

Report on the impact of Bridge to Business programme in Hungary: How did corporate partners benefit?





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

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

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

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

Homepage: www.bridgetobusiness.eu <http://autonomia.hu/hu/programok/hrom/>
<https://cps.ceu.edu/research/bridge-to-business>

The report along with other reports and summaries may be accessed at:
<https://cps.ceu.edu/research/bridge-to-business>



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

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

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our colleagues, Violetta Zentai, Ágnes Kelemen, Márton Illés as well Boyan Zahariev and Ilko Yordanov for their valuable comments and insights to this report.

We would also express our gratitude to all the HR fellows who were open to share their ideas and practices with us during interviews and workshops. They provided indispensable information to this research. We hope they will be able to use finding in this report in their work. Special thanks goes to Rita Harangi for organizing workshops in the framework of Equal Opportunity Employers' Forum (MEF) and sharing her network of business HR leaders open to the idea of diversity.

And finally we would thank our colleagues, Borbála Varga and Lilla Jakobs for their continuous support during this project and all the help they made our work smooth. We would like to thank Gwendolyn Albert for the language review of this report.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication can be reproduced, stored or implemented in a circulation or processing system in any form (electronic, mechanical, photocopying or other) without the written consent of the authors.

Table of Contents

About Bridge to Business (<i>HRom</i>) in Hungary: Intervention for inclusion of Roma youth through employment in the private sector	4
1. Introduction	5
1.1. The labour market context	5
1.2. Regulatory environment concerning the employment of vulnerable groups and corporate strategies	7
2. Description of the partner companies	9
3. Data and methods	11
4. Corporate strategies affecting the employment of Roma.	12
4.1. Approaches to social inclusion	13
4.2. Corporate strategies	16
5. Company procedures for hiring Roma employees- practices and examples	19
5.1 Outreach/ communication.....	19
5.2 Recruitment: recruitment activities, procedures that support (or hinder) the inclusion of Roma in the workforce	22
5.3. Selection	24
5.4. Inclusion at work.....	26
6. Company experiences with the Bridge to Business programme.....	28
6.1. Impact on general diversity/equal opportunity strategy and practices	28
6.2. Summary of partner companies' changes in response to the challenges of employing Roma. Innovative practices.....	29
7. Companies' opinions of the programme	32
8. Sustainability: Which programme elements do companies see as sustainable beyond the life of the programme, and how?	34

About Bridge to Business (*HRom*) in Hungary: Intervention for inclusion of Roma youth through employment in the private sector

The main idea of the Bridge to Business¹ programme is to facilitate access by highly-educated Roma (with at least upper secondary qualification) to quality, white-collar jobs in the private sector. The project involved 150 Roma with completed grammar school or tertiary educations. The programme understands inclusion to be a mutual process occurring between Roma seeking jobs and companies aiming to hire a more diverse workforce, hence it aimed to have an impact both on Roma youth and on the companies partnering with the programme and brought together a diverse set of stakeholders: Roma and pro-Roma civil society organisations, large multinational companies, and researchers from the academic field, professional trainers and HR experts in a broad collaboration.

The activities in the programmes implemented by the Autonomía Foundation (AF) targeted potential Roma employees as well as partner companies. Young Roma took part in an intensive, 4.5 days training that aimed to prepare them to successfully apply for and enter jobs in the corporate sector. The programme supported participants' access to private sector jobs by providing information about job opportunities, helping with the application process, offering career guidance, and connecting young Roma directly with employers offering relevant openings. Participants had access to a range of additional trainings, including English-language and IT skills, as well as mentoring and coaching throughout the job search process. The project also supported the employer companies in adapting their internal procedures to support the recruitment and inclusion of Roma candidates as well as to create more inclusive environments within the firm. Partner companies were offered the opportunity to take part in a series of workshops discussing and sharing strategies and practices for diversity in employment, with special attention paid to Roma employment.

While the core idea of the project is rather straightforward, the initiative has several innovative elements. It targeted a relatively small but important sub-group of the Roma community – i.e., highly educated young Roma - highlighting a social issue that has largely been neglected by employment policy measures. The project is also unique in the sense that it targeted existing, quality employment opportunities on the primary labour market and aimed at making these available to relatively disadvantaged Roma, as opposed to other programmes which try to create new job opportunities that are rarely sustainable or integrated into the mainstream economy.

The project's long-term aim was to contribute to the strengthening of a Roma middle class and to promote responsible employment practices. The elements of the intervention provided a basis for social policy tools to bridge the gap between educated Roma and the quality jobs provided by the corporate sector.

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

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is the first of two reports aiming to assess the Bridge to Business project's impact in Hungary. The policy literature on Roma inclusion interprets it as a two-way process, where the openness of both the members of the minority group and the larger environment are essential prerequisites to successful inclusion. When assessing the impact of a Roma inclusion program we need to discuss not just its impact on the Roma participants, but also on the receiving environment (the corporate firms in our case). The present report focuses on how the programme cooperated with the partner companies and how it may have influenced their approach to employing Roma. The second paper – “Report on the impact of the Bridge to Business programme on Roma youth participants” – discusses the programme's impact on the young Roma.² In addition, the programme produced similar reports about its impact in Bulgaria as well as two policy briefs.³

This document will first provide a concise introduction of the labour market context in which the Bridge to Business programme was embedded. Then it will provide an overview of the companies partnering with the programme, their activities, and their different ways of participating in it. After introducing the methodological considerations and the data we used, we will present the results of the study. Starting by discussing the various approaches to and strategies for diversity employment at the partner firms (chapter 4), the study will continue with examining procedures and practices at each step on the way to including Roma in the company: outreach, recruitment, selection and workplace inclusion (chapter 5). The sixth chapter will share companies' experiences with the programme and how these may have changed over the two and a half years of their involvement. Finally, we share what the HR experts cooperating with the programme thought about its benefits and barriers, and we will conclude by considering the potential for sustaining and extending such programmes.

1.1. The labour market context

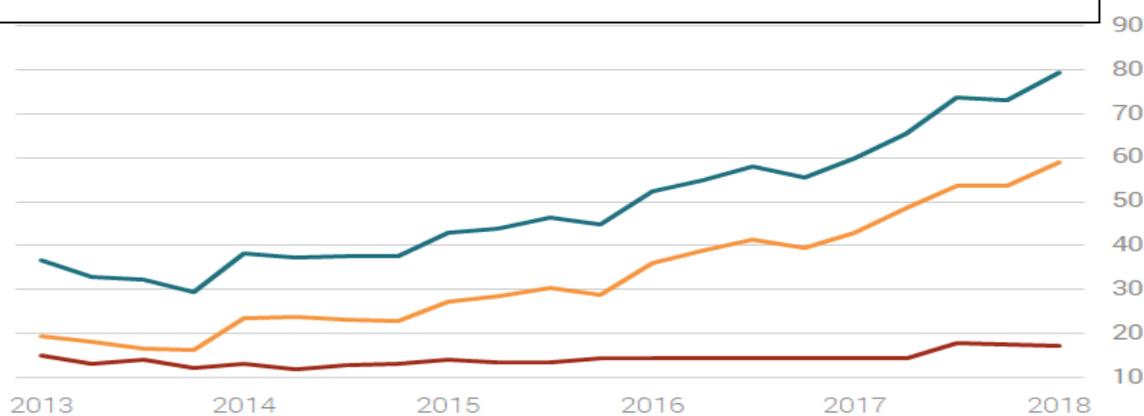
The Hungarian labour market was essentially characterised by labour shortage during 2016-19, the period of the **Bridge to Business project (BtB)**. While in 2014, 37 000 job openings were registered by the Hungarian Statistical Office (23 000 in the business sector and another 12 000 in the public sector), the number had increased to more than 87 000 openings by 2018 (of which 63 000 appeared in the business sector).⁴

² <https://cps.ceu.edu/research/bridge-to-business>

³ Same as above

⁴ Source: KSH. http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_evkozi/e_qli027c.html

Graph 1: Open positions in the private sector, in the public sector and in the entire economy (thousand)



(Source: Central Statistical Office, Portfolio)

Economic estimates suggest that the labour shortage is significantly greater – as many as 300 000 employees lacking – than the officially announced number of openings indicates.⁵ Such a situation, though not favourable to the economy, provides a perfect context for innovation or for the piloting of new approaches to managing labour market inequalities. The Bridge to Business programme was exactly such a project: it aimed to turn attention to and to explore the potential for improving the employment chances of Roma youth. Thus, **Bridge to Business operated under favourable macro-economic conditions.** Given the increasing shortage of suitable workforce, companies were more likely to be receptive to cooperating with the project in the hope of reaching out to new labour market segments.

However, the labour shortage is not distributed equally in terms of either economic sector or geography. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics it hit the construction industry, tourism, and the hotel and catering sectors the most. Also, the labour shortage was especially salient in the north-western parts of the country during the project period. The Roma live primarily in the east, the north-east, the south-west (Baranya and Tolna counties) and in Budapest. Also, Roma youth who have graduated from secondary school or have tertiary degrees are overrepresented in occupations that are of limited interest to companies in the business sector (such as social work, social care, teaching, and early childhood care). Companies partnering with the BtB programme were in banking, retail, technology and energy services, sectors primarily seeking engineers, economists, lawyers, office assistants, and client services employees qualified in trade and marketing. Thus, despite the very favourable labour market context (from the job-seekers' perspective) **the programme faced a mismatch in terms of the professions and regional distribution of the participants and corporate partners.**

In terms of state policies, labour market programmes in Hungary are predominantly characterised by an equal treatment approach: Roma job-seekers are generally supported through general, mainstream, needs-based schemes (Messing and Bereményi 2016; Messing *et al* 2017). Unlike some other vulnerable population groups, such as employees with disabilities or long-lasting health problems

⁵<https://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/munkaugy/ez-a-legnagyobb-baj-mar-300-ezer-ember-hianyzik-magyarorszagrol.290744.html>

that reduced their work capacity (whom we will refer to as ‘people with disabilities’ or ‘with limited work capacity’),⁶ there are no financial or other types of incentives offered to employers to hire Roma. The largest segment of active labour market policies is involved in job creation, namely, the public works programmes that are highly controversial and constitute 80% of the entire labour market intervention budget. Roma participation in these programmes is extensive: it is estimated that at least a third of the 120 000 -180 000 public workers are Roma, and half of all Roma employees in Hungary worked in public work schemes in 2017.⁷ Although the numbers primarily represent the less-educated workforce, Roma with a secondary school diploma often work in public work schemes, especially in smaller settlements, and earn just 55% of the minimum wage.⁸

1.2. Regulatory environment concerning the employment of vulnerable groups and corporate strategies

In this section we will focus on the regulatory environment in which firms operate with respect to equal opportunities and corporate strategies concerning diversity management. The guiding regulation the Law on Equal Treatment (2003/CXXV) prohibits treating anybody in a disadvantageous manner on the basis of her/his given/inherited traits (gender, age, ethnic background, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) unrelated to the work s/he performs. However, companies frequently interpret this law in the reverse and presume it also prohibits positive discrimination or affirmative action. While this is not exactly the case, most companies still refer to the law when explaining why positive discrimination is not in their diversity practices toolkit.

In addition to respecting the prohibition of discrimination, state-owned companies are required by law to also draft an Equal Opportunity Plan that should include mapping their employee pool and describing their procedures and practices for providing equal opportunities within the firm. According

⁶ Firms with more than 25 employees are required to employ people with health or physical challenges. If they do not, they have to pay a so-called ‘rehabilitation contribution,’ the amount of which is 1,242 million forints (approximately 3900 EUR) for each non-employed challenged person (in an amount not exceeding 5% of the number of their employees). For example, a company with 1000 employees has to employ 50 persons with health or physical challenges. If they have only 10 such employees, the company then pays 40 x 1,242 million HUF, or almost 50 million HUF/ year (155 000 EUR).

⁷ There is an extensive academic literature available on public works in Hungary and their effects on vulnerable people. See, for example:

Váradi, M. M., & Virág, T. (2014). *Faces and causes of Roma marginalization: experiences from Hungary*.

Szikra, D. (2014). ‘Democracy and welfare in hard times: The social policy of the Orbán Government in Hungary between 2010 and 2014’. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 24(5), 486-500.

Messing, V. (2013). ‘Active Labour Market Policies with a Impact Potential on Roma Employment in Five Countries of the EU.’ *Budapest: NEUJOBS Working Paper Series No.19.2*

Messing, V., & Bereményi, B. Á. (2017). ‘Is ethnicity a meaningful category of employment policies for Roma? A comparative case study of Hungary and Spain’. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(10), 1623-1642.

Adamecz, A., Czafit, B., Bördős, K., Nagy, E., Lévai, P., & Scharle, Á. (2013). ‘Roma inclusion and impact evaluation of two mainstream EU-funded active labour market programmes.’ *Executive Summary. Budapest: Budapest Institute*.

Fazekas, K., & Scharle, Á. (2012). *From Pensions to Public Works: Hungarian employment policy from 1990 to 2010*.

⁸ The minimum wage is 149,000 HUF. A public employee’s wage is 815,000 HUF in 2019.

to research, Equal Opportunity Plans rarely exceed the minimum bureaucratic requirements and are filled with boilerplate content.⁹

All the companies partnering with the Bridge to Business programme do much more in this regard than the law requires: many have a substantial – usually multi-year – plan for how the company provides not just equal treatment, but also equal opportunities, and what kind of programmes they operate in this regard. There is, however, a great deal of diversity in how the BtB partner companies interpret, frame and put their strategies into action. To start with, the names of these policies differ to a great extent: at some companies this is called an Equal Treatment Strategy, in others it is an Equal Opportunity Strategy, there are several companies that formulate their strategies in terms of Employee Diversity, and there is one large company, for example, which identifies practices and procedures promoting employee diversity in terms of its Sustainability Strategy. However, interviews revealed that there are three important issues with respect to the depth and efficiency of such strategies:

- The importance that the leadership attributes to employee diversity;
- Whether there is a senior member of executive staff who nurtures the idea and actively promotes practices that support more diversity;
 - The nature of the department responsible for diversity. We understood that if diversity issues are the main area of the Human Resources Department, it is likely that diversity-related practices will be implemented more in-depth and that the actual measures promoting employee diversity will be significantly stronger and more sincere than in companies referring this issue to their Communications (or Corporate Branding) Departments.

It is worth mentioning that most of the BtB partner companies who deal with diversity management do so through their HR departments. *“At the end of the 2000s, during the global financial crisis, the firm thought about what kinds of opportunities we have to make the company more attractive to employees and keep them here,”* a senior HR manager of a partner company told us.

Most partner companies focus on one or more of the following groups in their diversity / equal opportunity strategies:

- Gender, women and the harmonisation of work-life balance;
- Employees with disabilities, long-lasting health problems, or reduced work capacities;
- Age groups (especially the younger generation and 45+)

Neither ethnic nor racial minorities nor Roma in particular were especially a focus in any of the companies we interviewed, and only three companies explicitly mention Roma in their strategies

⁹ Mészáros, Z., & Várhalmi, Z. (2011). A munkaadók gyakorlata a diverzitás kezelésében és a roma alkalmazottakat érintő munkáltatói attitűdök [‘Employers’ attitudes concerning the practice of employers in diversity management and employees of Roma’]. *Esély*, 23(2), 28-54.

Tardos, K. (2017). Az életkor és az intézmények szerepe a munkaerő-piaci integráció és dezintegráció alakulásában. *Socio. hu Társadalomtudományi Szemle*, (1), 27-56.

despite the fact that all of the companies participate in the BtB programme and support the employment of Roma youth in one way or another.

Our interviews with HR experts at BtB corporate partners¹⁰ reveal that there are various motivations directing the decision about which groups to focus support on, including (but not limited to): (1) making the company more attractive to potential employees and extending the labour pool; (2) making current employees interested in a long-term career within the firm; (3) building a reputation as a responsible, sensitive company and employer.

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, the companies' diversity/equal opportunity strategies do not emphatically focus on Roma. One important reason for this, according to the interviews, is related to the size of the qualified Roma population: most partner companies are interested primarily in employees with at least secondary school diplomas.¹¹ The number of Roma with such characteristics is not large enough compared to other groups in the focus of corporate diversity policies (such as women, the elderly or youth). The interviewed partner company representatives argue that the reason for not having Roma in general as an emphatic focus of corporate strategies is also related to difficulties with identifying who belongs to the group: companies do not include ethnic self-identification in their application forms because of the legal and practical difficulties related to managing, storing and using such data. Companies open to actively supporting the inclusion of Roma in their organizations do so by partnering with various NGOs or programmes (such as BtB, Integrom or Romaster) aiming to bridge the gap between Roma and business. Thus, the burden of identifying and recruiting Roma applicants remains with the partner NGO. However, extending our focus beyond the partner companies - a group that includes a special set of conscious, open-minded employers - we have to mention that in general, one of the greatest barriers to Roma employment is widespread discrimination against them on the labour market (for details, see the State of the Art Report on this issue.).¹²

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PARTNER COMPANIES

The corporate partners of HRom (Bridge to Business in Hungary) included 18 companies covering *inter alia* the retail, service provision (gas, electricity, telecommunications, courier services), banking, agriculture, IT, energy and electronics sectors.¹³ These companies vary to a great extent in terms of their geographic distribution, their profiles, their sizes, and their employees' levels of education, socioeconomic status and demographics, but generally they are large, corporate-level firms, and the majority of them are global companies - this last feature influences their attitude toward diversity to a great extent. All the partner companies have their local headquarters in Budapest (or its vicinity) and

¹⁰For a description of the methods, data, number and type of interviews, see chapter 3.

¹¹ Some partner companies, especially in retail and mailing services, do employ a larger number of people with lower educational qualifications, though.

¹² <https://cps.ceu.edu/publications/working-paper/roma-employment-and-potentials-state-and-business-actors-labor-market>

¹³ For a list of partner companies, please see the programme's homepage (<http://autonomia.hu/en/programok/hrom/>)

only half of them have branches outside the capital. This fact limits the opportunity of successful placements through BtB at partner companies, as the majority (over 80%) of young Roma programme participants live in rural Hungary and many are not in a position to move to the capital city (we will return to this in more detail below).

We found a great deal of variation in how involved the partner companies became with the BtB programme. Some are very much involved and participated in all or most of the events and employer workshops during the BtB programme (see CASE 1) and actively recruit job applicants through the programme. Others are only weakly connected. The reason for this diversity is that the programme sets a very low threshold for companies to participate: (1) the company needs to be interested in the programme and open to employing Roma, (2) there must be a realistic chance that the company will have an open position with a profile that matches the qualifications of the BtB participants, (3) there must be a contact person ready to respond to inquiries. There is no requirement of a written partnership agreement. *“It is important that we set a low threshold for partnership with companies: we don’t tell them what to do, for example, to hire a certain number of people from the programmes, or to organise a certain number of introductory interviews with programme participants each year”* explained a lead fellow at Autonómia Foundation (AF), implementing BtB because most companies would not partner under such conditions with explicit responsibilities. On the other hand *“we also do not have to dedicate ourselves, for example, to delivering a certain number of job seekers with certain traits”* to partner companies as fellows at AF involved in the implementation of the program strongly believe that setting up any kind of strong expectations from the partner companies (i.e., a target number of placements or introductory interviews) would not only drive away potential partners but would not be a responsible decision to take, as the long-term harm of placing applicants who are not competitive enough with the partner companies outweighs any short-term benefits.

As to what partnering entails, there are different activities in which companies are invited to partake: they are offered the opportunity to participate in a dinner during each training session where companies and training participants can meet and get to know each other in an informal environment. (See CASE 4) Companies receive CVs of applicants they are interested in, or whom AF thinks may be a good match to the openings advertised. After the training, companies may also get support in the recruiting and mentoring of applicants, as well as advice about any kind of workplace inclusion situation from the programme (which they rarely ask for). As has been described, partnership with the companies is about voluntary cooperation: *“We offer opportunities for companies: if they come to the HR dinner, they may meet with approximately 15 young job seekers, if they find someone interesting there, we forward their CVs and connect the applicant with the firm. If the company does not take advantage of this opportunity, that’s on them.”* (lead fellow at AF). Of the 18 official partner companies, several are ‘dormant’ partners because the opportunities offered by BtB are not used by them, either due to a lack of a match between the participants’ skills or interest and the company’s offers, or because of the very low fluctuation in the workforce at a given company.

In sum, we found that the motivations of companies to partner with BtB are multiple, and several motivations can co-occur: some are motivated to partner with the programme because they lack

suitable workforce and are trying to reach out to new employee groups; others partner because they think diversity policy in Hungary should include Roma and want to support that aim even if their company has no immediate issues with finding employees. This may be the reason why participation in the BtB activities (HR dinners during the training, cooperation with Autonomía Foundation on placements, or participation in workshops about corporate diversity - more details in CASE 1) is disproportionate to the number of placements. Some companies, even though they present themselves in all possible forums linked to the programme, have not managed to place a single person from the programme with their company during the past two years, while others that are just weakly involved in these activities may have made more use of it as another workforce recruitment source.

3. DATA AND METHODS

The Bridge to Business impact study applied a multi-method approach to investigating both the actual and the potential impact of the programme on participants and partner companies. The study incorporated a balanced mix of qualitative and quantitative elements.¹⁴ The research with the companies, however, just applied qualitative methods: we conducted interviews with the HR departments of nine partner companies during the first year of the BtB project and returned to the five most active companies in January 2019. The interviews covered the firms' strategies and their general approach to diversity and related practices, individual cases of programme participants, and the firms' experiences with them. The report draws also from five workshops organized in cooperation with BtB and the Equal Opportunity Employers Forum (EOEF) in the first six months of 2018 (see also CASE 1). The workshops,¹⁵ which applied the methodology of focus group discussions and lasted two hours each, covered five broad topics, such as (1) outreach, (2) recruitment practices, (3) selection procedures, (4) internal and external communication, and (5) diversity strategies and the advantages of and barriers to inclusion for Roma employees. These workshops served as a basis for drafting "*Diverse, inclusive workplaces for Roma and others. A guide for HR,*"¹⁶ which was presented to representatives of corporate sector actors (mostly from HR departments) during the annual conference of the EOEF in October 2018. In addition, we conducted a series of in-depth interviews with the programme coordinator, the Autonomía Foundation. Although we had planned to do quantitative data collection within the partner companies in the form of an internal survey inquiring about their diversity strategy and employee attitudes towards diversity and Roma employees, this proved to be an overly ambitious plan: companies were not open to cooperating with such data collection at all.

Where available, we collected and analysed company documents dealing with anti-discrimination, equal treatment, equal opportunity, diversity or corporate social responsibility. In several cases,

¹⁴ Bamberger *et al* 2010, Garbarino and Holland 2009

¹⁵ There was a significant, though not complete, congruency between the BtB partner companies and those participating in the workshops.

¹⁶ http://mef.forum.hu/ckfinder/userfiles/files/sokszinu_befogado_munkahelyek.pdf or <http://autonomia.hu/hu/document/sokszinu-befogado-munkahely-romaknak-es-masoknak>
CPS-es link az angol nyelvűnek

however, this was not possible because these internal corporate documents are not accessible to the public or researchers.

The investigation of the companies also applied a ‘case-study’ approach based on interviews conducted with company representatives. A ‘CASE’ can be the story of an individual, someone’s path to successful employment (portrait), but a ‘CASE’ can be also a certain procedure or practice (practice) implemented at one of the partner companies or by the BtB programme. Through such cases, our intention is to highlight specific HR tools and corporate practices that can be considered innovative or that have emerged as specific outcomes of the programme. Some cases also demonstrate particular problems or obstacles during the programme implementation, as perceived by the companies (barriers). An important selection criterion for a ‘CASE’ is that it must convey either an important enabling mechanism or an important obstacle to the employment of Roma in the current Hungarian context. We tried to keep the scale and variety of the presented ‘CASES’ as broad and diverse as possible without becoming methodologically incoherent.

CASE 1. PRACTICE: WORKSHOP WITH HR REPRESENTATIVES OF PARTNER COMPANIES AND OTHER COMPANIES INTERESTED IN DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

Key words: *think-tank; strategies, diversity employment, knowledge sharing, good practices*

A series of thematic workshop events were co-organized by the Bridge programme and the Equal Opportunity Employers’ Forum in Hungary (EOEF). Company representatives from the EOEF partners (many of whom are also BtB project partner companies) participated. The sessions were organized thematically, including sessions about outreach, selection and hiring procedures, and managing diversity inside a company. Discussion evolved around different types of diversity and equal opportunity policies as well as anti-discrimination policies, highlighting the differences between each of these concepts and exchanging ideas about the practical consequences and organisational procedures emerging from such policies. The workshop session concept was based on interaction, mutual learning, and the sharing of good practices and failures. Examples came not just from the area of Roma employment but from employment programmes targeting other vulnerable groups such as women and people with reduced work capacity (typically people with physical and/or mental challenges). In Hungary, companies have the most experience with the latter group due to the legal environment, which encourages companies to hire such people via negative incentives. Workshop participants accumulated a valuable pool of knowledge about the existing ideas and practices in diversity management that are relevant to Hungary, and colleagues of the Bridge project drew from this to author an edited guide for employers entitled “Diverse and inclusive workplaces for Roma and others” to be shared and distributed among EOEF partners and beyond, among corporate employers in general.¹⁷

4. CORPORATE STRATEGIES AFFECTING THE EMPLOYMENT OF ROMA.

In the following section we will review corporate strategies and companies’ approaches that may (or may not) lead to (more) Roma employees and their greater inclusion. Most of the practices identified at the partner companies can be categorized into the following major approaches: from the perspective

¹⁷ Illés, M.(ed); Kelemen, Á.; Árendás Zs. and Messing, V (2018) Sokszínű, befogadó munkahelyek romáknak és másoknak.

of how the inclusion of vulnerable groups is managed, we distinguished between equal treatment and equal opportunity approaches; from the perspective of corporate strategies, we can distinguish between a diversity and a corporate social responsibility approach. These approaches are not mutually exclusive, but very often operate through the same practices; the difference lies rather in the framing and interpretation of their measures and strategies.

4.1. Approaches to social inclusion

Equal treatment postulates that each person needs to be treated equally irrespective of his/her ethnic background, gender, age, etc. This is mentioned as synonymous with non-discrimination and has become the defining approach in Hungary today, both in the state and business sectors in accordance with the legal environment the business organisations operate in (see chapter 1.2). In 2015, a broad survey conducted among Hungarian firms found more than half had a code of ethics in force that included aspects of equal treatment, while a third had anti-discrimination statutes. (Tardos 2017) When interviewing the BtB partner companies, we found that most employers, when asked about issues of equal opportunity, started their narratives by stating that their firms reject any discriminatory practices and, although some acknowledged that such behaviour can happen and their responsibility is to make non-discrimination a basic norm within the firm, most companies denied the possibility of discriminatory behaviour on their premises – *“No way is there the possibility of discrimination.”* (Diversity expert at a partner company)

Most of the partner companies emphasized that their basic approach to employing Roma is rooted in the following approach: *“We evaluate all applicants exclusively based on their performance. No other factors can play a role ...,”* said the senior HR manager of a partner company. Interestingly, they emphasized an equal treatment approach even if they also provided some kind of support to job applicants with certain types of vulnerabilities.

Our interviews with HR professionals revealed that many overlooked the fact that the disadvantages attached to positions of vulnerability do not disappear due to equal treatment; for example, in a competitive situation - e.g., in a job interview - various characteristics originating from an individual's disadvantaged situation place the individual in a disadvantaged position, creating obstacles during his/her performance. To give a simple example from the field of business employment practices: many Roma participants in the BtB programme come from segregated settlements or from underdeveloped regions where the quality of the public education is much lower than in more developed areas. This is a structural problem of the public education system that negatively affects those in economically less-advanced regions. Companies applying an equal treatment approach will necessarily put people with such educational backgrounds in a disadvantaged position. The following quote, from a senior HR person, reveals how two apparently identical qualifications may essentially differ and what the dilemmas are that employers who are sensitive to equal opportunity face:

“They have weaker qualifications. Even if they have a secondary school diploma, it is of different weight. They did not learn the same things and did not reach the same level of knowledge and competences [as peers who attended high-profile secondary school].”

Question: What do you mean by ‘knowledge’ and ‘competences’?

“Well, in [rural town] they scored much lower on our entry test.”

When looking more closely at what equal treatment/antidiscrimination procedures and practices are, we see that, apart from formally prohibiting discrimination and biased treatment of employees, there are formal – ethics or complaint – procedures accessible to employees who perceive unequal treatment. It is evident, however, that relying on ethics procedures is no substitute for the regular monitoring of equal treatment or equal opportunity practices, as ethics procedures deal with actual complaints from already-hired, individual employees. The monitoring of corporate procedures and the investigation into potential violations of ethics codes each have utterly different aims: the former measures the realisation of a corporate strategy and the elements to develop or correct, while the later examines and sanctions violations of regulations in concrete cases. Furthermore, very few employees have the courage and make the effort to turn to such bodies with their complaints, and complaint mechanisms are accessible just to those who are already employed; applicants who were not hired but suspect discrimination can merely turn to the state authorities.

Most companies, however, conduct regular employer satisfaction surveys and also collect statistics on the presence of vulnerable groups such as women, different age groups, or employees with disabilities, but there is no such information available about Roma employees at any of the companies. The reason for the lack of such measures is the legal environment: companies interpret the existing legal regulation as one that makes ethnic data collection impossible. Many of the existing equal opportunity measures used at the partnering companies of the BtB program have been introduced at length in the employer Guide written as part of the Bridge programme. (Illés et al. 2018)

The equal opportunity approach emerged from the recognition that equal treatment may contribute to reinforcing existing inequalities and that to combat different types of disadvantage the concerned parties need to be treated individually in various competitive situations. Although there are a few partner companies that did not recognize the legitimacy of such an approach (*“We would discriminate against them specifically if we put a focus on them”*; *“We don’t need to call attention to them”*¹⁸), most of the companies – while emphasizing the normativity of an equal treatment approach – actually apply affirmative practices in order to equalize the opportunities of applicants and employees with various types of vulnerabilities. Interestingly, they are reluctant to refer to it as ‘positive discrimination’ or ‘affirmative action’: *“We do not say that we offer preferential treatment, but rather that all should be given an opportunity, who are good.”*¹⁹ Most such actions, however, explicitly support

¹⁸ an HR fellow at a partner company

¹⁹ an HR fellow at a partner company

either large demographic groups (such as women, mothers with young children, or 50+ employees), or employees with disabilities (see Chapter 1). There are several companies that apply some sort of differential treatment to Roma, though not explicitly, especially during recruitment and selection procedures. Such treatment includes:

- Organizing a preliminary meeting with the HR department or introductory interviews for Roma coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. The introductory interviews provide applicants with an opportunity to get acquainted with the situation and obtain additional information about the company, the work environment, different openings, and information about what s/he can expect during the interview; (see Case 2)

CASE 2 (PRACTICE): CASE OF AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION MEASURE AT A PARTNER COMPANY

keywords: affirmative measure; selection

The company in question is a long-term, very active partner to BtB in Hungary. It supports Roma employment in several respects, including in its selection procedures. Its HR department recognized that a barrier to Roma applicants succeeding in being hired is rooted in the fact that because many come from highly disadvantaged circumstances, the corporate environment feels alien and paralyzing to them. Applicants coming from Roma employment programmes such as BtB have to go through the same selection procedure as any other candidate, but are also offered a personal informal meeting with the HR representative who prepares them for the interview. The personal, pre-interview meeting helps Roma applicants get to know basic information about the Bank, about the selection procedure, and about what to expect in the interview. This informal, personal meeting can support Roma applicants in becoming more self-confident and comfortable with the corporate environment. It also provides an opportunity for the employer to get to know the applicant better.

“I sit in on the interview, if I have a chance, to see how the managers and interviewers speak to [the Roma candidates]. There is no training about sensitization, but when I recommend a Roma applicant, I talk to the interviewers (the department head and the direct supervisor) and say ‘I expect you to be open-minded and assess his/her competences fairly, let’s talk afterward,” the head of an HR department told us.

- Forwarding the CVs of Roma applicants recruited through partner programmes directly to the department head for the interview stage;
 - Being less strict about factors where Roma applicants usually have a disadvantage, but that are not crucial to the job and can be caught up on within a limited time (i.e., experience with certain software, minor disadvantages in language skills);
 - Providing financial support for transportation to reach the interview venue;
 - Supporting selected applicants with accessing the state relocation subsidy (CASE 3);

CASE 3 (BARRIER): THE CASE OF R.’S HIRING AT A PARTNER COMPANY IN RETAIL

Key words: affirmative action; hiring; geographical mobility

R., a young Roma lady with a post-secondary degree who participated in a BtB training, found a job opportunity at a partner company specialized in retail that was appealing. She talked to the HR representative of the firm during the HR dinner organised during the BtB training (see CASE 6) and, after being encouraged, she applied for one of the job openings. The selection procedure was relatively easy. However, R. lived in a municipal town about 200 km away from the capital and she had to move to Budapest for the job. She could hardly afford to hire a flat in Budapest - even the salary she was offered for a junior manager's position seemed to hardly cover such an expense. The costs of moving to and renting a flat in Budapest, where costs correlate more with international price levels than with Hungarian incomes, is one of the main obstacles to Roma youth employment related mobility. The BtB coordinators turned R.'s attention to a state relocation benefit (in the framework of the Youth Guarantee programme) that offered a substantial amount for up to one year to unemployed youth who were ready to relocate for the purpose of employment. However, R. had to be registered as unemployed for at least 30 days in order to qualify for the benefit. The company was flexible and agreed to wait for R. to qualify for relocation support. The company's lawyers made sure that all the highly complicated, multifaceted, bureaucratic conditions and deadlines were met, and R. was able to make use of the relocation subsidy to hire a flat in the city near her job. While this is not a clear-cut case of affirmative action, it was still very important that the firm was cooperative, flexible, and adjusted to the needs of R. when signing the contract with her.

4.2. Corporate strategies

From the perspective of corporate strategies, we distinguished among the approaches of **corporate social responsibility** and **corporate diversity**. Both approaches primarily focus on the gains of hiring people from various social groups, even if these gains are long-term and indirect.

The key actor for the management of a **corporate diversity strategy** is usually the HR department. Corporate diversity may apply to either the equal treatment or equal opportunity approaches. In Hungary, at present, we see that companies with such a vision usually apply an equal treatment approach formally, but informally several of them provide some (minor) support to Roma applicants. This is different than for the other vulnerable groups focused on by diversity strategies: for example, people with limited work ability, women, or mothers with young children are offered differential treatment and affirmative measures.

As a business model, diversity may yield direct positive business outcomes. This is an important point made in the organizational and business literature, as it highlights that besides the indisputable challenges and risks posed by a diverse workforce, diversity can be an important resource and may lead to business gains.²⁰ However, while several BtB partner companies said they realized the advantages of a diverse workforce, only a few could identify any direct gains from employing Roma employees beyond easing their labour force shortage.

²⁰ Loden & Rosener, 1991

The most frequently-mentioned arguments about the direct or indirect gains that diversity as a business strategy yields were the following:

- The firm needs to proactively react to the labour-market crisis and the increasingly acute shortage of suitable workforce . Investing in diversity may lead to reaching out to and recruiting employees from social groups that have been beyond the scope of the firm previously. *“...because the mainstream²¹ is getting ever smaller, we need to recruit from social groups we did not consider earlier; the talent may hide there,”* the HR expert of a partner company told us.

- A diverse employee circle may serve the needs of a diverse clientele better. A firm with diverse employees may also be more attractive to a wider pool of clients: *“This is relevant because we have significant Roma clientele, and thus having Roma employees has business relevance, how we communicate with clients and whether Roma clients will choose us, or a Roma subcontractor will work with us. These are all issues that may translate into direct financial gains for the company through employer branding,”* the HR fellow of a partner company told us.

- Retaining a good workforce and reducing employee fluctuation. In a market characterized by high workforce demand, employee volatility is necessarily high. Therefore, companies that manage to keep a good workforce and prevent high fluctuation will have a significant advantage in the competition. *“The good reputation of a diverse firm spreads quickly and in a difficult labour market situation – like the one we are dealing with presently – such a firm is able to keep up its competitiveness simply due to less employee fluctuation.”²²* This is especially the case because most positions require on-the-job training, which is time- and resource consuming. A job requiring four to six months on-the-job training incurs significant expenses that show a return only if the employee stays at the job for two years or more.

- Several companies mentioned that diversity turned out to be an important value for their employees. Firms regularly conduct internal surveys assessing employee needs, problems and satisfaction. These surveys usually include a list of values and features important to the respondents. Two of the companies mentioned that diversity was rated surprisingly highly on this list, among the five most important features.

However, the following rather evident advantages of employee diversity never came up spontaneously during the interviews with HR representatives of the partner companies (although when these aspects were raised during the workshop, many agreed):

- Comfort with a corporate environment where employees may openly express what they identify with (in terms of ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, etc.), because hiding identity reduces work efficiency and work capacity. In addition, employee engagement and loyalty will also be significantly influenced.

²¹ the interviewee meant applicants not belonging to any vulnerable groups

²² HR fellow of a partner company

- Diversity supports innovation and creativity. According to the literature, several studies provide clear evidence for an increased potential for innovation and creativity in a diverse corporate setting compared to homogeneous firms.
- Diversity is advantageous because employees with different backgrounds and identities may bring different competences and qualities into the firm that, in the appropriate circumstances are mutually enriching.

The corporate social responsibility (CSR) (identified by some companies as ‘sustainable development strategy’) approach is a popular one in Hungary, although it was not typical among the partner companies of BtB. CSR is a business model that goes beyond compliance with regulatory requirements and engages in *"actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law,"* as an HR professional described. The impact a firm has on its social environment, and thus on the inclusion of vulnerable social group members, is often treated under the broad umbrella of CSR, although – according to the literature – environmental impact tends to be more in the focus of CSR than is social impacts.²³ CSR may refer to the inclusion of and caring for vulnerable population groups, as well as to actions to that end. CSR is most frequently managed by the Communications Department, as the utmost aim of CSR is to construct a company image communicating concern for the environment and social awareness. However, there are companies where CSR and HR strategies are loosely coordinated, and therefore CSR goals do not define HR processes and practices that may influence the hiring and inclusion of employees with vulnerabilities. *"It is usually the Communication Office that is responsible for the CSR; the key point is branding. More in-depth issues [HR processes and practices] are rarely dealt with in this framework"* explained an HR fellow at a partner company *"Equal opportunity employment is the terrain of HR, CSR is not HR, it falls under communication"*.

²³ Ligeti, György 2007

5. COMPANY PROCEDURES FOR HIRING ROMA EMPLOYEES- PRACTICES AND EXAMPLES

This part of the report summarizes the results of interviews the research team conducted at partner companies in regard to their practices related to diversity employment, including hiring more Roma employees. The section is organised according to the successive phases of the hiring process, starting with outreach and ending with workplace inclusion. It tries to understand the existing practices of diversity employment and employing Roma specifically. How do companies involved in the BtB project think of these measures, what do they consider good practice, and where do they face difficulties or feel gaps in their practices? In this part of the report we build heavily on ‘cases’ selected from the BtB program to present various practices and procedures towards successful Roma employment through concrete examples.

5.1 Outreach/ communication

Although with the increasing workforce demand it should be easy for Roma to find employment, due to the characteristics of the labour market described in the introduction the matching of Roma applicants to jobs does not always happen without difficulties. Companies find it hard to find eligible candidates from selected groups, either because the candidates do not reside where the jobs are and are unable to move or commute to them; or the candidates are not qualified enough to compete with candidates having no geographical barriers; or they do not have the social network necessary to find and apply successfully to the job.

CASE 4. BARRIER: DIFFICULTIES AND BARRIERS IN OUTREACH TO THE ROMA

Keyword: outreach; “cultural distance”; lack of confidence; role model

A partner company that is active in diversity recruitment and management with other target groups summarizes the limitations of the outreach and ‘matchmaking’ between Roma applicants and their company, talking about the barriers between different ‘worlds’, between the social realities of most Roma (even well-educated and qualified ones) and the business world and how this restrains Roma from applying for open positions in the business:

“I think this is such a distant world for them that they couldn’t even consider being successful and getting hired by us, or maybe they wouldn’t even consider walking in to our company. We had one candidate, a Roma woman, intelligent, with secondary school qualifications. She disappeared in the middle of the hiring process. This is not so typical in Budapest, but very much so in the countryside, for instance in town B.” [Their back office functions in a small town in Eastern Hungary].

She later emphasises the importance of role models and a personal network that links Roma communities with the business sphere:

“They haven’t ever seen such an environment, such a model. That world should be brought closer to them.... This model could also come from their Roma friends who have already gotten employed in the business world, but as I said earlier, there are significant differences between the countryside and Budapest in this matter.”

Company representatives (all of them HR fellows) argued that in order to be able to reach out to and attract higher numbers of employees belonging to a vulnerable/minority group, *targeted, proactive measures and incentives* need to be initiated by the company. Still, most companies apply predominantly an equal treatment approach in their outreach, meaning that they approach potential candidates in an undifferentiated manner in most cases (exceptions include the already-mentioned demographic groups and people with limited work capacity whose employment is supported by the legal environment).

One of the areas enabling outreach to the target group is utilizing different communication channels. Most of the companies involved in the Bridge to Business program do not communicate directly about the Roma in their PR materials or job advertisements because they find this group too small and often assume that messages encouraging Roma applicants may have as much of a negative or damaging effect as a positive one in a society with high levels of anti-Roma prejudice. However, a few partner companies have started to communicate about the Roma in their advertisements and PR materials by publishing photographs including their Roma employees among the 'company faces'. Such indirect communication about company diversity may encourage individuals belonging to minority groups to apply and also may inspire individuals for whom diversity is an important workplace feature.

Some of the companies use alternative methods and targeted strategies to reach out to the Roma as well. Roma networks and forums or geographical areas with high proportions of Roma can represent such alternative recruitment methods, as do Roma social or educational networks or NGOs. Only a few of the partner companies travelled to the countryside to reach out to the Roma communities in a targeted way. Most companies reach out to Roma by partnering with a Roma employment programme (such as the BtB program, but also Integrom or Romaster.).²⁴ This is a very efficient form of outreach: with relatively little investment, employers are linked to pre-selected job candidates (of adequate qualification and experience) of Roma background. In addition, partner organisations do the initial screening for the companies, and the above-mentioned programmes also serve as quality assurance for the BtB companies, as they conduct pre-selection among their own programme participants. The drawback to this type of outreach is that its volume is limited. The most successful company partnering with BtB was able to employ 10 young Roma through the programme and its pilot, but there were several companies that could not employ anybody from this pool.

Another way to reach out to Roma – strongly overlapping with the above approach – is to build partnerships with NGOs who have links to Roma communities but have no expertise in employment (such as Romaversitas²⁵ or the Roma Self-Governments). These organisations maintain a wide network

²⁴ Integrom was initiated in 2014 by the Boston Consulting Group and the Autonómia Foundation in Budapest. It is very similar to the Bridge to Business programme because it was its forerunner. The programme supports participants with training and access to contacts in the corporate sector. RoMaster was initiated by the Hungarian Business Leaders' Forum and IBM in 2007. It addresses talented Roma students who plan to acquire university qualifications in Law, Economics, Medicine and Engineering. It supports them with scholarships and business mentoring.

²⁵ Romaversitas is the first comprehensive support and training programme for talented Roma youngsters in Hungary. Established in 1996, over the past 20 years Romaversitas has supported more than 300 Roma students

of Roma communities and have accumulated significant experience with them and knowledge about them. Two companies we spoke with had tried to cooperate with local Roma Self-Governments,²⁶ a very obvious channel for reaching out to Roma communities, but both gave accounts of very limited success.

A third, emerging strategy for outreach to Roma is to rely on the personal networks of Roma employees; companies encourage them – along with other employees - to recommend suitable applicants from their personal network. However, this requires the company to have already hired Roma.

CASE 5. PORTRAIT. THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL NETWORK TIES

Keywords: *importance of personal networks; challenges of career change*

A. is a secondary school teacher of Maths and IT in a rural Hungarian town. He aimed to get a job in the business sphere because his income as a teacher was insufficient to maintain himself. He was able to find a job at one of the large multinational companies (not a partner to the BtB programme) through the support of his university friends: the job was not even openly announced, and his friend told him, informally, that at the firm they were looking for a junior person with IT qualifications who was willing to learn new skills, and if he was interested, he should send his CV. He did so, and very soon was invited to an informal meeting and then to a formal interview. He used his interethnic friendship ties to find accommodation in the capital, too, teaming up with other friends he knew from university to share a multi-room flat. Without these friendships, he would certainly not have had access to the information about the job, or to such accommodation, which is one of the greatest barriers for mobile Roma youth willing to take on a job in the business sphere outside their home town. Employers in Hungary rely greatly on recommendations from their employees in the process of recruitment: employees are motivated to share information about openings in their own networks and to recommend friends, relatives, and acquaintances to the firm.

A frequently-applied tool for increasing outreach to and encouraging applications from people with vulnerabilities in Western Europe is to include a clause on anti-discrimination in job advertisements or calls for tender, while in other instances the wording invites those belonging to vulnerable groups that are important for the company to apply. These practices are not present in Hungary when it comes to the Roma as a vulnerable group. During a workshop with company representatives on diversity measures and management it was unanimously concluded by the participants that such a clause (targeting Roma job-seekers) would be considered 'meaningless', or even counter-productive, and therefore they would avoid using it.

throughout their academic studies so they successfully graduate and become highly-skilled professionals in their chosen field. The programme operates as a shadow institution; members attend formal education (secondary schools or universities) and also receive scholarships, mentoring, tutoring and additional classes and training in the Romaversitas framework.

²⁶ The Minorities Law (1993) allows for the creation of representative political institutions for Hungary's national and ethnic minorities, including Roma. However, the current state of the law leaves the new institutions both financially and politically highly dependent on the national Government.

5.2 Recruitment: recruitment activities, procedures that support (or hinder) the inclusion of Roma in the workforce

Workforce recruitment takes place in two different ways at BtB partner companies (some use both methods): either the HR department of the company conducts the recruitment, or they outsource this task. It is obvious that a company conscious about diversity employment and/ or targeting specific minority groups for employment will have limited influence over the recruitment procedures in the latter case (when it takes place indirectly, through a recruiting firm), while the firm will have more control over the procedures when they are handled by its own HR department.

As workforce demand is intensive and the pressure on recruiters is heavy, in most of the cases we saw during our research the recruiters tended to use the broadest possible channels of recruitment. Needless to say, this strategy is the exact opposite of targeted recruitment, and very few or no companies would compromise on whether to conduct outreach *en masse* versus attracting a minimal number of individuals from a minority group (especially when the legal environment is not particularly supportive, as is the case with employing Roma people).

Another barrier to recruiting members of vulnerable groups is that job advertisements are often worded in highly technical language incomprehensible to applicants unacquainted with HR terminology. Due to their lack of experience on the labour market and their having no personal networks in the business sector, Roma jobseekers and others coming from disadvantaged backgrounds might not be able to correctly decipher such job advertisements and to understand that most of them overstate the requirements (e.g., if five years of work experience is mentioned, it is fine to apply even with two years' experience, etc.). If such is the case, then for many of the open corporate positions Roma would not even 'dare' to apply.

Apart from learning about a number of obstacles in reaching out to potential Roma applicants and their limitations in receiving the message, our interviewees expressed their dilemmas concerning the investment that recruiting a 'visible' number of Roma employees necessitates. As one sums it up: hiring a qualified Roma applicant requires a lot of extra work and effort, and good results are not guaranteed:

"There is a great openness towards diversity in our HR department, for instance, in terms of achieving greater gender balance, but we do not have the capacity to employ extra people, extra human resources in the selection process - this involves a lot of extra work. The openness is there, but it does not fit our daily operations. If someone would take this up and be willing to invest in it, I am sure HR would support it. Our CEO also likes such initiatives."

As we perceive the current labour market situation and the scarcity of a quality work-force in Hungary, companies are being increasingly pushed into such experimental pathways where an initial investment is needed (also with regard to non-Roma employees) but good outcomes are not 'guaranteed'. As this brief experience and history of employing Roma through employment programmes

indicates, the majority of Roma employees, once they perceive their new employer as an inclusive employer, feel comfortable to stay and become a reliable part of the workforce.

Another important barrier to recruiting qualified Roma people for these companies is that Roma candidates lack the relevant social capital and professional networks. This means they do not have a clear understanding about how to get in touch with companies when searching for a job, how to obtain relevant information regarding where to apply, what kind of positions to aim for, and in general, what the world of business companies looks like. This is a serious information gap, much bigger than in the case of applicants from mainstream society who usually have such networks, contacts, and much of the relevant information.

To bridge this information gap, a specific type of targeted recruitment and information-sharing has been introduced by the Bridge programme in the form of so-called “HR dinners”. This event served as a first step in linking up companies with potential Roma candidates for various company positions. (CASE 6)

CASE 6 PRACTICE: HR DINNER OF THE BTB TRAINING

Keywords: *recruitment, HR tools for targeted recruitment*

A very important, innovative element of the BtB program is the *company (or HR) dinner*, which offers *the first, informal interaction between the partner companies and the Roma training participants*. The dinner takes place on one of the evenings (usually the second) during the 4.5 days core training programme organized for young Roma. The dinner starts with company representatives introducing themselves and their firms and the type of positions generally available. Then everybody splits up into small groups seated at tables and the interaction starts between company representatives and job-seeking Roma youth. The dinner is organized in such a way that each participant (approximately 10-15 people per training) has a chance to interact with each company representative seated at different tables (in general, four to six companies are present during a dinner). The format of these interactions is similar to speed-dating: the training participants introduce themselves and the company representatives brief them about the profile of their firms and potential job opportunities (open positions) as well as other future opportunities at the company (internships, promotion system, extra benefits). In most instances, the discussion is very informal and serves the purpose of getting to know each other. The candidates are encouraged to ask any questions they have. Ideally, this makes these short sessions extremely interactive and full of new information for the participants. Some end up realizing they were initially underselling themselves due to not having enough information about the value of their qualifications on the market or, contrarily, they might have had overly ambitious expectations; they also learn about the various company positions and opportunities. Young Roma may realize during these informal discussions that they need to work more on their skills - they might have to take up extra training or education. Some may realize which types of companies would suit them personally and which would not. In some cases, the meeting between a company representative and a participant ends in the exchange of contact information, and the company representative may ask the participant to send them a CV after the training. Occasionally, short-term internships are also suggested to the participants.

The BtB also supports recruitment of young Roma by partner companies to ensure that candidates' CVs are reviewed and in most cases improved by the end of the training session. AF sends out CVs to the partner companies for specific positions or, if no matching positions are available at that point, for

future consideration. The following practice (CASE 7) shows that there are further possibilities to proactively enhance the recruitment of Roma applicants, although this firm's practice is a pioneering one, in our view.

CASE 7. PRACTICE: HR INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME FOR RECRUITMENT AND INCLUSION OF ROMA EMPLOYEES

Keywords: *recruitment; outreach, internship, inclusion*

Last year, one of the most active partner companies in BtB hired D., a part-time Roma intern, through the BtB programme. His tasks included liaising with BtB, and thus he started attending the company dinners as a representative of the firm. Though he was just a trainee and not an experienced HR person, because of his age and his social background the participants felt closer to him and thus, it was expected, would interact with him more freely, without any reservations. It was also expected that having a Roma intern at the company would attract more Roma candidates and potential employees. D. also had the task of finding new channels for recruiting potential Roma applicants. He used his personal networks, approached various networks of the Roma community, and contacted local minority Roma Self- Governments. He did manage to bring in candidates for an interview through his personal network, but his efforts to liaise with the Roma Self Government failed. He also developed a plan for a summer camp that would serve as an outreach program of the company in order to attract secondary school students in their last year of studies in an entirely playful, interactive way, raising interest among young Roma people and providing them information about job opportunities and company requirements.

D.'s tasks also included supporting Roma colleagues, especially those recruited through the BtB programme. He kept in touch with them and organized regular, informal gatherings, typically lunch meetings. These gatherings happened on a monthly basis and focused mostly on daily issues and existential challenges (e.g., related to accommodation).

As a senior HR person summarised the lessons of the HR traineeship, the present practice is worth continuing, even though D. resigned from the job after the period of traineeship. During the company's involvement in the pilot phase and the project period, 10 employees of Roma background were hired. Only one has left the company in the meantime; the rest of the Roma employees successfully integrated into the company.

5.3. Selection

What we have learnt from the employer side is that the actual skills and expertise of applicants coming from the BtB programme often fall below their expected levels. This is a problem characteristic of the entire population and is not specific to Roma applicants. However, Roma applicants struggle with additional difficulties rooted in the structural disadvantages related to their socio-economic background, poor schooling (as a consequence of the education system characterized by low level of equity and practices of segregation), residential segregation, etc. (see p. 13)

What follows from these socio-economic inequalities is a very tangible difference in Roma's performance compared to an average applicant during a job interview. Most often, employers report poor communication skills and differences in language use; lack of clear ideas or motivation about why he/she is interested in the particular job; and insufficient information about the company itself or about

the type of job for which the candidate has applied. Other employers mention a lack of soft skills, weak IT skills, communications skills, and lack of inadequate level of foreign languages knowledge. Another important skill, when it comes to selection and interview situations, is the ability to present oneself in a credible, convincing way. Such skills are believed to be related to self-confidence in general. Roma applicants are reported to perform poorly at this, supposedly due to their experiences of discrimination from early childhood on and to negative ethnic stereotyping during their life so far (including during their schooling, at previous workplaces, in their neighbourhood, and so on - see the participant report for details).

As was presented earlier in this report, although the majority of the business partners stick to the procedural steps related to equal treatment and non-discrimination, some have introduced practices that aim to counterbalance the disadvantages of Roma applicants. During the HR interviews we collected several of these interventions, such as:

a. *Shortened or supported selection procedure.*

This measure serves to support the candidate through the selection process, to make sure that he/she does not 'fall out' at an early stage. Some of the companies using this measure ensure that a formally suitable candidate arriving from the BtB programme reaches at least the stage of a personal interview, as in a general procedure many of the vulnerable Roma candidates fall out at an early screening stage, such as the phone interview, due to lacking either good communication skills over the phone, good timing, or the assertive behaviour to choose an 'ideal interview situation' (e.g., the Roma candidate does not dare to refuse an interview and thus accepts an interview phone call when s/he is in the middle of a noisy street or on public transport or a spot with poor phone-reception, where his/her chances to communicate successfully become very limited). A senior HR manager at a multinational firm that is a partner company speaks about her interventions in the hiring process when it comes to accepting young Roma candidates through the programme and also about the limitations of such interventions:

"If the position belongs to me [meaning the hiring recommendation is up to her] then I try to push the candidate forward to the interview stage. I make the decision that I am going to screen the candidate instead of the unit head so as to place him/her in an enabling position. This is a good expression, because we are not making an offer, but we are providing him/her with an opportunity. ... If the position is not with me, I will make a phone call or email the recruiter in charge and ask him to pay attention to this candidate, if possible, to call him/her for an interview, but of course I have no power to control whether they follow my request or not."

b. *Introductory interview*

Another form of a company/HR intervention during the interview process is an **introductory interview**. (See also CASE 2) Some of the committed HR managers at the partnering companies invite candidates for their open positions from the programme for a *pre-selection* interview. This means that the HR person briefs them about the job and asks them similar questions to the ones to be expected during the 'real' interview. This kind of support works well, according to the research interviews;

candidates do better after such a preliminary interview. (It is worth mentioning that the BtB programme itself provides opportunities for mock interviews to the participants during the training). An important element of the supported interview process is to **provide feedback** information to the candidate, helping him/her to learn from the experience, which may obviously lead to a better interview performance on the next occasion. This can be considered an innovative company practice, as giving feedback is not a norm during general interview processes.

c. Sensitizing/briefing the interviewer about the candidates arriving through the BtB programme

Some of the most pioneering companies in this area use methods to sensitize interviewers in order to 'screen out' discriminatory practices during selection stemming from social/ethnic prejudices. However, this is not done in a systematic manner by most of the companies, for instance, through anti-discrimination trainings provided to people working for the HR department; rather, it is based on informal methods, using personal channels and communications between the liaison person (a member of the HR unit) and colleagues involved in the selection process for a concrete position.

5.4. Inclusion at work

Inclusion is the stage of employment practices related to the Roma for which we were able to obtain the least amount of field data, simply due to the fact that the employment records for the participants hired by partner companies or for employment gained after participation in the training are still relatively recent and therefore short. Still, some preliminary observations can be made based on individual narratives and on the interviews with HR staff.

Firstly, as has often been emphasised here, hiring Roma may involve simple, structural obstacles. Channels of mobility within the country, including **geographical mobility**, are very restricted. (For more details on this see the Report on the Impact of BtB on participant young Roma.) This is especially the case when it comes to mobility from the countryside and even more so when it is about moving from segregated areas of the country to the capital city. Job applicants either commute or have to change their place of residence. Public transport is not adapted to employer needs, which makes commutes extremely long, tiring, and in most cases impossible on a daily basis, to say nothing of its costliness. Another option is to relocate to the place of work (in most cases to Budapest, in the BtB programme). In the context of the current rental market, where hiring a flat may cost as much as 90 % of the average income,²⁷ this is nearly impossible for a young person with no substantial savings to start with. This is a major obstacle often mentioned by the Roma programme participants that is much less visible to the employers, though some of the HR interviewees made clear references to the problem as well (more

²⁷https://index.hu/gazdasag/penzbeszel/2019/03/08/nem_eleg_csak_beszeln_i_a_dragulo_lakhatasi_koltsegekr_ol/

on this in Árendás- Messing- Zentai 2018 or in the other report on participants of the BtB project). (See also CASE 3)

When the complex process of how the company is including the recently-hired Bridge participants is being discussed, company representatives explain that their driving principle is a 'colour-blind' approach related to their anti-discrimination policies, and even though an employee is being hired through a Roma placement programme, his/her Roma identity is not necessarily revealed to other employees. It is left up to the individual to what extent s/he wants to communicate about her/his ethnic identity or whether to keep it private in his/her work environment. As a general characteristic, it is an unspoken expectation of the new Roma employees that they adjust to the receiving company environment (such expectations are articulated towards all employees). The companies' approach to employees' expressions of identity is rather varied; most take a completely colour-blind approach to diversity in the workspace. These companies are likely to downplay the role of ethnicity (or other identities) in potential conflict situations and to either leave colleagues who find themselves in such a situation alone or to frame such situations in other terms. Other companies take a more colour-conscious approach to diversity in the workplace and allow space for expressing identity, even providing a framework for grassroots initiatives, such as employee groups. Two companies gave accounts of informal Roma workers' groups or clubs; these groups did not want formalise but were used as a platform to exchange about the experiences and challenges young Roma face in the given corporate environment. (See CASE 5)

6. COMPANY EXPERIENCES WITH THE BRIDGE TO BUSINESS PROGRAMME

6.1. Impact on general diversity/equal opportunity strategy and practices

In terms of equal opportunity/diversity strategies, no companies mentioned any major changes in their approaches and practices. The social groups that companies already focused on when they joined the BtB programme have essentially stayed unchanged: most are typical demographic groups (women, certain age groups) and people with limited work capacity. With a few exceptions, neither ethnicity, race, nor sexual orientation were a focus of companies' diversity policies. However, during the follow-up interviews, several companies' HR fellows mentioned that an internal employee satisfaction survey had revealed how important diversity and equal opportunity are for employees. Diversity was rated among the five most important values of a BtB partner company by their employees, alongside values such as stability, appreciation, and predictability, and constituted an important aspect of branding for present and future employees. (*"In 2016 we conducted an employee satisfaction survey within the company and it revealed that our employees see diversity as an absolute advantage, a strong characteristic of this firm". "The employee survey revealed that our employees see our firm as a diverse one. It is not the most important feature, but it is rated very highly. Salaries were not the most important; diversity was rated fourth most important, if I remember correctly,"* the HR managers of two partner companies said).

However, **even if on the level of formal strategies or policies hardly any changes occurred, on the level of practices we identified several initiatives, new practices and innovations** supporting diversity employment at the companies that were the most pro-active in cooperating with BtB. When talking about actual cases and practices, we found that there has been a significant change in the practices of recruiting and selecting Roma employees in some companies. Although this was never stated explicitly, the discourses and also the actual practices of recruitment and selection changed in a way that supports greater outreach to and selection of Roma employees. Such changes are essentially practice-based and small-scale; it is yet to be seen if policies will follow the trend and whether successful initiatives and practices will be formalised.

CASE 8. PRACTICE: GLOBAL MULTINATIONAL FIRM'S CHANGE OF ITS DISCOURSE AND PRACTICES IN TREATING ROMA APPLICANTS

During our first interview in late 2017 with the equal opportunity officer of this firm we were given an account of its rigid equal treatment approach to all applicants. The firm expressed its openness to diversity and explained the advantages of diversity as both business advantages and as social responsibilities, but as soon as their actual practices were illuminated, it became clear that they followed the principle of colour-blind equal treatment approach and were not supportive to applicants in disadvantaged positions. They wondered why they were unable to hire any Roma even though *"they are treated in the same way as any other applicants."* The causes of the failure in hiring were attributed to the applicants in most cases, i.e., *"often they are reluctant to apply, maybe they feel a distance". "They don't have sufficient interview experience and this is a problem, indeed"; "They are not socialised in this labour market competition culture."* Although these problems are real, the company's HR representative, who is in charge of equal opportunity employment, did not consider the company's potential role in overcoming them and becoming more sensitive to Roma applicants' vulnerabilities.

More than a year later, following active participation not just in the programme but also in the workshop series in the course of which companies exchanged their experiences about diversity practices and the recruitment, selection and inclusion of Roma into their companies, this person's discourse changed significantly. She not only considered suitable Roma applicants, she actively supported them with reaching the interview stage. Also, she considered other practices, such as hiring a Roma HR assistant/trainee who would have better understanding of the community and how to approach Roma applicants, somebody who *"would serve as a kind of quality assurance for the Roma applicants, who would present to them that this company is a safe place for Roma."*

Our experience is that noticeable changes in the approach to diversity and Roma employment have occurred in the companies that took an active part in the workshop series organized by BtB in collaboration with the Equal Opportunity Employers' Forum in 2018. (See CASE 1). **Partnership with the programme in and of itself did not bring about noticeable changes in their approaches to and practices of diversity management.** This is logical, as partnership with the programme has been defined in a wide scope, and the threshold to become a partner was set at a rather low level (see chapter 2), thereby incorporating very different levels of cooperation and involvement by corporate partners. Also, it would be naïve to expect big changes in big multinational companies' HR strategies as a result of a single project. These organizations are large and change relatively slowly. With no direct financial benefit – as would be the case of hiring people with disabilities – little change can be expected, and even in the case of hiring people with disabilities, it took many years for changes to occur. Diversity strategies that shape recruitment and employment practices are developed and accepted by boards just every two or three years at such large multinational organisations.

The workshop series organized in cooperation with the EOE Forum (CASE 1), which required active participation on the side of corporate partners, had an impact on the approaches and even the practices of some firms. Thus, the workshop series that was organised within the framework of the programme to broadly cover aspects related to diversity and the employment of Roma in the corporate sector had a significant effect on facilitating a structured dialogue among HR experts, strengthened their awareness of these aspects, and led to the compilation of the above-mentioned diversity Guide for employers.

6.2. Summary of partner companies' changes in response to the challenges of employing Roma. Innovative practices.

Companies partnering with the BtB programme highlighted several issues that they found challenging in association with employing a Roma workforce. The following chapter will be organised according to the key challenges posed by hiring Roma that were mentioned by partner companies during our initial interviews. Each subchapter will discuss practices of meeting the given challenge. We list all the experiences, even though some may have occurred only at one or two companies and were not widely shared among the corporate partners. Still, these responses may be understood as innovative measures for addressing Roma's employment in the business sector.

Developing outreach to Roma communities and potential applicants

The first obstacle the corporate partners of the BtB program mentioned was that **there are very few Roma, if at all, applying to open positions** at their firms. Applying a non-targeted, equal treatment approach to outreach and recruitment means the news about open positions does not reach Roma, who – alongside the non-Roma living in marginalised rural settlements – have very little knowledge about how to look for a job and what a job search entails. Prior to joining the programme, companies considered this something of a given, and perceived their partnership with pro-Roma programmes as the only channel for reaching out to Roma applicants. However, during the two years of partnership, some companies took a pro-active stand in reaching out to potential Roma applicants. One of the companies in the financial sector introduced multiple measures and **hired a Roma trainee** from the BtB programme with the aim of increasing their outreach to Roma communities, giving him this task. This trainee contacted local Roma leaders (Roma Self-Governments and NGOs) and negotiated to use their networks to inform members of the local Roma community about open positions at the company. The trainee also used his own personal and community networks to attract Roma youth to job openings. (See CASE 4).

Some companies decided to **use photos of Roma in their promo material** in order to make the company more attractive to Roma and to visually reinforce the corporate diversity image of their firm. While such branding does not explicitly increase a company's outreach to Roma applicants, it encourages Roma (and other groups of vulnerable applicants) who know about an opening to take the liberty of applying for the open position.

A very important source of outreach is **personal contacts and recommendations** in the Hungarian corporate sector. Most BtB partner companies provide direct financial benefits to colleagues whose recommendations lead to the actual hiring of new employees. With no Roma at a firm, evidently this channel of outreach would not support Roma employment, but having Roma employees already on board, even if just a few, could lead to a **multiplier effect**. Roma employees recommend the firm to their circles of friends and acquaintances and encourage them to apply to open positions, guiding them throughout the selection process.

Another practice that a company recently initiated was to **liaise with secondary schools**, especially those that specialize in vocations important to the firm. The company offers extra-curricular activities to introduce itself and its jobs in the schools in the hope of making seniors interested in working with them after graduation. Several companies target Roma students by **partnering with RoMaster, a scholarship and mentoring programme** in which companies financially support and mentor a Roma student throughout his/her studies.

Enhancing Roma applications to open positions

Several corporate partners mentioned that young Roma **are reluctant to apply for open positions**. One means of increasing applications is the **HR dinner** organised at the BtB training, during which young

Roma get a chance to talk with corporate partners and receive very up-to-date, personalised information about the firm and its open positions, while firms get a first impression of the programme participants and may find candidates suitable for open positions at the firm. (CASE 6) HR representatives sense that young Roma seem to be enthusiastic during this informal meeting, but when it comes to taking action such as submitting applications, sending their CVs, or following up by phone, this enthusiasm seems to fade to some extent: *“It is so nice to talk to them during the HR dinners, they are so enthusiastic, but then, when it comes to action, this enthusiasm somehow fades.”*

Autonómia Foundation mentioned that they send information about open positions at partner companies to programme participants regularly. Also, one company created an **online registration interface** for BtB participants; once registered, they will be contacted directly and receive information about all the relevant openings directly from the firm.

Preventing Roma applicant dropout at an early stage of the selection procedure

Most companies explained at the start of the programme that **even the very few Roma who do apply do not make it to the interview stage**. Two years ago, at the start of the programme, most companies followed a rigid equal treatment approach and did not see that there are systemic causes for Roma applicants dropping out in the early stages of the selection process, such as poor performance during pre-screening phone interviews due to their lack of experience and/or inadequate circumstances; lack of self-confidence due to extensive discriminatory experiences since early childhood, as well as feeling uncomfortable due to the huge gap between the corporate environment and that of their homes; inadequate communication due to lack of experience with job interview situations; unprofessional CVs; not understanding what the advertised position is about; lack of information about the company or the business sector in general due to a lack of personal networks in this area. By the programme’s third year several companies had introduced certain practices (they would not call them affirmative) that eased the path of Roma applicants to the interview stage. Several companies give **special attention** to applicants arriving from programmes such as BtB and **inform the unit or colleague in charge of the selection** about the applicant. Other companies go even further and make sure that the Roma applicant applying through the BtB programme reaches the stage of a personal interview, either skipping the pre-screening (phone interview) or not taking a very rigid approach to its results. Also, some companies organise **preparatory or introductory interviews** for Roma applicants to make them more prepared and comfortable with the situation. (CASE 2). Still, most of the partner companies did not change their practices and do not support Roma applicants in any specific way.

Inclusion in the workplace

The corporate partners were **concerned about the inclusion of Roma youth in the workplace** and the management of anticipated conflicts from the programme’s inception. With just one exception, no companies gave any accounts of conflicts that could be traced to differences in culture or ethnic background with regard to the employees hired through the programme since it began. Any conflicts that programme participants were caught up in were regular workplace tensions, such as

communication problems, issues about distribution of tasks, overwhelming workloads, or lack of sympathy with a certain colleague. To ease Roma youth inclusion in the corporate environment and the burden of feeling isolated, two companies started to organise or support the organisation of **Roma employee groups**. (CASE 7) There is some ambiguity about the advantages of these employee groups: Roma youth are not explicitly enthusiastic about them for various reasons, such as the huge workloads they have to manage at these new jobs and the fact that most of them did not want to perform their ethnic identity in a corporate environment. Still, the existence of such a group, even if informally, seems to be an important signal to Roma applicants about the firms' openness to Roma. Another support for Roma, along with the other newcomers the firms receive, is a **network of mentors or 'buddies'**. Mentors are usually appointed to all, but in the case of Roma employees, some companies have given special attention to the appointment of their mentors. One of the companies that covers almost all of Hungary and has an extensive clientele faced several instances of small-scale **conflicts** that their newcomer Roma employees encountered. Most were not of an ethnic nature; however, the senior HR manager attempted to follow and to **mediate** these situations personally, making sure that these disagreements were not framed as ones rooted in ethnic differences.

Enhancing territorial mobility: closing the geographic gap between Roma and corporate jobs

Another problem mentioned by many corporate partners concerned the **regional mismatch of the young Roma and their open positions**. (see report on BtB Participants too) This is obviously a structural problem of the Hungarian labour market not specific to Roma, but Roma are disproportionately affected by it because a large segment of Roma live in marginalized, rural areas where public transport is not adapted to workers' needs and where property prices are too low to motivate mobility. Firms do recognize this problem but identify it as one they can hardly do anything about. Very few actively support overcoming this barrier. Mobility is difficult, as most partner companies have their open positions in Budapest, where the income of a junior employee only rarely covers accommodation costs. Young Roma usually don't have the kind of financial reserves necessary to cover, even if just temporarily, the expenses of such mobility, and companies also do not take these needs into account when formulating an offer. Two companies made a **strategic decision and moved one of their branches to rural cities**. One company, seated in the vicinity of Budapest, used a different approach and supported a suitable applicant in such a way as to enable her to **apply for a state-provided relocation grant** (within the framework of an active labour market policy targeting unemployed youth). (See CASE 3)

7. COMPANIES' OPINIONS OF THE PROGRAMME

All partner companies actively involved in the BtB programme evaluated it in absolutely positive terms. They have remarked on the training segments' high level of professionalism, its well-formed structure, and its useful content elements. As an HR partner put it, *"the programme became one which operates with a really good, well-developed curriculum."* Corporate partners also appreciated the professionalism of the AF in implementing the programme.

Some company partners noted problems and limitations of the program with respect to the participants. A partner active in the retail sector spoke about the mismatch between the open positions available at their company and the education level of programme participants, referring to the fact that most were over-qualified for the jobs they could offer. *"I think in our case the problem was with the pool: we have 6,500 employees, of whom 6,000 work in the department store, which means that the BtB programme participants can just apply for administrative positions at our headquarters due to their high qualifications. It would be of great help to us if the participant pool would include less-qualified candidates as well."*

When it comes to the profile of the applicants, other companies emphasize exactly the high qualifications and skills of the programme participants. *"I only have positive things to say... I did not have any expectations... We have received candidates who could be transferred easily [within the company for a hiring process]. I sensed a clear shift in this."* This company representative is comparing the BtB to the earlier pilot phase of the program called Integrom, referred to above.

Another company spoke about the mismatch between the professional backgrounds of the candidates - many of them coming from humanities and the social sphere (social worker, teacher, community helper, etc,) - and the world of multinational companies, referring to the fact that the employer is signing up for the risks regarding a successful switch between professions in such cases. *"Many of them are social workers who have earlier worked with civil society organisations. It is very difficult to take them away from this, and one does not feel like tempting them away from it, as it's a beautiful goal. That's a different calling, and I don't want to remove anybody from it, but it will make his/her situation in the business world very difficult.(...) One risks a different level of commitment to the work when it comes to a business company than to working for a civil society organisation, and he/she may quickly realise that this is not for her/him. It is a risk."*

The geographical mismatch between the candidates and the available company positions comes up in some of the interviews as well when companies express their slight disappointment over the fact that most applicants live in areas where they have no jobs to offer and relocation is impossible for the applicant. While acknowledging the difficulty of this mismatch, they mention that the programme was not able to reach a large segment of the Roma population living in the regions where the company's presence was stronger and thus their hiring capacities were stronger, too.

"It is very difficult to evaluate... this programme works on a national basis and I had high expectations regarding this feature [that it would be something of national scale – Authors' Note]. At the same time, there are no big changes, neither in the number nor in the 'quality' of the applicants. The programme has not yielded significant changes [compared to the preceding Integrom programme], although at its launch the number of applicants had increased. That was a temporary change, though. (...) It is a fact that we did get a few good applicants. We were able to hire 10 people from the programme, eight of them are still with us."

8. SUSTAINABILITY: WHICH PROGRAMME ELEMENTS DO COMPANIES SEE AS SUSTAINABLE BEYOND THE LIFE OF THE PROGRAMME, AND HOW?

In the first chapter of this report we argued that the labour market context, characterised by a labour shortage during 2016-19, offered an extremely favourable environment for initiating new approaches and innovation concerning diversity employment and the inclusion of Roma in corporate firms. Companies struggling with an increasing shortage of suitable workforce were more likely to be receptive to cooperation with the project, in the hope of reaching out to new segments of labour market and consider and test new approaches to and practices of inclusive hiring. However, despite the very favourable labour market context (from the point of view of job seekers) the programme faced a mismatch in terms of professions and regional distribution of its participants and corporate partners: most of the young, educated Roma reside in parts of the country characterized by little economic activity and presence of the corporate sector. Also, young Roma typically possess qualifications that are of little interest to the corporate sector. Therefore, the potential of the program to place participants at partner companies was limited even in such a favourable macro-economic environment.

Eighteen companies in the corporate sector formally partnered with the Bridge to Business project during its three-year time span. The companies covered a wide range of sectors, but their geographical coverage turned out to be less balanced, with an overwhelming weight of the capital city. There was great variation in terms of what partnership actually involved ranging from intensive cooperation in think-thanks concerning diversity management, intensive partnership in placing young Roma participating in the programme at companies, to merely formal partnership with little or no active involvement either in such placements or in developing the ideas and practices of diversity management. When discussing the rationale behind partnering with Bridge to Business specifically as well as the new generation of diversity approaches more broadly, the accounts provided by the company representatives diverged significantly. Their arguments revolved primarily around the business rationales emerging through the employment of a diverse workforce, such as pro-actively responding to the growing labour shortage and looking for new groups of potential employees; serving the needs of a diverse client group better with more diverse employees; retaining a good workforce; and reducing employee fluctuation.

The research found that the target of increasing Roma hires was primarily approached through partnership with (pro-) Roma NGOs or programmes. The target group was socially (and often geographically) quite distant from corporate firms, and thus the network and expertise of NGOs was instrumental in finding potential Roma employees.

Looking at the framework of the activities and practices concerning diversity employment and Roma inclusion we found that, following from the legal environment, which is anchored in the Law on Equal Treatment (2003/CXXV), companies emphasize the guiding principle of an equal treatment approach. However, when looking at actual practices, many of the partner companies applied affirmative measures in order to equalize opportunities. They did so not only with regard to the large

demographic groups who are usually the focus of diversity strategies (women, youth, 50+, mothers with young children or people living with disabilities), but some also supported Roma in this way, too. When checking the changes that had occurred during the 2.5 years of the project we found that the formal diversity strategies and, within them, the approach to employing Roma had not changed. However, at the level of practices we could identify several initiatives or innovations that actually supported the inclusion of Roma in the company. (CASE 2, 3 and 8) We found that participation in the workshop series (CASE 1) - serving as a think-tank and exchange of ideas for companies willing to open their doors to Roma employees - pro-actively contributed to more conscious, strategic thinking about the possibilities and tools of corporate firms to employ (more) Roma.

The research has identified a number of innovative HR practices enhancing Roma employment that happened during the time scope of the Bridge to Business project at the partner companies. The most significant areas of innovation and actual practices are as follows:

- o Several companies developed and tested new, innovative tools of reaching out to Roma communities. Some companies liaised with established pro-Roma NGOs and employment programmes to recommend open positions to young Roma and vice-versa, to recommend suitable Roma applicants to companies. One of the companies also employed a Roma trainee whose task included liaising with Roma organisations and educational units (secondary and vocational schools) that could potentially serve as a source of young, job-searching Roma. (CASE 7)

- o The BtB training, as well as the HR dinners, can be considered innovative practices in and of themselves. The training offered in-depth, extensive preparation for participants to apply and go through a selection process. The HR dinner (CASE 6) proved to be a tool to begin closing the gap between corporate employers and young Roma.

- o A few companies implemented pro-active affirmative practices in the selection process, ones that do not harm the principle of selecting a fully suitable candidate for a given position. One of these practices was to ease the way to the personal job interview for Roma who arrived through BtB. Some companies felt that the programme (BtB) itself had pre-selected and trained suitable Roma. The reasons for dropping-out prior to the personal interview may have not so much been related to applicants' skills, but rather to their social disadvantages, such as lack of experience with job interview situations, as well as having to conduct phone interviews under inadequate circumstances; lack of self-confidence due to extensive experiences of discrimination since early childhood; or lack of information about the company or the business sector in general due to a lack of personal networks in that area. (CASE 4 or 5) Another intervention several companies started to apply in the course of the BtB programme was to invite suitable Roma applicants for a preparatory or introductory interview that made them more prepared and comfortable later in the actual job interview. (CASE 2)

- o There were fewer innovations concerning the inclusion of those young Roma who were employed. Most of the time – if any inclusion was strategically done – it remained within the framework of mainstream operations, such as assigning a mentor or a buddy to the newcomer.

However, two companies initiated an informal employee group for Roma as an additional tool of inclusion. This initiative was received with some reluctance by the young Roma: some thought that such a group was helpful in managing everyday problems related to the new job environment and (for most of them) new life situation, while others considered forming a group based on ethnicity problematic as they didn't want to exhibit their ethnicity in the work environment.

Finally, when considering the impact of a programme that largely proved to be fruitful for both the partnering companies and, even more importantly, for the participating young Roma (see the other report about the impact of BtB on the participating Roma youth) we need to reflect upon the potential for its sustainability. BtB is a project financed for three years; its activities end in September 2019 and thus will not be sustained in the present format. When it comes to outreach/recruitment, the long-term cooperation of companies with non-project funded partners - like Roma NGOs, Roma Self-Governments and Roma networks – could serve as a sustainable model. However, continuous commitment from both the employer's and the NGO's side would be a precondition for that. One partner company, for example, tried to build such a partnership with local Roma Self-Governments, but it turned out to be a failure. The same company also tried to ensure outreach to potential Roma candidates and to institutionalize recruitment practices by hiring an HR intern of Roma background.

In hiring processes, sensitizing the HR employees involved in selection can have long-term effects and impacts on hiring practices at a company level and may have the potential to influence the actual numbers of hired Roma candidates. If non-discrimination practices are monitored continuously in a structured way at corporate level – especially for hiring processes – that can ensure the long-term sustainability of the BtB programme results beyond its timeframe.

When it comes to inclusion, some of the measures such as the buddy-system (peer-to-peer learning system) in place at some of the partner companies, the Roma employee groups, and the mentoring system via the HR person in charge of the diversity measures and Roma employment are all targeted tools of inclusion that can continue beyond the BtB program. Interviews with HR representatives and the EOEF workshop discussions underlined that employers committed to diversity employment and more specifically to employing Roma are keen to continue with these employment practices beyond the programme.

Obstacles of enhancing Roma's inclusion in the corporate world include (1) low level of institutional commitment, which therefore influences the sustainability of these practices; and (2) the one-person type of commitment (e.g a single HR person) driving practices related to the employment of (more) Roma, presently. This latter feature, logically, seriously threatens sustainability: as soon as the committed individual leaves the company, the level of commitment drops. To reiterate what has already been spelled out before, in order to increase the level of sustainability of the results of the program, and to enhance Roma's presence in corporate level firms a stronger institutionalization and higher level of institutional commitment are important preconditions.



DIVERSITY
PAYS OFF

For contacts with Bridge to Business Programme

Open Society Institute – Sofia Foundation

📍 56, Solunska, str., Sofia

☎ 02/9536619

🔗 bridgetobusiness.eu | www.diversitypaysoff.eu | osis.bg

✉ info@bridgetobusiness.eu

📘 facebook.com/bridgetobusiness.eu | facebook.com/diversitypaysoff



bridgetobusiness.eu

BRIDGE TO BUSINESS

The report along with other reports and summaries on the implementation and impact of Bridge to Business in Hungary can be accessed at:

<https://cps.ceu.edu/research/bridge-to-business>



CENTRAL
EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITY

Bridging young Roma and business – Intervention for inclusion of Roma youth through employment in the private sector in Bulgaria and Hungary“ is supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation („EaSI“) 2014-2020

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