

Policies for Improvement of the Employment of Roma in Macedonia

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Exclusion of Roma

Macedonia is a country of about 2 million people and, officially, there are some 54,000 Roma.¹ Other estimates give a range of 80,000 to 135,000 Roma.² Roma are the poorest population in Macedonia.³ For centuries, Roma have lived outside the mainstream of society, neglected by the other communities in the region.

The overall number of unemployed in Macedonia as of April 2005 is 385,338,⁴ almost 39 per cent of the working-age population. According to state data, 71.3 per cent of the Roma population is unemployed. Roma sources⁵ say the true figure is around 95 per cent. There are 16,740 registered unemployed Roma, but many are not registered, because of lack of documents and lack of awareness of the criteria for registering;⁶ thus the real number of unemployed Roma is significantly larger. Roma are grossly under-represented in both private and public sector employment, the latter in spite of the Framework Agreement provision on proportional representation of ethnicities at state institutions at all levels.⁷ The socio-economic status and exclusion of Roma in Macedonia from employment is a violation of international and Macedonian human rights and minority rights standards.⁸

Unemployment among Roma rapidly increased during the transition from socialism, when many state-owned businesses downsized or closed.⁹ Roma were severely affected because they were often the least educated¹⁰ and most unskilled workers, and because of their lack of knowledge of their rights.

This micro-study assesses the key factors causing unemployment of Roma in Macedonia, and the national and international programmes set up to bring about change. Research for this study targeted a range of stakeholders, including Roma.¹¹

Roma experience of employment and unemployment

Roma who have jobs mainly work as casual labourers, traders in small goods, artisans, cleaners, musicians, seasonal workers, collectors of recycled goods, etc. These jobs are insecure and do not provide a steady income. Roma with qualifications often hold low-paid jobs



Roma blacksmiths in Tetovo – a dying trade. Roma Democratic Development Association (Sonce)

inappropriate for their qualification. Widespread stereotypes about Roma and their long-term marginalization in society reinforce this situation.

Factors contributing to the lack opportunities for Roma in Macedonia include lack of education and skills, compounded by employers' perceptions of Roma, political patronage and discrimination against the Roma. Two examples highlight the difficulties that Roma face in seeking work.

KD (40) from Kumanovo lives with his wife HD (38) and six children aged 3–14. Both parents are illiterate. HD looks after the children and does not earn any money. The family receives social welfare assistance, which is not enough even for food.¹² KD constantly looks for work. Sometimes he earns 5–10 € per day as a labourer. The Local Employment Agency gives him no information on where and how to look for work, and he cannot find this information himself because of his illiteracy. He thinks no one will give him work because he is illiterate and has no education or experience.

UK (43) and SK (42) both have university degrees (in music and economics respectively). They are unemployed and have been living on social welfare assistance of about

PRISMA project

The USAID-supported PRISMA project offers a model that could bring about change. All the parties involved (development agencies, state institutions, private companies, civil society organizations, media and unemployed) participate in all stages of the project cycle. Various components address the different economic development issues:

1. Local Economic Development – preventative community response to economic change.
 2. Rapid Response/Worker Adjustments – vocational training for laid-off workers.
 3. Enterprise Competitiveness/Quick Start – streamlining work for increased productivity and competitiveness.
- Including this approach in a Roma-specific targeted programme would ensure sustainable changes.

22 € per month for their three-member family for more than ten years. After graduating from high school, SK applied for jobs, approached companies, asked friends to help her and registered at the Employment Agency. She was told that she was not able to obtain a job because she didn't have a university degree. She graduated from university in 2000 but was still rejected when she applied for jobs. The Employment Agency told her that Roma political leaders should intervene but the Roma MP she contacted could not help her. She thinks all hope is lost. Their son is an excellent student at school, but, because of his parents' unemployment, doesn't see the point of further education.

Government employment programmes

Efforts to reduce unemployment and improve the economic situation in Macedonia are not reaching Roma. There is a lack of programmes targeting Roma and mainstream efforts to promote employment fail to consider Roma's needs or to consult the different communities in Macedonia.

One key initiative to reduce the unemployment among the whole population was 'Branko's law' (the Law on Promotion of Employment), which gave companies tax relief for each new employee during the two years (2003–5) it was in force. Its results were minimal – only about 15,500 people were employed. This indicates that longer-term measures are needed.

State representatives were concerned mainly with the general numbers, while the disaggregated data was neglected. Thus, participation of Roma in this measure cannot be assessed. Of the Roma interviewed for this study, 44.75 per cent confirmed they had heard of Branko's law; while 87.25 per cent said they had had no benefit from any of the employment programmes.¹³

Another government measure, implemented through the Employment Agency, is preparation for employment of

unemployed people. In the period 2000–04, 784 such programmes have been undertaken; 17,016 people participated of whom 12,504 subsequently found employment. These programmes are mainly aimed at people who have been educated beyond primary level. This automatically excludes most Roma.

The Employment Agency keeps records of the number of unemployed according to ethnicity. However, there are no records on participation of Roma (or other ethnicities) in the employment programmes, even though state institutions are obliged to keep such records under the Ohrid Framework Agreement. This applies to all programmes implemented by state institutions, both government initiatives and programmes run by international development agencies. State institutions excuse the lack of disaggregated records principally on the grounds that laws must be applied equally to all citizens. However, the Roma community has specific needs, conditions and capacities that cannot be addressed by the same measures as for other communities.

Currently, the government has adopted the National Action Plan on Employment (NAPE) 2004–05. Roma and Roma NGOs were not involved in the drafting process of this plan, and the plan is not publicly available.

The Macedonian government has also prepared a National Strategy for Roma and National Action Plan. The National Strategy for Roma is part of the EU Agenda 2000, and the Action Plan is part of the Decade for Roma Inclusion. Roma did not participate in drafting the National Strategy (although some Roma comments were included in the final version), but they have been involved in drafting the Action Plan, which contains a number of innovative ideas. These include, among others, training employees of the Employment Agencies to deal with Roma; training for Roma in managing their own businesses; establishing teams in municipalities to support unemployed Roma.

International development agencies' programmes

International development agencies run many programmes and projects, mainly in cooperation with the state. Most of these are focused on improving economic conditions and legislation, rather than job creation.

Programmes supported by international development agencies in Macedonia include: (1) creating new jobs and social dwellings (Council of Europe Development Bank); (2) developing the NAPE; providing equipment for a network of Employment Agencies; running 11 pilot projects on employment and a Vocational Education and Training project (European Agency for Reconstruction); (3) USAID employment programmes and credit lines.

Roma have limited access to these programmes. Development agencies need to provide mechanisms to

ensure that Roma benefit from their programmes (see Recommendations).

Roma perspective on employment programmes

Roma rarely benefit from national and international initiatives. Most programmes assume at least a primary school education and functional literacy, which excludes most unemployed Roma. According to Roma interviewed for this study, their participation in government vocational training initiatives is insignificant; the state does not keep records on the participation of Roma.

Another factor in the exclusion of Roma from employment initiatives is the lack of appropriate information, delivered in appropriate ways. Information provided by state institutions is not presented in simple language, nor is it produced in the Roma language. Some information is conveyed at an individual level instead of through the media, or is presented in media that are not generally accessed by Roma. Roma also said that the state is uninformed about their workforce.¹⁴ For example, Roma often have skills acquired through informal education or working experience.

One way to secure Roma participation in employment programmes is participation of Roma during the development of the programmes: from design, to the decision-making process, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Currently, this does not happen.

Roma interviewed for this study said that they felt that they are not protected from discrimination and abuse; there

are no recognized leaders to protect their economic rights; and that Roma organizations do not act together to advocate and lobby for the economic rights of Roma.

Given the fact that unemployed Roma are entitled to and receive social welfare assistance,¹⁵ it is in the state's interest to reduce the unemployment of Roma so they can contribute to the state via taxes.

Conclusion

Roma generally have a low level of education and are not competitive in the labour market. They are not informed about their rights and they are mostly unable to benefit from government or international development agencies' employment programmes. The lack of Roma representatives in government and in influential organizational forums¹⁶ in society excludes Roma from the process of planning and decision-making regarding employment programmes.

It is necessary to identify programmes that will effectively create new jobs and micro-enterprises, and to identify and enhance the specific elements of programmes that will ensure participation of Roma. International development agencies and the Macedonian government should introduce Roma-specific employment programmes and ensure that Roma benefit from future general employment programmes by mainstreaming their needs.

Roma unemployment is a complex problem and should be addressed by all the relevant actors – state, donors and Roma – in order to bring about a long-term sustainable solution.

Notes

- 1 State Statistical Bureau of the Republic of Macedonia, Population Census 2002.
- 2 UNDP, *Faces of Poverty, Faces of Hope: Vulnerability Profiles for Decade of Roma Inclusion Countries*, Bratislava, Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–15, Council of Europe, European Commission, UNDP, 2005.
- 3 Jakimovski, J., *The Social Situation of the Population in Macedonia* (in Macedonian), Skopje, Friedrich Ebert, 2003
- 4 Employment Agency of Republic of Macedonia (RM), April 2005.
- 5 Roma associations, political parties, intellectuals, experts.
- 6 Previously, primary education was obligatory to register as unemployed. Although the law has changed and everyone is entitled to register, people are not sufficiently informed of this.
- 7 Working Group for Minority Issues, 'Shadow Report on the Situation of National Minorities in the Republic of Macedonia', submitted to the FCNM, 2004. The Framework Agreement was the peace plan that ended the conflict in Macedonia in August 2001. It ensures constitutional and legal protection of interests of minority communities and promotes diversity and the multi-ethnic character of the country.
- 8 Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, Recommendation Rec. 17 (2001) on improving the economic and employment situation of Roma/Gypsies and Travellers in Europe, Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 27 November 2001; Council of Europe, MG-S-ROM (99) 5 rev., Economic and Employment Problems Faced by Roma/Gypsies in Europe; Situation of Roma in the Candidate Countries: Background Document; Guiding Principles for Improving the Situation of the Roma Based on the Recommendations of the Council of Europe's Specialist Group of Roma/Gypsy and on the recommendations of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Art. 6, 13); Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Constitution of Republic of Macedonia; International Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination (Art. 5); Framework Convention on National Minorities (Art. 5, 12.3); Ohrid Framework Agreement.
- 9 RM, National Strategy for Roma, 2004; Jakimovski, op. cit.
- 10 RM, National Agency for Employment: 15,247 Roma without qualifications and 1,241 Roma with qualifications waiting for job.
- 11 Research was conducted April–May 2005, through interviews with representatives from state institutions (State Statistical Bureau, National Employment Agency, local Employment Agencies in four towns in Macedonia, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy), representatives of international development and donor agencies that run employment programmes (World Bank, European Agency for Reconstruction, USAID, Macedonia Competitiveness Agency), private businesses involved in PRISMA project (BEAS – Stip), and 200 Roma families were interviewed, and focus groups were conducted, in four towns (Gostivar, Kumanovo, Bitola, Stip). Henceforth, RHAM Sun's research.
- 12 Social welfare assistance is about 20 € per adult and 10 € per child monthly, but this decreases each year by about 20 per cent.
- 13 RHAM Sun's research.
- 14 RHAM Sun's research.
- 15 There are 7,468 Roma families receiving social welfare assistance, which consumes annually about 10–12 per cent of the funds designated for social welfare aid (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, December 2004).
- 16 Roma have one out of 120 MPs, and one deputy minister. There are a few Roma employees in various ministries. There are three Roma political parties and number of NGOs. They are mutually divided and have no economic/political power.

working to secure the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples

Recommendations

To the Government of Macedonia:

1. Steps must be taken to realize the Roma Decade Action Plan on employment and the Roma National Strategy, part II.2 on employment – in particular the introduction of employment programmes targeting Roma is a matter of urgency. Mechanisms for implementation and for monitoring and evaluation must be set up with necessary resources and with Roma men and women staff.
2. To fulfil international obligations and to end discrimination against the Roma, the government must promote improved Roma access to employment and participation in national employment programmes. Roma participation in the drafting and implementation of the National Action Plan on Employment II (NAPE II) can prioritize means to achieve this.
3. Disaggregated data (by ethnicity, gender, age and education) is a precondition for developing appropriate policies and programmes and monitoring their effect on Roma. Independent and regular research (using sampling) should be supported by the government. Data should be collected with the consent and participation of Roma in a sensitive manner.
4. Special measures should be taken to promote access to education for Roma, and to ensure that education is appropriate for Roma. The government, in consultation with Roma representatives, should develop clear targets for increasing enrolment and reducing drop-outs in primary and secondary schools. These targets should be linked to employment targets within the framework of the Decade and Roma National Strategy.
5. Employment programmes targeting the Roma need to be long-term and sustainable and should involve Roma at all stages.
6. The government should introduce comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation complying with the EU *acquis communautaire*, including the Race and Employment Directives. This should include setting up a body to ensure the implementation of equality in employment and public services, and provide independent help to victims of discrimination. Roma participation in these processes and bodies is essential.
7. Programmes and measures to improve employment opportunities for Roma should be communicated clearly to Roma beneficiaries; officials responsible for implementation should ensure appropriate action is taken and raise public understanding and awareness.

To international actors:

1. Development programmes, whether targeted or non-targeted, particularly those related to employment, should involve Roma to ensure that they do not have the effect of widening the gap between Roma and other communities.
2. International actors should prioritize support for programmes targeting Roma education and employment.

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