the problem

Several national policies are being implemented in Latvia where young Roma are or could be part of the target group. However, limited data availability does not allow for a full assessment of the impact of mainstream policies and measures on Roma youth. The majority of policies do not identify Roma young people as a specific target group; policies do not provide specific measures to promote the full participation of young Roma people in social and political life or to lower the existing institutional barriers to their accessing rights and services, particularly in education, employment and extra-curricular activities.

The Implementation Plan for National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy 2019-2020

The Implementation Plan for National Identity, Civil Society, and Integration Policy 2019-2020 (Implementation Plan)³¹ is implemented by the Ministry of Culture (MoC). The plan identifies Roma as a group at risk of social exclusion and foresees measures aimed at the inclusion of all groups at risk of social exclusion in the education system. Objective 1.3 of the Implementation Plan envisages measures to support the social inclusion of the Roma, but none of these measures specifically addresses the inclusion and participation of Roma youth. The specific measures that are conducted are the ones foreseen under the Youth Guarantee and the Support for Combating Early School Leaving project. However, in terms of employment, the Implementation Plan does not foresee any specific measures to support young Roma in the transition from education to employment, and thus no concrete data is available about them.

²⁸ Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, Profiling of potential target groups for motivation and support services and the needs assessment study, 2017, p.6. funded by ESF. See: http://petijumi.mk.gov.lv/sites/default/files/title_file/petij_sif_motivac_paaugst_un_atbalst_pakalpoj_potencial%2Bmerka%2Bgrup_profiles_un_vaj_izpete.pdf

²⁹ Research Centre SKDS, Opinion of Latvian people on ethnic relations in Latvia, February 2019. See: https://www.sif.gov.lv/images/files/ESF/ESF-integracija/petijumi/Atvertiba_ir_vertiba_SKDS_petijums.pdf

³⁰ From an interview with N. Rudevičs, President of the International Roma Union.

³¹ Document available at: <https://www.km.gov.lv/lv/integracija-un-sabiedriba/integracija-un-sabiedriba/dokumenti>

Youth Policy Implementation Plan and Youth Guarantee Programme

As of 2014, the MES and the Ministry of Welfare started to implement the Youth Guarantee Programme³² as part of the Youth Policy Implementation Plan for 2016-2020. The Youth Guarantee is a programme intended to promote integration into the labour market or into education of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEETs). The Youth Guarantee targets young people aged 15 to 29 (inclusive) who are supported in their search for a job, in pursuing a quality further education, and in attaining their first work experience or job offer, including education programmes leading to a recognized professional qualification within four months of registering with the SEA or applying to an education institution implementing a 12 or 18-month vocational education programme, depending on the young person's skills and previous work experience.

While specific measures are implemented as part of the Youth Guarantee by different public offices such as the Agency for International Programmes for Youth (AIPY), the State Education Development Agency (SEDA) or the State Employment Agency (SEA), unfortunately, none of these institutions collect data that is disaggregated by ethnicity, which makes it impossible to determine the number of young Roma who:

1. are not in education, training or vocational training and who have taken part in the Youth Guarantee project "*PROTI UN DARI!*" ("CAN AND DO!"), (aged 15-29).
2. young people who are not studying, have not obtained a professional qualification, and who have taken part in the Youth Guarantee project "Implementation of initial vocational training programmes under the Youth Guarantee", (age 17-29).

Some municipalities where many Roma live, such as Ventspils, Valmiera, Jelgava, Dobele, and Talsi, together with their strategic partners, are including Roma mediators and jointly identifying and motivating Roma NEET youth to participate in the project "*PROTI UN DARI!*".³³ The results of the survey³⁴ conducted with the Roma mediators³⁵ show that Roma mediators are aware of this project but do not have complete data on the services provided and the access to them by Roma youth. The information provided by Roma mediators indicates that the project works with NEET Roma youth, but a strict restriction on eligibility (neither studying nor working) prevents the participation of active Roma youth still in education. Generally, young Roma entering the job market are becoming more self-confident and aware of their independence from their parents. Measures for the employment of students during the summer holidays are important.³⁶

As the Youth Guarantee is a universal programme, it is impossible to evaluate its impact on young Roma. In addition to the support measures provided by the Youth Guarantee project, 123 Roma unemployed youth were involved in active employment measures implemented by SEA between 2015 and 2019,³⁷ including 57 Roma youth unemployed who have been involved in paid temporary community work, 28 of whom have been involved in support measures for the long-term unemployed.

³² Document available at : http://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/?option=com_content&view=article&layout=edit&id=91076

³³ MoC, Informative Report on Implementation of Roma Integration Measures in Latvia in 2018, 2019. See: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/Dokumenti/KM_210519_romi.pdf

³⁴ From the survey of Roma mediators.

³⁵ The work of Roma mediators is provided within the framework of the project "Roma Platform IV" (2019-2020) implemented by the Ministry of Culture.

³⁶ From the survey of Roma mediators.

³⁷ Unpublished data from SEA provided to the authors upon request. Data for 2019 compiled for just nine months at that point.

Support for Combating Early School Leaving

Since 2017, the State Education Quality Service (SEQS), as part of the MES, has been implementing the European Social Fund project “Support for Combating Early School Leaving” (PuMPuRS) focused on reducing early school leaving among children and adolescents. This project reached 614 education institutions and their students in grades 5 to 12, as well as students in years one through four of vocational education and training institutions implementing vocational education programmes.³⁸ The project is contributing to the establishment of a sustainable cooperation system between the municipality, the school, teachers and parents in order to identify children and young people in a timely manner, including Roma pupils, who are at risk of dropping out and to provide them with personalised support. Unfortunately, the SEQS does not collect data disaggregated by ethnicity, which makes it impossible to determine the number of Roma youth who have used the services available under project PuMPuRS.

Diversity promotion

The Society Integration Foundation (SIF) has been implementing the project “Diversity promotion”³⁹ since 2017, which targets people at risk of discrimination because of ethnicity, including Roma⁴⁰ and other ethnic minorities. From 19 February 2018 to 15 September 2019, 46 Roma received services (for example: specialist consultations, support groups, awareness-raising activities, self-help groups, etc.), including seven young people aged 21 to 25 (one female and six males). As a result of these motivation support measures, one young Roma person started a job search.⁴¹ Employment data is still being collected at the time of writing and therefore is not yet available.

³⁸ SEQS, information about the project. See: <https://ikvd.gov.lv/esf-projekts/par-projektu/>

³⁹ Society Integration Foundation is public foundation established in 2011; for information about the project, see: http://www.sif.gov.lv/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9976&Itemid=256&lang=lv

⁴⁰ This data was collected among the participants in the project and is based on self-declaration.

⁴¹ SIF unpublished data provided to the authors upon request.

PARTICIPATION, EMPOWERMENT AND SELF-ORGANISATION

Definition of the problem

While there is no concrete data to confirm this, an analysis of the activities run by registered Roma NGOs in Latvia shows that there is a limited number of actively operating Roma NGOs. According to the Institute of Sociology, 20 NGOs (9 per cent of all minority associations) were registered in 2017 to represent the Roma culture and interests.⁴² Moreover, the National Roma Contact Point (NRCP) in Latvia stated that there is a lack of Roma representatives who could take on the community leader role of coordinator or mediator.

One of the obstacles that significantly hinders the involvement of Roma in non-Roma NGOs is the stereotypical public attitude towards Roma. As found in the Opinion of Latvian People research, only four per cent of respondents said they have close relations with Roma, 42 per cent say they have had negative experiences with Roma, while 33 per cent say they would not want a Roma as a colleague, 47 per cent say they would not want Roma as a family member, and 36 per cent say they would not want Roma as a neighbour.⁴³

Background and cause of the problem

The limited capacity and limited number of Roma NGOs in Latvia hinder the participation of Roma overall. There is still a lack of understanding of the specifics of Roma inclusion at the municipal and local community level and there is a need to improve cooperation between different institutions in Latvia in this regard.⁴⁴

The Roma mediators⁴⁵ surveyed pointed out that often there are no Roma NGOs in the regional towns or counties. This suggests that the opportunities for Roma to participate in civic activities are often severely limited. No data are available on Roma involvement in mainstream NGOs. Awareness-raising about different public services and spreading of information can be ensured not just by institutions providing services and support in problem-solving, but also by different organisations, for example, associations, societies, and NGOs.

The quantitative survey results reveal that Roma find it more essential to participate in religious rituals⁴⁶ and are far less interested in attending activities organised by the societies of the Roma community and Day Centres, which offer different opportunities and activities specifically for Roma.⁴⁷

A Roma representative pointed out that there are several weaknesses in the active participation, empowerment, and self-organisation of the Roma. Public funding is available only for separate activities and not for the implementation of medium-term plans. There

⁴² MoC, Institute of Sociology, University of Latvia, Analytical Report "Minority Participation in Democratic Processes in Latvia", 2017, See: [https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Petijumi/Mazakumtautibu%20lidzdaliba%20petijuma%20zinojums%202017\(1\).pdf](https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Petijumi/Mazakumtautibu%20lidzdaliba%20petijuma%20zinojums%202017(1).pdf)

⁴³ Research Centre SKDS, Opinion of Latvian people on ethnic relations in Latvia, February 2019. See: https://www.sif.gov.lv/images/files/ESF/ESF-integracija/petijumi/Atvertiba_ir_vertiba_SKDS_petijums.pdf

⁴⁴ From an interview with the Latvian National Roma Contact Point representative, MoC.

⁴⁵ The work of the Roma mediators is organized within the framework of the project "Roma Platform IV" (2019-2020) implemented by the MoC.

⁴⁶ Religious organisations in Latvia are not NGOs.

⁴⁷ Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, Roma in Latvia, research report, 2015. See: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/Papildu/romi_latvija_petijums_EN_G.pdf

are also capacity differences (ability to attract funding, participation in decision-making and policymaking etc.) between Roma NGOs and other NGOs. Possible solutions include measures to strengthen Roma self-confidence.⁴⁸

A serious problem identified in the Latvian society's attitude toward Roma is discrimination, which is often not recognized, and even when it does get recognized, it often goes unpunished.⁴⁹ There is no direct evidence that the public sector is aware that antigypsyism is one of the main causes of exclusion as it is not mentioned or defined in Latvian law and political rhetoric.⁵⁰

Policy answer to the problem

According to the Implementation Plan, the MoC annually promotes regional NGOs, including capacity building of Roma NGOs, cooperation among NGOs, and their dialogue with local authorities and institutions. In 2018, at least one Roma integration project in each of Latvia's planning regions⁵¹ was supported as a result of regional NGOs' open calls for projects. In total, five Roma NGO projects have been supported to promote Roma integration and participation, including reducing negative stereotypes about Roma through cross-cultural dialogue activities. The total funding granted was 7,596 EUR. The support for Roma NGOs provided an opportunity for several regional Roma associations to launch their own initiatives. Young Roma people were involved in three projects about working in musical theatre (15 Roma, including children and young people) - participating in a musical theatre performance, participating in the production of a performance together with young people of other nationalities, and attending an educational course for Roma youth on teamwork and networking (10 young people).⁵²

The Active Citizens' Fund is a programme of the European Economic Area (EEA) and the Norwegian Financial Mechanisms with a total funding of 8.5 million EUR to be allocated in Latvia till 2024. Funding will be made available to NGOs through open calls for proposals expected in the middle of 2020. At the end of 2018, stakeholder consultations were held on the establishment of the Active Citizens' Fund in Latvia with the aim of listening to and summarising the views and suggestions of NGOs on how to address the challenges identified in the non-governmental sector and society as a whole. The summary report on those consultations provides information on the empowerment of vulnerable groups, including minorities, but does not specifically mention the Roma. The report draws conclusions and proposes ways to promote minority citizenship and improve cooperation between minority and other NGO, but does not specifically identify Roma NGOs.⁵³

⁴⁸ From an interview with N. Rudevich, President of the International Roma Union.

⁴⁹ Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy (2012–2018), p 18.
https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Petijumi/En_Pamatnostad.pdf

⁵⁰ Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Latvia, 2018. See: <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-1-latvia-2017-eprint-fin.pdf>

⁵¹ In accordance with the Law on Regional Development, five planning regions have been established in Latvia – Kurzeme Planning Region, Latgale Planning Region, Riga Planning Region, Vidzeme Planning Region and Zemgale Planning Region.

⁵² MoC, Informative Report on Implementation of Roma Integration Measures in Latvia in 2018, 2019. See: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/Sabiedribas_integracija/Romi/Dokumenti/KM_210519_romi.pdf

⁵³ EEA and Norway Grants: Active Citizens' Fund in Latvia, Summary Report of the Consultation of Stakeholders, 2018. See: http://www.activecitizensfund.lv/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/AIF_Kopsavilkuma_zinojums_AIF_IesaistitoPusuKonsultacijas.pdf

The final report⁵⁴ of the Latvian Roma Platform meeting organised by the MoC within the project "Latvian Roma Platform II: Dialogue, Participation and Mutual Learning"⁵⁵ (Platform II) on 15 June 2018 suggested a set of recommendations that were then followed-up during Platform III, such as developing activities aimed at enhancing cooperation with municipalities, raising public awareness of Roma culture and history, strengthening the capacity of Roma NGOs and activists, strengthening the capacity and participation of Roma women, and developing exchanges of Roma integration practices. One recommendation of the Roma Platform meeting to the Government is to provide support for capacity-building of Roma NGOs. There are no specific programmes focused on Roma NGOs and the Latvian NGO Fund does not specifically target the Roma NGOs.

Within the framework of the project "Latvian Roma Platform III: Promoting Cooperation and Participation"⁵⁶ (Platform III) implemented by the MoC, a meeting of the Latvian Roma Platform was organised on 3 July 2019. The information in the final report from the meeting⁵⁷ shows that the Platform III project promoted the participation and involvement of Roma NGOs, strengthened the capacity and skills of Roma representatives, and organized workshops aiming to empower and facilitate participation by Roma young people and Roma women in the development of civil society. More specifically, the following activities were developed: Roma mediation practices in the municipalities for effective dialogue between Roma families and state/municipal authorities (schools, social services, city councils); Roma representatives participating directly in the implementation of Roma integration policy measures; and strengthening the capacity and skills of representatives of Roma civil society. The workshops were organised in order to empower and facilitate participation by Roma young people and Roma women in the development of civil society.

However, experts noted that the public has a poor knowledge of Roma issues, exclusion, traditions and culture; that there is a lack of data on the Roma; that it is necessary to allocate more funds from the state budget for these issues, not just to attract the funding available from the European Commission; that dialogue with politicians should be developed; and that more emphasis should be placed on promoting the participation of Roma women in the development of Roma inclusion policies.⁵⁸ The Roma Platform meeting's recommendation to the Government is to provide support for the capacity-building of Roma NGOs and to promote research into the needs of Roma communities.

The report on the evaluation of the project activities⁵⁹ prepared by D. Didžus,⁶⁰ an external expert to Platform III, states that a lack of Roma activists, their lack of capacity, and the capacity of civil society were mentioned as challenges during the CAHROM experts' thematic discussion on "Roma integration, policy development and coordination practices

⁵⁴ MoC unpublished data.

⁵⁵ MoC, information about the project. See: <https://www.km.gov.lv/en/integration-and-society/roma/projects/latvian-roma-platform/latvian-roma-platform-ii>

⁵⁶ MoC, information about the project. See: <https://www.km.gov.lv/en/integration-and-society/roma/projects/latvian-roma-platform/latvian-roma-platform-iii>

⁵⁷ MoC, FINAL REPORT of the Latvian Roma Platform meeting within the framework of the project "Latvian Roma Platform III: Promoting Cooperation and Participation", 2019. See: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/nosleguma_zinojums0307liesma_ose_DK%281%29.pdf

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ MoC, External Expert Evaluation Conclusions on Measures Implemented within the Project "Latvian Roma Platform III: Promoting Cooperation and Participation". See: https://www.km.gov.lv/uploads/ckeditor/files/gala_akts%20eksperts%202019..pdf

⁶⁰ D. Didžus also performs the duties of a Roma mediator within the framework of the project "Roma Platform IV" (2019-2020) implemented by MC

in countries with small Roma populations”, held on 3 October 2018.⁶¹ The Roma in Latvia have very low motivation to start their own NGOs. Regular public funding for Roma integration measures is indicated as a recommendation for future action, as funding is currently mainly implemented on a “project” basis rather than as a public policy with regular public funding. Emphasis was placed on project development and implementation training for representatives of Roma NGOs; the thematic discussion was attended by representatives of Roma civil society from several Latvian cities. In one recommendation, the report mentions the need for the Roma themselves to set up their own organisations and to develop cooperation with local authorities to facilitate the exchange of information.

⁶¹ Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM), CAHROM Thematic visit on Roma integration, policy development and coordination practices in countries with small Roma populations, Riga - Jelgava - Jurmala, Latvia, 3-5 October 2018, FINAL DRAFT THEMATIC REPORT: <https://rm.coe.int/thv-latvia-final-report-version-21102019-006-/168098fb74>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Challenges faced by young Roma in effectively transitioning from childhood to adulthood

To the Ministry of Education and Science

When developing Latvian youth policy planning documents for the next period post-2020, the ministry should:

1. provide focused activities to promote the involvement of Roma young people in education, vocational training and employment activities offered by the state facilitating a successful transition from education to the labour market;
2. develop appropriate data collection disaggregated by ethnicity on youth involvement in the education, vocational training and employment services and activities (for example, the Youth Guarantee) implemented locally and nationally in order to identify the impact of those measures on Roma youth.

Roma participation, encouragement and self-organisation

To the Ministry of Culture

When developing civil society and integration policy planning documents for the next period post-2020, the ministry should:

3. adopt and implement measures for combating antigypsyism and structural discrimination against Roma youth and women, taking into account the fact that antigypsyism and structural discrimination have specific, long-term effects on how Roma youth achieve their potential and their social and professional development;
4. develop and implement focused activities that promote the capacity-building of Roma NGOs and activists, with special support for promoting the participation and self-organisation of Roma youth, as well as strengthening their capacity to attract funding from different domestic and European programmes;
5. develop an appropriate monitoring system to track state and local government support for Roma participation, empowerment and self-organisation processes and the impact of that support.

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