

## Topic: Employing the Marginalized Roma

### The Roma as an Opportunity for the Regions

The issues of employment and employability of the Roma in Slovakia and the lack thereof, have been resonating among both the expert and non-expert public for decades. Currently, there is a paradoxical situation when larger businesses must fight labour shortage and are often forced to “import” workers, whereas about 100,000 working-age Roma in Slovakia do not have a job.<sup>1</sup>

The unemployed from socially excluded locations have a considerable potential. There is extensive unemployed workforce available. These people possess a significant extent of informally acquired skills and work experience from the sector of grey economy. They are also highly motivated to find legal, stable, and long-term employment.



**Anton Marcincin,**  
Government Plenipotentiary for the Least Developed Districts

“The Roma are the last major group of population, of which the majority have not yet been integrated into the labour market. They are willing to work in relatively lower-level working positions and for low salaries. In 2035, our labour market will be short of about 500,000 people. There will not be enough employees and contributors to the social security system. For many regions in Slovakia, the Roma represent an opportunity for survival.”

#### Myths and facts: The Roma and work



MYTH	FACT
The Roma do not want to work.	Although it is not possible to quantify the number of the Slovak Roma who leave to work abroad, some districts have recorded a high percentage of Roma citizens (over 50%) who leave to work in England, Belgium, and Sweden. <sup>2</sup>
The Roma have the same access to the labour market as the rest of the population.	Several factors obstruct the Roma from entering the formal labour market – low qualifications, high debt levels, an unsuitable form of the state’s social and family policy, and often also poor health resulting from their living conditions. Prejudices of employers’ and other employees’ after getting employed also play a significant role.
The Roma abuse the social security system and slow down economic growth.	The total fiscal costs paid to the Roma families account for approximately 0.2% of the public expenditures. This is approximately the same amount that the state pays to retired people in the form of Christmas bonuses. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> According to the statistics of the Office of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family, 34,237 foreign nationals worked in Slovakia in October 2016. Out of the EU countries, most of the foreigners were from Romania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Bulgaria, and from third countries, especially from Ukraine and Serbia. Except for production operators (more than 7,600 persons) and craftsmen (almost 3,000 persons), there were also more than 3,300 supplementary and untrained workers. The numbers that include the so-called undeclared work are, of course, much higher.

<sup>2</sup> [http://bit.ly/Vanova\\_Romovia](http://bit.ly/Vanova_Romovia)

<sup>3</sup> [http://bit.ly/INESS\\_Romovia](http://bit.ly/INESS_Romovia)

## When analysing the employment, employability, and the use of potential of the marginalized Roma, it is essential to realize two facts:

1. The issue of employment of people from marginalized communities is not equal to the issue of the employment of the Roma as such. This characteristic is based on social status rather than ethnicity. Problems related to employment and social inclusion result from the conditions, in which the person or a specific community lives. Poverty, exclusion and otherness are not characteristic features of the Roma ethnicity as such, but rather the low social class (the so-called underclass), which has its own specific characteristics regardless of nationality, ethnicity, etc.
2. Employing marginalized people differs in case of work incubators (social enterprises and other forms of training for employment), large businesses, small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs). In the case of large businesses and multinational companies, inadequate qualifications and working habits are the biggest obstacle, while in the case of SMEs, prejudices of the management and other employees are often a part of the problem too.

## How Can This Work?

In Slovakia, we can find examples of solutions and functional systems, which serve for employers to make use of the existing structures to solve social issues, as well as issues in their firms related to filling vacant positions.

### Specific project of a large business: U. S. Steel Košice



BEST  
PRACTICE

In 2002, company **U. S. Steel Košice** launched a local project titled *Rovnosť príležitostí* (Equal opportunities), which focused on the marginalized Roma and communities with 100% unemployment rate. Firstly, company's management offered the municipality an opportunity to create vacancies for 35 job-seekers. In the following stages, the number of people involved in the project grew to 150 persons employed in the steel company through the municipality. Besides the village of Veľká Ida, the project gradually grew and included also the municipality of Šaca and the city district of Luník IX.

Once a year, the company defined the extent and kind of works they would need to be done. The project utilized the model of employee leasing, i.e. the employees were employed by the municipality, the city district, or a civic association. The employee selection process was based on a previous personal acquaintance with the applicants, and the selected ones were those who were ready to work and change their habits, supported education of their children, and wanted to increase their qualifications. As a great motivation served the possibility of a full time employment for those project participants who would achieve outstanding work results and were willing and able to take part in professional training enabling them to perform tasks requiring better qualifications.

At first, the project focused on work-age men, but gradually it shifted to women – wives of the workers, as well. Later, it proved essential to extend the project and include also work with employees' children, as it was clear that their parents' work performance depends on good family and social background, too. Therefore, the project also included work with teachers or supervisors (foremen).



RECOMMENDATION

Adjust professional trainings and educational activities to the needs of this target group and to specific conditions of a given job position.



RECOMMENDATION

The support of family relationships and personal life of the Roma employees is an essential part of successful labour policy of a company.

The project was run by a flexible team consisting of managers, supervisors, lawyers, production workers, and others who reacted to new challenges flexibly. After the launch of the project, staff fluctuation proved to be the biggest problem, which was solved through involvement of an intermediary – a town mayor, i.e. someone who knew the employees personally and could assist them with problem solution directly.

The project was formally terminated by an amendment of the Labour Code (which came into force in 2016) bringing a number of insurmountable obstacles to its further implementation.



**Ján Bača**, U. S. Steel Košice

“Our goal was not to implement a short-term project but to ensure a sustainable development of the whole community, and create employment potential for the company in the long term. It was successful, as many people, except for being directly employed, increased their qualifications and asserted themselves in the labour market. We often accept participants of the project to internal positions without giving them advantage over the other candidates. What we considered a success already during the project was that mayors and people living in the involved locations saw progress in the communities thanks to stable incomes of their inhabitants. And finally, we also see it as very positive that employees overcame prejudices and changed their views based on practical experience of interacting with the Roma as their co-workers.”



#### RECOMMENDATION

Strengthen your relationship with local authorities or community centres. They will be able to direct you and possibly also resolve issues directly with your employee.

## Long-term policy of a large business: Whirlpool Slovakia



#### BEST PRACTICE

Company Whirlpool Slovakia has its main offices next to the municipality of Veľká Lomnica with an extensive Roma population. It was this community from which the company started recruiting workers rather massively in 2014. Company’s management describe this step as a natural reaction to the labour market in the Poprad district. The Roma account for about 20% of company’s employees. In addition to the most common blue-collar positions, the Roma also fill many specialized positions.

Since the beginning of the process, the jobs had been offered through a standard full time contract, which was viewed as the greatest motivation for the job-seekers.

Despite the inadequate (and sometimes non-existent) qualifications, the company managed to prepare and qualify these employees continuously. A great majority of them became fully integrated.



#### RECOMMENDATION

By providing the opportunity to work with a permanent contract, you give job-seekers a promise of stability. In return, you attract dutiful and loyal employees.



**Jaroslav Grygar**, Whirlpool Slovakia

“We do not consider employing the marginalized Roma to be a specific experiment. For us, it is a natural process that proved to work. In our company, the Roma are now a stable and responsible part of the operations. However, a lot of effort and work with them was necessary. On average, it took us three years to train and integrate them. We were able to prepare a qualified operator in half a year on average, and he/she was even able to move across different positions. Despite the concerns our company had in 2014 when taking on these employees massively, we definitely consider the time spent preparing and training them effective and put to good use.”

Initial problems related to absences from work were solved individually through managers, supervisors, production managers, and members of unions. Visits in households proved to be effective, too – mostly they focused on explanations of work habits and employment principles, as well as removal of barriers between an employer and an employee.

A very important part of the process was that the employer paid attention to employees' families, especially to children, their education, and free-time activities. Rather than securing employees through an employment agency, the company chose to work directly with job-seekers as well as the employees themselves. Except for basic hygiene skills and work discipline issues, the company also dealt with personal relationships in the workplace, outside the workplace, as well as families' household financial management. Currently, it can be concluded that most of the employees have been fully integrated and help create a higher-quality work environment.

**Ján Bača**, U. S. Steel Košice

*“Without networking that goes beyond the company structures, the project would not have been successful. Success was based on good cooperation with municipalities, schools, and other stakeholders.”*

**Jaroslav Grygar**, Whirlpool Slovakia

*“The practice has shown that a purposeful cooperation with a nursery school, primary school, secondary school, and municipalities, as well as with the labour office is essential and beneficial.”*



#### RECOMMENDATION

Employ an individual approach towards your workers, and try to see them more as people with uneasy backgrounds rather than employees only.



#### RECOMMENDATION

Examples from practice demonstrate that to overcome the above-mentioned barriers successfully, for a company it is essential to cooperate across various units, sectors, and collaborate with all the stakeholders.

## Experience of a small/medium-sized company: Alfa Bio



#### BEST PRACTICE

**Alfa Bio**, a company in Banská Bystrica, has not adopted any measures focused on employing marginalized and long-term unemployed Roma, yet they have been working with this group for a long time. The company is convinced that a successful integration of workers from excluded communities is based on helpful and open communication. Activities such as contacting authorities, using public transport, or filling in forms may seem ordinary for working people, but this marginalized group may consider them a big challenge posing a major mental obstacle. Therefore, it is essential to differentiate between laziness and irresponsible approach, and a loss of work habits which is usually the true reason behind initial problems with the Roma employees. On the other hand, the company sees a difference between the majority population and the Roma population – the Roma have a higher motivation to work and often a more responsible approach to work. A number of Roma employees of Alfa Bio claim that the reason for that rests in their gratefulness for the opportunity which, due to discrimination, is not a matter of course in many other workplaces.

In Alfa Bio, expressions of racism in the workplace are rather rare, and would be strongly objected not only by the management, but the whole team. However, a certain degree of fear of the unknown can typically be found in workplaces where people are not in direct contact with the Roma (e.g., in offices and the management).



#### RECOMMENDATION

Workers from excluded communities appreciate a helpful and fair approach of their employer, which then reflects in their active approach to work.



**Ondrej Lunter**, Alfa Bio

“What I see as the most important aspect of successful integration of the marginalized Roma into our company is creation of open recruitment and adaptation process rules and abiding by these policies. Still, respect towards the policies needs to be actively required of the employees, preceded by a thorough explanation. Our processes are standardized for all workers, yet I believe that we could do more. If we could devote more time to recruitment and employ an individual approach based on needs of individual candidates from different social groups, more candidates could pass through the recruitment process and be successfully integrated into the company.”

## Cooperation with NGOs, Schools, and Community Centres

Experts agree that education of the Roma is fundamental – whether through elimination of special schools, where Roma children often end up, or through advanced coordination and education of employees by the employer. Non-governmental organizations are an effective intermediary between companies and their potential employees. They have the potential to provide social services not only to a given person, but also to their whole family and community. They also have the capacity to perform further counselling, mentoring, tutoring, and assistance.

Civic association **Ludia a perspektiva (People and the Perspective)** takes part on solving and eliminating problems of the socially disadvantaged citizens in town Krompachy and its surroundings. In cooperation with a private united school, it trains the young Roma, so that they are able to get employed at the **SEZ Krompachy** company afterwards. The association assists the school in recruiting primary school pupils from the marginalized communities, helps ensure attendance and discipline during classes, secures practical training placements, and selects suitable graduates for employment. The cooperation of all three actors enables to provide pupils with merit scholarships and pocket money for practical training.

The Ludia a perspektiva (People and the Perspective) association has also established long-term cooperation with other business operators, for which it prepares and trains socially disadvantaged employees with a background of long-term unemployment. At first, the “future employee” of a cooperating business operator becomes an employee of the civic association, which prepares him/her for work, and, at the same time, works with his/her family too. Provided the training has been sufficient, the employee then gets fully employed at the company. At this “intermediate” stage, the association not only educates the workers, but as a subcontractor also assists with production activities of the company, either on the premises of the association or the premises of the cooperating company. Therefore, instead of a training consisting of a theoretical and practical part, this preparation combines standard production works and social assistance services.



**BEST  
PRACTICE**



**RECOMMENDATION**

Make use of capacities and experience of schools and non-profit organizations, which can provide your potential employees with tailor-made trainings based on your specific needs.



**Imrich Holečko**, Civic association Ludia a perspektiva

“Activities of our civic association prepare the disadvantaged and long-term unemployed citizens for employment based on previously defined and precise needs of employers. An important part of the training is a change in the lifestyle of these citizen, related to issues such as discipline, sense of responsibility, and consistency. This kind of cooperation has been implemented and successfully tested for more than 10 years. These activities should become a starting point for joint coordinated programs with the state sector. To make the cooperation effective, the programs should make use of the capacities of various business operators, the state administration, municipalities, and NGOs.”

When overcoming initial problems related to work preparation and problem-solving at a workplace, companies can cooperate with community centres, and thus have a local partner. Within national project titled Komunitné centrá (Community centres), the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family of the Slovak Republic created a database of community centres supported by the project. Thus, companies have a list featuring a map of 168 centres to seek professional support, at their disposal.

There are three workers providing specialized social counselling (also) in the field of employment in these centres. Currently, a similar project is being prepared under the auspices of the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma communities. It focuses mainly on supporting these centres.



#### RECOMMENDATION

Make use of experience of community centre employees, who know your (potential) employees in person and can advise you on employment or legal issues related to employing this group of people.



**Miroslava Hapalová**, MESA 10

“The network of community centres in Slovakia is currently quite robust, and it would be a pity if the employers do not make use of it. As an inspiration may serve good examples of approach of NGOs, such as, for instance, job coaching by Človek v ohrození (in the past called Človek v tísní), Community Centre of Minorities (Veľký Krtíš) and Lipany Community Centre (Charity of the Archdiocese Košice). When entering the labour market, an important support role is also played by “intermediaries”, such as the municipal company of Spišský Hrhov, the Svatobor association, Horehronie Community Centre (Association of the Young Roma), and others.”



### In what a community centre can be of assistance to a company:

PREPARATION FOR ENTERING THE LABOUR MARKET	ENTRY INTO EMPLOYMENT	AFTER AN ENTRY INTO EMPLOYMENT
Preparation of job-seekers for entering the labour market (motivation, debt relief)	Provision of relevant references on individual job-seekers	Assistance with problem-solving at a workplace
Approaching suitable candidates for specific positions	Assistance with arrangement of administration for candidates	Assistance with addressing employee’s family issues
Conveying information about tools of active labour market measures	Assistance with arrangement of accommodation, transport, etc.	Support and motivation of an employee

## What Can the State Do?

We live in times when it is necessary to offer complex solutions which may be applied locally. Besides supporting municipalities that care about their inhabitants and the economic development of the area they govern, it is also necessary to support employers who deal, amongst many other problems, with the issue of labour shortage. Many of the employers engage in regional processes and feel accountable for their surroundings. It is not companies' role to focus on social work. Despite the enthusiasm of businesses to employ the Roma, we often encounter disappointment and the burnout syndrome. This means that other elements that could help prevent these kinds of situations are organized insufficiently. Therefore, a proactive approach on the side of the state is necessary.

We asked companies in which fields they require support of the state, so that together we can create a better business environment and, at the same time, help tackle the long-term social issue of the unemployment of marginalized Roma communities. Please, feel free to **send us your suggestions; we will be happy to pass them on.**



**Anton Marcinčin,**

Government Plenipotentiary for the Least Developed Districts

"There are sociologists, politicians, and activists with their own views on how to tackle the Roma unemployment. Still, we often lack the view from the perspective of economists and companies. A social dialogue on this topic between companies is non-existent. We need a strong platform of entrepreneurs who would make themselves heard and pressure the system. The companies should be state's partners with a strong argumentation potential. The state should care about healthy and natural functioning of processes, with everyone doing what they are supposed to do. Together, it all forms a real, healthy, and working mechanism."



**Pavla Mončeková,** GGP Slovakia

"As far as employment of the socially excluded Roma from the settlements is concerned, the state should direct its support at improving people's basic levels of education, and supporting basic hygiene skill creation, as well as creation of working habits. It would be helpful to establish a consulting and assistance institution for employees and provide incentives to employers who employ a certain number of Roma people."



**Ondrej Lunter,** Alfa Bio

"Companies operating in areas with developed industries and high employment rates often lack workers with low and medium qualifications. The solution to the problem could be a completion of activities of the Labour Office, which fulfils the function of concentrating job-seekers well, by training and mediatory activities in close cooperation with target employers. Their opinions on the expectations of future employees are probably the most relevant."

These recommendations are an output of event **Action Oriented Forum – from the Needs of Companies to Addressing Employment of the Marginalized Roma**, which took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2016 with an aim to exchange experience among the public administration sector, NGOs and entrepreneurs.

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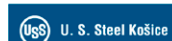
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Contact: cr@pontisfoundation.sk • Pontis Foundation, Zelinárska 2, 821 08 Bratislava 2 • www.blf.sk