

NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR THE PROJECT ROMFASHION

Situation of Roma people living in the Czech Republic

Roma people have been living in the area of the present Czech Republic for a long time. The first written note of their presence is from the 15th century. India is considered to be the country of origin of Roma people. Roma are known as travellers with specific way of live, customs and traditions, which are greatly different from the way of live European people are used to. Although living at the area of present Czech Republic for several centuries, Roma have not integrated into the Czech society. By and by, other people used to think of them as a troubled ethnic minority and bilateral incomprehension and displeasure between Roma and the white majority has grown.



This society's attitude towards Roma had a lot of negative consequences for Roma, as church excommunication, dispute of basic human rights, limited access to education and career development, repression of Roma customs and traditions, gradual segregation, etc. During 20th century, Roma identity cards were established. These cards contributed to Roma segregation from the society in the newly established Czechoslovakia and were also used by Nazis during Holocaust. Hence it is not surprising, that after 1989

Roma have preferred to use Czech nationality then Roma. This situation complicates many statistical surveys based on the nationality.

November 1989 brought a big change for Roma in Czechoslovakia. It was an important date for all people in our country but for Roma moreover this is the date since they can use they own language, develop their own culture, found for this purpose their own organizations, develop international contacts, etc. Roma people made an attempt to rebuild their nation. Since this date we can see many Roma activities, as a Roma poems and prose, numerous cultural actions and social meetings. State is a main supporter of Roma press, telecasting and broadcasting. Roma can use public media. It is possible to study Roma language and culture at universities. In 1991 Roma were officially declared as a national minority with its rights and responsibilities.

Although today Roma people have such conditions for developing their culture, traditions and customs and their personal development as they had not before, their actual situation is very difficult. A long period of systematic limitation of their development (access to education, limits for business, etc.), impossibility to develop their culture and dispute of basic human rights led to systematic segregation of Roma from the Czech society (creation of socially excluded Roma localities) and their belonging to the lowest classes of the Czech society. For evaluation of social and economical situation of Roma in the Czech Republic three topics are important:

- Housing
- Access to the labour market
- Access to education

Socially excluded localities are most likely to be found in certain regions (especially Usti Region and Moravian-Silesian Region – see figure) and certain parts of towns or villages, specifically in those parts which are not lucrative for other residents due to

various reasons. These localities have been gradually populated by relocated Roma families of socially excluded individuals (unless already living here before 1989) who became "prisoners" of such places unable to leave the locality despite their efforts.



*Socially excluded Roma localities
in Moravian-Silesian Region*

The families of socially excluded individuals mentioned in the preceding sentence are primarily families of long-term unemployed Roma. To say it in simplified way, **unemployment** can be taken as a primary factor in the social exclusion process of residents of these localities. Long-term exclusion from the labour market has often led to life strategy changes resulting from various facts including weakened income basis of a family. Shortly after the primary earner's job loss, these families frequently stopped paying the rent. As rent dodgers, they were sooner or later relocated from their original settlement.

Finally, it is necessary to say that **minimal education and no or low qualifications** of most residents of the reviewed localities were the main reasons for unemployment and inability to reintegrate into the structured labour market.

Until 1989, almost all Roma in the Czech Republic had jobs. The paternalistic socialistic state ensured work for everyone. To be without a job was actually illegal (crime of vagrancy). During the first half of 1990s, the majority of current inhabitants of the socially excluded Roma localities lost their jobs¹ in consequence of economic transformation resulting in lay-offs in several industries. This period was marked by onset of the general trend towards decreasing numbers of **unqualified and low-qualified jobs**. At the same time, the required level of qualification has been increasing so the prospects of socially excluded Roma for their (re)inclusion in the labour market have further lowered. The Roma minority in the Czech Republic has therefore been suffering from a **high unemployment rate** for prolonged period of time. Regardless the total unemployment rate in Czech Republic, the unemployment rate

¹ Job loss has also affected the majority of Roma whose families have been living in flats/houses fully integrated into surrounding settings. These people are permanently at risk of being forced to move to a socially excluded locality due to insufficient funds to cover their everyday needs.

reached 90-100%² in the majority of the socially excluded Roma localities and unemployment was very frequently **long-term** (several years) and/or **repeated unemployment**. It was also very common that both partners (or all adults in a household) were without work.

Unemployment has **several serious impacts** on Roma inhabitants of the socially excluded localities. In addition to **material poverty**, these include **social** (exclusion from participation in social and economic life of the Czech society) and **mental consequences** (quitting further attempts to find a job, loss of work habits, falling into addictions, etc.) which further **decrease prospects of inhabitants for integration into the labour market**. In many cases, we can talk about **factual unemployability** of the socially excluded Roma.

The Roma inhabitants of localities who are employed mostly have a **marginal position in the labour market**. Most of all, they have **seasonal or occasional jobs** based on unprotected arrangements. This type of work is marked by low earnings and persistent job uncertainty. Employment contracts concluded for indefinite period of time are very rare in the case of the socially excluded locality inhabitants.

Long-term unemployed Roma as well as Roma who are marginalized in the labour market gradually develop **alternative living strategies** to make their living - such as actual dependence on welfare, debts, unofficial work and other informal economic activities. In the socially excluded settings, these strategies and related values (undervaluing education and wage labour, focus on the present, etc.) gradually spread their roots and are being reproduced from generation to generation. The seriousness of the problem is further intensified by fact that in the socially excluded localities, almost an entire generation of youths has been raised without learning the importance of labour relation. Unemployment is a standard for them. Not only does this generation lack a work ethic, it doesn't even have a chance to establish one.



Considering the above it is clear that **labour market integration is the key precondition of social inclusion of inhabitants of the socially excluded localities**. Since poor education and qualification levels proved to be the major cause of the current situation, it is necessary to lay a strong emphasis on education of children if the problems are not to intensify in the future. In addition, it is necessary to pursue integration of currently unemployed persons.

Majority of adult Roma living in the socially excluded localities had finished primary education only, were long-term unemployed and were dependent on the social assistance or support system. Yet successful completion of the primary school programme is a basic

² It is well known that it is not possible to obtain accurate data on the unemployment rate of (socially excluded) Roma because the Labour Offices do not (officially) monitor such data due to personal data protection. The mentioned data are based on estimations of entities operating in the socially excluded localities (field social workers of NGO or local authorities, representatives of social departments of local authorities, and occasionally Labour Offices workers).

precondition of further education and adoption of professional skills necessary for competition in the today labour market.

The failure of Roma pupils in the Czech education system combined with the resulting inability to compete on the labour market contributes to further deepening of social exclusion. Czech primary **education tends towards reproduction of educational and social origins** which in the case of children from socially excluded Roma localities causes the education system itself to become an instrument of the social exclusion process.

Individuals (and their families, if any) with higher than primary education, nevertheless, had the mobility potential necessary to leave a socially excluded locality. Support for education of Roma resulting in adoption of professional skills followed by professional careers therefore plays a key role in tackling the issue of social exclusion of Roma.

One of the main factors contributing to low success rate of Roma pupils in the Czech education system is **a low motivation to learn and compete in the labour market**. Unfortunately, low motivation is constantly being deepened both by Roma (undervaluing of education) and the majority society (unequal access to the labour market based on discriminatory attitudes of employers). Also the current state social support system arrangement plays a major role in this regard.

Roma living in socially excluded localities do not consider education a vehicle for achieving a reasonable professional career, i.e. a vehicle of social integration, and indeed pass on such attitude to their children. In the socially excluded locality settings, there is a lack of good examples (e.g. successful, educated employed Roma) demonstrating the importance of education. Considering the fact that Roma pupils lack natural self-motivation to learn due to absence of such attitude in their families and surroundings, **improvement of self-motivation is the key factor for success of Roma pupils in the education system**.

Second factor contributing to low success rate of Roma pupils in the Czech education system is that **Roma children from socially excluded localities are often unprepared for entry into the compulsory school system**.

Children from socially excluded Roma localities grow up in an environment in which preparation for compulsory school attendance is not a priority (parents often ignore the duty to enrol their children at a



primary school, children only rarely attend infant schools/kindergartens). Roma children entering schools are equipped with different apparatus of social and communication skills, impairing their ability to adapt themselves to the new environment. In addition, they frequently **have poor knowledge of the Czech language** which is another barrier. The children often use the Roma “ethnolect” of Czech, hindering their absorption of information. Such trend can be reversed only through **above-standard specific support provided to the children from the outset of their compulsory school attendance (or even before, if possible)**.

It is also important to mention the markedly **low number of Roma students in secondary schools and vocational schools** that is one of the major reasons for Roma's failure in the labour market. Self motivation of the Roma population from socially excluded localities regarding secondary education is very low. After the children's completion of compulsory school attendance, Roma parents sometimes prefer **to register them to the evidence of the labour office** because if the children enrol in a requalification course then, they are immediately entitled to an unemployment benefit and hence immediately able to **support the family budget**.

Combining problems with adaptation to unknown environment, commuting or boarding house housing, the transition from a primary to a secondary school represents another key barrier on the Roma children's way to higher education. Socially excluded Roma children have difficulties in adapting to new environments and suffer deeply from separation from their families. They lack fundamental (or common, from the majority society's perspective) skills necessary for independent life (using public transport, time management skills, communication skills, etc.). Therefore, the majority of Roma students terminate their studies during the first months of their secondary school attendance.

From above mentioned facts it is obvious that the situation of Roma minority in Czech society is not easy and their status, standard of living, and further development will more or less depend on promptness and help from the side of state and wider society.



One of the possibilities how to help Roma to be integrated into the society is to enable them to develop their rich culture and traditions which they can further use for their living. Lot of people in the Czech Republic think that Roma people have never done something really useful, have been only sorners, and until 50th last century they mostly did occasional jobs or peddling and Roma women did jobs like stealing chickens and food, foretell the future from cards or hands and that with few exceptions

they just deceiving others. It is true that some of them did those activities yet after World War Second but only some of them and moreover this depended on environment they lived in. Not many people know that Roma were good musicians and knew a lot of crafts that unfortunately were forgotten or became unneeded because of industrialization and mainly because of constant pressure from past political system. And today, when there are more unemployed people among Roma then among other people, they are often regarded as loafers waiting for state subventions, social security benefits or rents. Nobody thinks if Roma are responsible for this situation or not.

Roma were regarded as skilful crafters, musicians and other jobs operators. The main craft for Roma was smithing. They used old traditional ways of work which they knew from India. While working they were sitting on the ground and they were using old materials as e.g. used iron which was free. They made especially nails, chains, wagon accessories, hoes and various ironworks. They made horse-shoes rarely. Only few Roma do this craft today and it is different from the past. They are interested in making objects of art such as ironworks, candleholders, grates, etc. Other form of their living was helping farmers on their fields and

because of this help they usually got some food as potatoes, corn, etc. This help was just occasional job as gathering potatoes and beetroot, weeding or crushing stone while building roads for villages. This cooperation finished with the beginning of collectivisation and founding of UAC (United Agricultural Co-operative) and since that time nobody wanted Roma's help and Roma became needless.

Other crafts Roma were used to do were making rods, baskets, scuttles, mats, skinning and tanning leathers, edging knives, making unburnt bricks from clay, water and husk, making of charcoals. Also music was very important for Roma, they were very good musicians. They played for Gorgios traditional local songs so they became bearers of traditional music. For other Roma they played slow songs about hard life, love, sadness and misery. The old Roma word say *Gadžeske bašavav andro kan, Romeske andro jilo* thus *For Gorgios we play for listening by ear but for our Roma we play for listening by heart.*

Roma women used to help their husbands; e.g. ironsmiths' women were used to kindle fire; however, sometimes they forged, too. Roma women also sold goods. As long as they did not help their husbands they did many other things. In traditional Roma community, women's task was maintenance of the household and family. Roma women often helped farmers. They did almost everything on field; it was a daily labour for them. They were cleaning, washing floors, cutting wood, seeding and helping at the time of harvest. After harvest they were picking spikelets and this was very convenient work for them because they could keep certain amount for themselves.

Until the World War Second, cooperation between Roma and farmers worked well. It was a symbiosis because farmers needed help and Roma were glad helping them so they got some food from them. It was common e.g. during picking potatoes that ten bags were for farmers family and eleventh was for helpers (Roma) family so this work was very convenient for them. Roma really appreciated this job, they liked it but especially for Roma women this job was very hard and difficult. Because Roma women were out of home helping farmers all days, oldest children were those who took care of younger brothers and sisters.

Roma always used natural sources because they were free. Roma picked forest fruits, mushrooms and plants good for health. From natural materials they used clay for example.

From above mentioned facts is obvious that Roma are very handy and skilful and both men and women were used to work hard. Events of last century made a lot of crafts, Roma were used to do, unneeded and moreover because of constant social segregation Roma have now many problems to attend schools and get some knowledge that is necessary in contemporary world of information.

One of the possibilities for Roma to become successful at today's labour market is refreshing of old crafts and propagation of their traditions and culture. Outstanding elements of Roma culture are certainly Roma dresses and jewellery. They exceed in their colourfulness, width, glitter and variety. A big temperament and provocation emit from them. One of the ways how to help refresh and develop Roma culture is to organize courses for sewing traditional Roma



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dresses and costumes. Many Roma women that are unemployed now will be able to acquire a job due to those courses and moreover results of their work might contribute to promote Roma culture. Roma dresses and costumes will be useful for groups of Roma dancers and musicians during their exhibitions. They can be also used during various cultural events and social occasions organised by Roma or Roma organisations. Costumes might be part of expositions in museums or part of thematic expositions about Roma culture, traditions and live. Dissemination and promotion of Roma dresses and costumes will help other people to learn more about Roma life, traditions and culture. For Roma themselves, this will help to raise their self-confidence and pride in Roma nationality.

Source: www.rommuz.cz
www.romea.cz
www.romove.radio.cz
http://www.gac.cz/documents/nase_prace_vystupy/GAC_MAPA_Socially_Excluded_Roma_Localities_in_the_CR_en.pdf

METER Silesia

Ostrava, Czech Republic

10th January 2009