

**ROMA YOUTH IN ROMANIA'S CHANGING LABOR  
MARKET: GOVERNMENTAL AND NON-  
GOVERNMENTAL PROGRAMS FOR ROMA  
EMPLOYMENT IN RURAL AREAS**

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## **Abstract**

This paper analyzes past and present employment programs in Romania designed to improve the employment status of the rural youth Roma population in the country. The Roma population in Romania, the majority of which lives in rural communities, has faced discrimination and poor educational opportunities, which has led to a disproportionately lower percentage of Roma in the workforce than their majority countrymen. This study will begin by introducing the past and current employment environment for Roma in Romania, discussing some of the issues that continue to hurt the employment prospects of Roma people in the country. It will look at programs initiated by both the government of Romania and the non-governmental sector, allowing for a comparative analysis of the differences and similarities in approaches between the programs from the two sectors. It will also discuss some of the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches, and through this offering several recommendations to consider when formulating similar programs in the future.

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## List of abbreviations

CEE - Central and Eastern Europe

CoE - Council of Europe

COM - Commission of the European Communities

ERRC - European Roma Rights Center

EU - European Union

FEANTSA - European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

HLG – High Level Group

ISPMN - The Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities

LFS - Labor force survey

MLFSP – Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection

MoLFEO – Ministry of Labor, Family and Equal Opportunities

NIS National Institute of Statistics

NSRF – National Strategic Reference Framework

OSCE - The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

OSI – Open Society Institute

RD – Roma Decade

REF – Roma Education Fund

UNDP – United Nations Development Programs

UNICEF – The United Nations Children's Fund

WB – World Bank

## Introduction

Over the last twenty years, within and beyond the European Union, the situation of national and ethnic minorities has gained increasing international awareness. Despite all this attention, still several minorities are discriminated, finding themselves in poverty and excluded from the society. Especially in post-socialist countries, the Roma suffer from both material poverty and social exclusion, due to the generally worse economic conditions, discrimination and ignorance of domestic governments and international institutions to the needs of Roma.

Often pejoratively referred to as the Gypsies, Sinti or Travellers, Roma have lived amongst Europeans since the ninth century, when they first started to emigrate from India (UNICEF, 2010). The Roma were denied their own nation-state as the states of Europe were built, and nowadays, all over the Eastern and Central European countries, most Roma are living as minorities on the margins of society, both in urban and rural locations. Found in numerous countries throughout, Roma face similarly abject conditions in almost any country they inhabit, marked by extreme poverty and social exclusion, lack of access to quality services, such as health, education and employment, as well poor housing, which continues to hamper their mobility (Thelen, 2005). This is particularly so in countries where Roma make up the largest minority.

Apparently, after twenty years of research on the Roma situations, “we don’t know anything about the Roma in Romania” according to Horvath Istvan, ISPMN president. Yet, there are facts that we accept as true about Roma (Dumitrascu, 2009). The lack of precise and consistent data forced researchers, and the prime organ of informing population, media, to approximate based on the facts that provide similar evidences in the daily life in order to

create an image of Roma minority. Therefore, the current image of Roma is frequently portrayed as representing the largest and the most deprived minority in the European countries.

Even if Europe is supposedly in the middle of a "Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015", Roma population still lives in extreme poverty. The poverty risk in Roma community used to be three times higher as compared to average risk at national level in 2003 (UNICEF, 2010). A World Bank Report (2005) stated that in 2000 about 68.8% of the Roma population lived with less than 4.3 USD per day. According to the Government Strategy for improving the Roma situation (GD No 430/2001), only 22.9% of the Roma population are economically active, and out of these 71.5% are in employment.

The aim of the thesis is to examine the labor market situation of Romania's Roma minority. In particular, it will focus on the situation of young Roma access in the labor market, especially in rural areas. Since little attention has been given to this specific segment, the paper will analyze the shift of the policies in terms of employment of Roma during the last two decades. The broader analysis compares the employment policies during the socialist period, post-socialist times and in the last 10 years. Practically, it will look at different sectors, national and NGO, and analyze the most significant, successful and unsuccessful, programs and projects that have been implemented in order to reduce the rate of unemployment among youth Roma which are living in rural Romania. *The main question to be addressed in the paper is – what can be learned from the main actors involved on cutting down the unemployment of Roma: are the projects implemented by different sectors complementing or clashing with each other?* It is as well important to identify the past experiences in terms of employment, in order to see what can be learned from them. Finally, the paper will indicate

some measurements that could improve the labor market opportunities for young Roma living in rural areas.

The first chapter will analyze the current situation of Roma in a historical perspective, presenting trends on the labor force of Roma before the fall of communism and 20 years after. The second chapter will evaluate the present picture of the young Romanian labor market. Particular focus will be given to young Roma living in rural areas of Romania, since that is the place where the effects of transition to liberal democracy and economy, discussed in chapter one, have been the most striking. The third chapter will analyze the projects envisaged by both Government and non-government sector, and will also provide recommendations. The last chapter of the thesis will conclude the main ideas.

## Methodology

This thesis is methodologically guided by documentary analysis of reference works in the labor market field and by secondary data analysis. The main data sources used were the national reports and publications by the Government, National Agency for Roma, Roma Decade, Open Society Institute, IZA, European Roma Rights Center, and National Agency for Development “Impreuna” (“Together”).

Guided by a historical comparative approach, the first two chapters analyze the current situation of the Roma, the recent developments, compared with the past situation during the communist period, in regard of youth employment and in particular Roma youth in rural areas. This comparative approach is used in order to highlight the unequal situation (treatment) between the Roma and the majority, providing the basis for recommendations based on a benchmark analysis. The third chapter will then use the research material to compare and discuss specific programs implemented by the government and NGO sectors for improving Roma employment in rural areas.

The main sources of quantitative data used in this study are the reports published by the Research Institute for Quality of Life (RIQL) in 1998 and 2002, the Romanian National Development Plan 2007-2013, National Strategic Plan for Rural Development and the National Programme for Rural Development. Other information sources included web resources or sites. On employment, the following texts were referenced (analyzed): Employment in Europe 2009 (EC), Roma Access to the labor market, Education and Employment Opportunities for the Roma, The Glass Box: Exclusion of Roma from Employment (ERRC).

# **CHAPTER I - The situation of Roma minority in the labor market: key issues and challenges**

The first chapter will analyze the situation of Roma in a historical perspective. It will give some background of the labor market situation of Roma, concentrating namely on the trends of the labor force during communism and the post socialist period. By comparing past and recent practices on employment, it can be better understood how much Roma lost out, in terms of job prospects, during the transition to the democratic system and the liberalization of the economy. It will then argue for the importance of investing in young Roma, in order to move towards a coherent development of Roma communities.

It is very important to analyze the changes that Roma faced since their emigration from southern Asia, in order to understand how much the socialist system, and today's current democratic system, have performed in terms of the policies for Roma "integration".

## ***The History of Roma and employment***

The root of Roma in Europe is a controversial topic. According to the data in the field, Roma arrived in Europe from northern India (Ringold, 2000). Data from the twelfth century in the Dalmatian Coast and Hungary, what is now the Slovak Republic, was the first sources about the presence of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe (Ringold et al., 2003). A census from 1893 in today's Slovakia showed that there were 36,000 Roma, only two percent of which were identified as being nomads (Ringold et al., 2005).

Within the East European context, Roma used to be viewed with suspicion because they represented a threat to the spatial and national boundaries of the states that were struggling to establish their national identity after the collapse of Communism. In addition,

the creation of the supranational institutions, like the European Union, and the consequent relaxing of state boundaries have made it easier for the Roma to move inside the new space. This has led to calls for the defense of the national identity against erosion by immigrants. Roma were, therefore, one of the targets, since they were perceived as a group without a national identity or a home country, lacking a state loyalty. They were portrayed as not possessing identifying characteristics from a particular place, they did not 'belong', not here anyway, providing justification for expulsions from one national European boundary to another (Kendall, 1997).

The presence of the Roma as a marginal group used to be seen as representing a direct and visible opposition to the norms and control of the sedentary society. Roma's rejection of these rules by living their own lifestyles led to a denial of their citizenship rights by the dominant society. They were seen as 'not deserving a homeplace'. They were the 'undeserving poor' because they were members of an underclass and of a dependency culture, making no economic or cultural contribution to society. Therefore, they did not deserve the benefits attached to membership of society and their exclusion was justified (Kendall, 1997).

In terms of employment practices, it is been known that during the centuries Rome were first in Europe, they were known for metalworking skills, making armaments and performing music (Ringold et al., 2003). Even then with specific occupations, Roma faced prejudice and persecution. They were enslaved in the areas of what is now Moldavia and Romania, and under the Ottoman Empire, they were subjected to rules about border mobility (Ringold, 2000).

Socialist governments tried to change the position of Roma by forcing them to live in the similar way as the majority (Roma Realities, 2009.). They focused on providing them employment, housing, and education. These efforts differed among countries (Ringold et al.,

2005). In Bulgaria, like Turks and other minorities, for example, Roma faced a “bulgarization” (Ringold, 2000) system of forced assimilation, which included changing their names to fit a Bulgarian identity. If they refused to comply they would then lose their right to social services. In Romania, President Ceausescu’s “systematization” program in the 1980s included “resettling entire villages and urban neighborhoods” and the destruction of whole settlements of Roma, again as well as other ethnic minorities (Ringold et al., 2005).

In addition, some governments, like Hungarian in the late 1980s, tried to increase Roma school attendance by giving Roma-language teaching (RD, 2007). This strategy achieved significant success in enrolling children in schools. In Poland, in the late 1960s, 80 percent of Roma children were enrolled in schools (RD, 2007). However, in many cases, socialist education policies actually made the difference of Roma even clearer. They put Roma into segregated schools for children that had mental and physical disabilities, because of the effort to make Roma children participate in schools (CoE, 2006). In the 1960s in Hungary, for instance, an education campaign included the creation of “special classes” that was aimed for the mentally disabled (Ringold, 2000).

Employment programs for Roma were marked by an effort to make traditional Roma trades formalized. The Polish government, for example, initiated programs to support traditional crafts, like coppersmith cooperative (Ringold, 2000) that included cooperative workshops. The problem was, however, that demand for traditional Roma crafts was not big and that physically difficult jobs they were offered were difficult and not paid, and because of that did not attract them (Fraser, 1995). For instance, as they were mostly unskilled Roma were mostly employed on collective farms and in companies owned by the state, where they used to take the most difficult jobs for which the lowest level of skill and education is required (Cretan, 2009).

In sum, although many Roma passed through extreme poverty, socialist policies gave positive results concerning the access of Roma to education, employment, and housing (Ringold, 2000). However, the problem is that at the same time they also marginalized Roma (Kligman, 2001). It has been argued that the fact that Roma did not freely choose their jobs but were rather forced to accept them during the course of repressive assimilation campaigns was the reason why Roma and their employers often did not trust each other. In essence the negative results of socialist came from “the absence of participatory processes, authentic self-government, and Roma involvement in policy development and implementation” (Ringold, 2000). The paternalistic social policy that was also clear in how the socialist state provided jobs, housing, and other assistances, most importantly, “created a culture of dependency”.

### ***Jobs for Roma after transition***

The transitions to democracy and a market economy promised new opportunities for Roma living in Central and Eastern Europe to improve their living conditions but also but also brought new difficulties. Positive effects of transition on life of Roma were greater opportunities for political organization and cultural expression. However, Roma are seen as much more vulnerable to the transitional changes than other minority groups. As Ringold argues “during the transition, when people started to lose their jobs and poverty started to grow, many people, but especially Roma started feeling abandoned and alienated” (2000).

These kinds of effects of transition for Roma in CEE countries are influenced by a legacy, coming from what was discussed in the previous section that still affects the socioeconomic status of Roma. Building upon the history of Roma in the labor market, this section situates the current challenges for employment and related issues of housing and discrimination.

Most generally, because of the creation of the new labor market since the 1990s the Roma who were during the communist period mostly employed faced long term unemployment (OSCE, 2008). The large percent of unemployment among Roma is considered to be one of the main reasons why they are marginalized, socially excluded and of have difficulties to access goods and services. That explains a need for providing the equal access to employment and especially the employment of a good quality. In addition, it explains why European Union sees providing jobs to Roma as so important. This concern is manifested in “European Union policy of promoting social inclusion and participation for all, including the most disadvantaged ones” (COM, 2007).

### ***Education and Discrimination***

According to the OSCE, “the two main factors leading to the present employment situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE area are discrimination and the fact that many Roma have limited or no skills” (OSCE, 2008). Because of the importance of these two related issues - education and discrimination - in the Roma employment question, attention will be given to each area in the following discussion.

Roma families in the new system had very little opportunities for employment, so this meant fewer chances for income and generally more poverty (ERRC, 2007). This was because in transition, the competition for jobs became stronger and it became more difficult for workers with less education and skills than the majority, to compete for jobs in the new market economies (Roma Realities, 2009). Since less than one per cent of Roma and Sinti have finished university (OSCE, 2008), and according one study in 1995 that was about the labor force in Hungary, 12 percent of the Hungarian workers were unskilled, compared with fifty percent of Roma workers (Cretan, 2009). Roma were often the first to be “made redundant due to their under qualifications” stemming from their previous experience in state

owned industrial factories, mines, and agricultural cooperatives (FEANTSA, 2005). Given this obstacle, Roma were forced to face significant difficulties in finding new occupation, and became dependent on poor social benefits, insecure “cash in hand” (Roma Realities, 2009) jobs, or they had to find jobs out of their home country. At the same time, the economic transition made problems of low education level and health status of Roma even worse.

The low level of education and inappropriate skills (for the labor market) have been important reasons for the widespread and long term unemployment of Roma and the worsening of their living conditions (Ringold et al., 2002). Much of this is due to problems of access to education, but also other social services like housing and healthcare, for Roma. The increasing needs as well as constraints in the budgets have made it more difficult to get these social services (Ringold, 2004). For instance, previously free services now have formal and informal charges, even if the quality of services is far less. This affects Roma because they particularly are less likely to have the extra money for the social services (Roma Realities, 2009).

At the same time, there is a relationship between a secure job and proper education, and decent housing. (Duminica, 2006). The transition has affected negatively Roma housing (Mizsei, 2006). Because of land restitution and policies for privatization, people whose land had been taken during communism benefited from transition but not the Roma, who were not traditionally landowners. Actually during this time the state provided less funds for public communal housing that Roma had relied on before (Poole and Adamson, 2008).

Some Roma, as a result live in illegal housing and because of that, they lack the documentation necessary for enrolling in school, or for getting social assistance like health care or benefits for unemployment (Ringold et al., 2005). At the same time, some Roma communities are geographically isolated and this means that they live too far from facilities

that provide social services, and because most Roma work in the informal sector their access to social benefits is limited because they do not contribute regularly (Ringold, 2004).

The exclusion of Roma from accessing in an equal manner to the main services affects employment in the labor market (Medve, and Cace, 2010). As Duminica argues, “stable financial resources created by, a stable well-paid job, would enable many Roma to meet basic needs, but such resources are missing. The lack of employment keeps the Roma on permanent stand-by, because whatever money is available is used to ensure survival, not a secure future” (Duminica, 2006). This and unemployment or insecure employment at the same time increases their social exclusion.

Another significant reason discussed by the OSCE on why is not easy for Roma to find jobs is discrimination. That is, Roma are often rejected from opportunities for employment because they can be visibly identified as Roma (ERRC, 2007). The changes in the political system, while promising better representation for ethnic minorities, were followed by rising discrimination and violence against them. In fact, for Roma, there is a clear lack of political representation (Roma Realities, 2009), and human rights organizations and international bodies have often reported cases about discrimination and violence taken against Roma (Ibid). Although other minority groups face similar problems, Roma situation is especially difficult because they have less social capital than other ethnic groups and they encounter stronger discrimination (Roma Realities, 2009).

As Ringold argues, stereotypes about the culture and lives of Roma reduce communication between Roma and others and this is part of “a vicious circle of isolation, marginalization and stigmatization” (Ringold, 2000).

Like Milcher (2006) has argued for the case of Croatia, the income of Roma in Romania is significantly below the average. Compared with the population as a whole, the principal sources of income for each household is considerably different for Roma. For example, because of the higher level of poverty discussed in the previous section, social assistance is a significant source of income. The most typical source of income for Roma families is actually received through allowances for children, as much as 66.2% of households in one study. In the same study, retirement pensions provided income for 11.7% of Roma families. 9.5% of the households researched receive unemployment benefits, and a similar percentage receive disability or illness pensions. Less than one fourth of family budgets in the 1998 study were secured by salaries, while 53.4% of households did report non-permanent “occasional” sources of income.

Overall, as Oosterom (2008) points out, the social exclusion of Roma is present throughout society, especially shown in the living standards that are very low everywhere in the region (Ringold and al., 2002). Since Roma are the poorest ethnic group Roma who are not poor face a constant risk of poverty, according to Ringold (2005), “it can be inferred that poverty has a substantial ethnic dimension”.

## CHAPTER II: Bringing the rural youth into the picture

The previous chapter provided a historical presentation of Roma in the labor market to make sense of the challenges occurring with transition. This chapter brings in a focus on the rural context and youth. This chapter looks more specifically at the labor market in rural areas and argues for a focus on youth, since that is where effects of transition to liberal democracy and economy, discussed in Chapter One, have been the most striking. Before that, it discusses the transition in the rural context more generally, in an effort to bring together the divergent literature that deal with Roma separately from the rural and from challenges for youth employment.

### ***The rural labor market***

As around sixty of Roma in Romania live in rural areas according to Data from 2002 Census, the question of employment for Roma youth should be situated in the context of the rural. In fact, the largest part of the Romanian territory, more than 93.7%, consists of rural areas. It is estimated that approximately half of the population of Romania lives in rural area (the number was 48% in 2002) (Zambori and Milin, 2006). So, it can be said that Romania is to a large extent, a rural state (Gherghinescu, 2008) with 40% of the labor force working in agriculture sector, even if its contribution to GDP amounts only to 13.4% (Ibid).

The Labor Force Survey (LFS) done by NIS in (2005), for instance, showed that “the population living in rural area makes 45.2% out of the total Romanian population and 46.6% out of the total population in employment (9,147 thou. persons). The rural residents with full time employment were 41.9% out of the total persons in full time employment and 87.3% of the total in part time employment.

Even with more than 40% of work coming from agriculture, this number is significantly less in a historical perspective. The employment in Romania suffered drastically changes in the first years of transition, moving from industry and agriculture to services (Ghinararu, 2010). For those who worked in service industry changes were not so harmful, because the process of adaptation to services consisted in acquiring new skills. However, people who worked in agriculture could not save their jobs only by acquiring new skills because due to industrialization less human force was needed to do the agricultural work. Many people who previously worked in agriculture became redundant. This problem together with the fact that living conditions in the villages were traditionally not very good (many villages had no access to the basic prerequisites for a decent live (Gherghinescu, 2008), such as potable water, electricity, gas, etc) motivated many young people to move away from the villages. The lack of opportunities even affected the rate of birth in rural areas. This has led to a drastic reduction of population in rural areas implicitly of the young and active population (MLFSP, 2008).

In the first ten years of Romania transition, the rate of employment in rural compared with the urban was much lower (UNICEF, 2010). Yet from 2002 to 2004, the differences between rural areas and urban areas seemed to be increasingly less severe, as farmers were benefiting from increased protections and enjoying a promising year for farming.

The rate of employment increased from 60.2% in 2002 to 64.2% in 2005 (MoLFEO, 2007) among age groups of 15-64 years old. However since 2005, the trend was put in reverse (WB, MoLFEO, NIS, 2007). By 2006, for example, there was 40 percent less poverty over a period of two years for the urban, but the rural areas showed only 18 percent decrease. This means that the poverty reduction was occurring less in rural context (Ibid). Considering the challenges to employment, more than 70 percent of Romanians that are poor live in rural

areas, and the rate of poverty is three times as high there than for people living in urban places (UNICEF, 2010). The end of the programs led by the socialist state for agricultural cooperatives for production (CAPs) have meant that a significant part of the Roma have been denied this major source of employment, especially important for those living in rural areas (Medve, and Cace, 2010)

Though they do not focus on Roma, a strategic priority is considered to be the active social inclusion of vulnerable groups living in the rural areas. This strategic priority has been transposed in operational terms in the PHARE Social and Economic Cohesion Programmes 2005 and 2006 (that are currently on going) which highlight the focus on financing active measures in the rural areas. Moreover, the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development (SPO HRD) 2007-2013 has entrusted a set of intervention fields to an intermediate body (The Romanian Fund for Social Development) dealing with the social inclusion and active measures for rural population endangered by poverty and exclusion. Among the strategies and targets envisaged for combating poverty and reviving the rural areas, the National Report mentions “stimulating job creation in rural environment through industrial sector and services development”, as well as “the increase of the number of social services in rural areas”.

The National Development Plan 2007-2013 pays special attention to reviving rural areas, by dedicating an important component to the National Strategic Plan for Rural Development and the National Programme for Rural Development, functioning as an operational Programme financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

## ***Challenges to Youth employment***

It is not only important to highlight the rural context in dealing with Roma and the labor market, but also to strategically aim for policies aimed at youth. In general, the unemployment rate of young in Romania increased from 21% in 1999 to 23.8% in 2005 (MoLFEO, 2007). One of the reasons why this may happen is that the Romania's labor market does not create adequate jobs taking in account the qualifications of the young (Ibid). So, the demand does not meet the supply of jobs for youth. In the same time, the remuneration does not meet the expectations of young. Most of the times the available jobs do not offer attractive salaries, in accordance with the expectations and the degree hold by them. Therefore, the knowledge obtained during their studies does not meet the requirements of the labor market, which contributes to the high rate of unemployment among young. That is why so many young chose to drop out or to work in the same time they are studying, hence the low interest of pursuing in more advanced studies. Young people, who have spent their lives in state care institutions, perhaps have the most difficulty finding a job once they reach age eighteen. This is partly because they have not developed or acquired professional skills. Some young people are especially "vulnerable", like "street children".

The focus on youth is especially important because of the higher rates of mortality and fertility of the Roma, the Roma population is very young compared to the rest of the population (REF, 2004). The following characteristics are common to most Roma families. Roma are usually getting married at early age, they have more children than families with average number of children in other ethnic groups. Roma have low rate of divorce, and young families live with one of the parent families. However, although marriages at early ages are still more frequent in Roma families than such marriages in other ethnic groups, according to well known activists in Romania Delia Grigore, only 5-10% of the Roma preserve this custom. In other words, this is more of a "stereotype than a reality" (Ibid).

The results of the research conducted by UNDP and the Romanian Academy presented in National Human Development Report (1999), showed that, mostly large families, particularly families with many children are affected by poverty. In fact, according to the report, 80% of the families with four or more children lived in poverty. It is estimated that many of those families are ethnic Roma. That explains the fact that many of Roma children become the children laborers.

## **Chapter III: Governmental and Non-governmental Programs for Roma Employment**

### ***Overview of Roma Economic Situation and Employment in Romania***

One of the most important issues facing Roma minority nowadays is that of employment. In recent surveys conducted throughout the Roma populations of Europe, and especially in Romania, respondents have consistently named employment and income as the most serious problem they are faced with (O'Higgins and Ivanov, 2006). Not only do Roma have problems finding work, as well the work they usually find is rarely respectable or of high pay and quality. When Roma find jobs, more often than not, they are working in the most labor-intensive sectors, with the lowest class of jobs and least important but most stressful positions filled by Roma (Crowe, 1999). From this it can be seen that Roma are not only put into the worst employment positions when they are trying to find work, but as it would suggest they face almost no opportunity for advancement within their employment. By this meaning that they are stuck in these low-paying and not very respected positions. Particularly, in rural areas, where there is less industry and opportunity to begin with, Roma will understandably find it even more difficult to find any work at all, and as well work that is better than the lowest paying and most difficult jobs.

It is understandable that these positions would have a negative impact on the desires of Roma to seek employment, as other possibilities of subsistence are provided by the state. These come mainly in the form of social welfare benefits and similar methods for Roma to draw income. With their increasing birthrate, Roma have been able to draw welfare benefits from the state as a way to survive financially. A recent report by the World Bank (2009) found that only 11% of Roma families in Romania depend on a fixed salary to add to their

total income. Most Roma families in Romania are dependent in some way to one or more opportunities for income from the state welfare system (see Table 1).

TABLE 1: Social Welfare Benefits to Roma Families in Romania

Type of Social Welfare	% of Roma Households Benefiting
Children's Allowances	66.2
Retirement Pensions	11.7
Unemployment Compensations	9.5
Disability and Illness Pensions	4.7

Source: World Bank, NAR Final Report: Romania 2009

A further statistical analysis of the current situation of employment of Roma minority in Romania shows that there is an immediate need for programs to improve Roma employment. Only 47% of Romanian Roma are employed (but 61.7% of the population as a whole is employed), and of these 47%, almost 65% are men, of which less than 30% actually receive salaries (Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies, 2006). As well over 70% are self-employed, and almost half of the total working population of Roma is day laborers (Ibid.). This indicates that any program aimed at improving the situation of Roma employment, especially in rural areas, should target the women and more specifically the young population in order to move toward a coherent development of Roma.

When it comes to considering programs to improve the employment opportunities for Roma in Romania, it is important to consider it with regard for the leading mechanisms that still exist which cause Roma to remain on the outside of the official labor market or in

positions that are very poor and do not count as meaningful employment. The Roma Center for Social Intervention (2006) laid out the most important reasons why Roma continue to face such difficulties entering the workforce: formal education below the level required by the job sector they wish to work or the labor market as a whole; lack of qualification for modern professions, if not in general; a decline in the value and demand for traditional crafts, which have been a very big part of Roma livelihood for so long; the existence of discrimination against Roma that is found in employers, making them less inclined to hire Roma; the economic recessions that followed the fall of communist states and continued during the 1990s.

It must be understood that there are obviously a number of problems that already exist that will make it more difficult for programs aimed at improving Roma employment to be successful. Although it is difficult to say for sure the degrees to which these preexisting factors affect rural vs. urban Roma populations, it is likely that because there are fewer economic opportunities in rural areas and the educational opportunities are generally fewer or of lower quality, the factors that exist in the urban areas also exist in rural Romania and are most probably worse.

### ***Roma Employment Programs of the Romanian Government***

When Romania joined the European Union, and even before, during the pre-accession period, the Romanian Government came under more pressure to start programs designed to help Roma population in the country, in order for them to become more integrated into society, especially in the area of education and employment.

One of the most important recent initiatives of the Romanian government for helping the Roma population to improve their employment levels and opportunities was the Strategy of the Government of Romania for the Improvement of the Condition of the Roma, which was

started in 2001 (Nasture, 2005). This initiative was designed to help Roma people in a number of socioeconomic areas, including employment. It included a number of specific points to help improve the employment situation of Roma, such as: implementing positive discrimination programs for Roma in regard to employment, providing training and professionalization services for the Roma minority in the country, and creating incentives for entrepreneurs who hire employees from the Roma minority, as well making it so they do not practice discrimination against them (Ministry of Public Information, 2001).

Despite that this government initiative tried to lay out several ways for helping the Roma minority, its success as a program for driving Roma employment has not been very high. There have not been enough sub-level projects that would implement the strategies to meet each of the previously mentioned individual goals in the program, and as well the rural authorities that have been set up to monitor these goals do not communicate well with the central administrative authorities (Nasture, 2005). So it can be seen that even though it is difficult to fully understand the success of this initial government program, it is probably very low and there is not much being done on the rural level to make sure that it is being completely implemented and followed, meaning that rural areas remain those most affected by the poor conditions of Roma employment.

A follow-up to the Strategy of the Government of Romania for the Improvement of the Condition of the Roma was the National Action Plan (NAP), which included several smaller plans developed with the government of Romania with the help of important non-governmental groups. The NAP sets out a series of actions or strategies that the projects under this program are supposed to follow in order to achieve the goals of the NAP. For example the projects in the program should create at least 42 partnerships between the government and local authorities for working with Roma to find jobs in government or the

public sectors, and as well the vocational training of 1,500 Roma citizens (Government of Romania, 2005). Another part is an income-generation project, where Roma are setup with lines of work, such as craft construction, to allow them to create products to sell on the open market (Ibid.). It is clear that the government has set up a number of specific target measures and indicators of success for the NAP that would help to determine if it is successful in its objectives.

This is actually a problem because the goals of the government and the officials responsible for the NAP become more concerned with meeting the goals specified (like the training of 1,500 Roma) than actually improving the employment of the Roma population. For instance, many times the vocational training centers and government offices set up to help Roma find work will only find work for them on a temporary or short-term basis, so they are employed for a few months meaning that this will count as far as the statistical indicators are concerned, but in a few months they will be out of work, so in the end they are in almost the same situation they started and still are not employed (Nasture, 2005). As well the income-generation programs the government sets up are not well thought through. A good example of this happened in the county of Ialomita, where the government under the National Action Plan set up a sewing workshop to employ fifteen Roma women and allow them to make crafts to sell and profit from. However, when they made the sewing crafts they found out that these were almost un-sellable on the open market, so in the end they did not really earn any money for their work and this project could not be considered a successful example of improving the employment of Roma (Ibid.).

One of the most notable and continued government programs is the “Job shop for the Roma” or job fair that is sponsored by the government, which by its second year had attracted 678 companies offering a total of about 8,000 jobs (Cage et al., 2006). As data has shown, the

employment type of many Roma is in labor jobs and those with the lowest responsibility, so this job fair offers Roma an opportunity for learning of new jobs that are different than use to be. As well it is a time for information sharing, because one of the main problems that prevent Roma from entering different or more important sectors of the workforce is the lack of information about the jobs and type of work, and this problem is most extreme in the rural areas (Ibid.)

### ***Roma Employment Programs from the NGO Sector***

In addition to the Roma employment programs, started by the Romanian government, there have been many employment programs initiated by non-governmental organizations. The most significant attempts by the NGO sector to develop Roma employment programs have been made by the Open Society Institute. Roma employment programs from the OSI have included a focus on elements that are commonly addressed by other programs from the NGO sector, including vocational training (especially for young people), orientation toward employment opportunities, entrepreneurial education and very basic legal training (Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies, 2006). The most important of these are the vocational training, because it trains uneducated or undereducated Roma to be able to work in certain jobs and sectors that require training, and as well the orientation towards employment opportunities, because the Roma who are trained to enter the workforce need to also be put in contact or in position to make this entry. In the rural areas, where employment opportunities are not as great as in the cities, and where information is slower to get to, it especially important to implement these types of programs.

One crucial program started by OSI is the “Stimulation of employment of Roma civil servants in public administration and public services” which set up partnerships between the local authorities and Roma communities in rural areas to train them specifically for entry into

public service, a sector of the economy not typically open to Roma minorities (Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies, 2006). Its aim is to provide the local Roma population with training for public administration jobs, and then to encourage their employment in these local administrative bodies through open competition. By doing this, the program not only helped to train and equip Roma people with the capabilities and knowledge to take jobs in public administration, but also encouraged these trainees to compete against their peers in terms of getting the jobs (open competition), which makes them more capable of competing in the long term for jobs on the open market.

Training Roma to work in public administration is much different than training them to work in labor and craft production, as many of the government initiatives seek to do, and represents an important step in making Roma minorities more competitive in the job market and opening up new sectors on the economy for them to work in. Another very successful NGO program was designed to do the same in terms of training Roma to work in new or more advanced sectors of the economy. Started by the Amare Phrala Association in Cluj-Napoca, this program trained almost one hundred Roma of young-adult age to be proficient in fourteen different professions, including mechanic, bartending, and computer operating, through a six month training course followed by an examination period to determine if they acquired the necessary skills, which nearly all trainees passed (Nasture, 2005).

In contrast to the programs initiated by the government of Romania, which are focused on vocational training and integration or generation programs for adults or those already seeking entry into the workplace, the programs of the NGOs include parts to help young Roma. There are several important examples of successful Roma employment programs from the NGO sector that target youth. One of the first successful programs is the "New qualifications for Roma Youth" that was started by the Amare Phrala Association, which

began with a pilot project designed to take twenty Roma youths with no education or experience and train them in to be cobblers, and after the training to find jobs (Cage et al., 2006). Obviously this project was not big with just twenty Roma, but it provided them with both the training and the help in job placement, and as well was targeting youths, so the vocational training was occurring early on in their lives and they had a better chance to start early in the workforce and move up in their profession.

A second very important NGO program targeting youths in particular is the "Qualification for the Roma in occupations demanded by the employers" started by the General Roma Union – Deva, which is aimed to bring young unemployed Roma who are seeking employment – and had registered with the local Workforce and Unemployment Office – into a training course that would teach them skills to enter the workforce or to start their own business (Cage et al., 2006). The strength of this program is not only that it trained young Roma to be able to work in the economy, but also that it trained them with the knowledge to be entrepreneurial, so that they can start their own business and work for themselves, then as well employ others. This is a part of some of the programs coming from the NGO sector, although there is nothing in this regard found in the programs from the government, who seeks to put Roma into the existing workforce rather than equip them with the skills and knowledge to add even more to the economy by starting their own businesses.

### ***Analysis of Government and NGO programs and Recommendations***

One of the first points that must be considered when considering what recommendations to propose for the future of Roma employment programs in Romania is the relation between education and employment. Although some elements of the Government's programs for improving Roma employment include points about education, like short vocational training, it is clear that most programs focus on changes to government or

employment practices, such as trying to stop discrimination in employment practices or providing incentives to entrepreneurs who hire Roma employees. For the future, the Government should look to provide more educational opportunities before the vocational-level, so that Roma can receive training that will help them enter the workforce in more important or higher paying levels. When Roma education reached its peak during the communist period, it was the same time when employment levels of Roma were also at their highest (Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies, 2006).

Government-sponsored programs, such as the income-generation schemes discussed and the example of the seamstresses are a problem because they are not really designed to grow Roma integration in anything but where they are already familiar. Labor and craft jobs, like sewing, have been sources of income for Roma for a long time, but what they have always lacked was the opportunity to enter the modern working society, and government programs appear not to consider this. The government has recently pledged that it will do more to train and help Roma to enter different sectors of the economy than their traditional sectors of labor, but so far the programs themselves have focused on improving Roma employment numbers or inclusion within the sectors they are already familiar with (Cage et al., 2006).

Although the programs started by NGOs, especially the Open Society Institute, also spent a lot of focus on vocational training, another part of NGO programs is the transfer of communication and knowledge regarding how to take the next step from learning and acquiring the jobs skills to actually entering the workplace. In other words, NGO programs also train Roma how to enter the workplace, rather than just how to work once in the workforce. Using the previous example about the seamstresses, it can be seen that when the government does attempt to help Roma enter the workforce, they do it by forcing their entry

rather than attempting to make them competitive candidates for job openings in businesses that already exist. Future Government programs, as well as continued NGO programs, should include a part that helps to educate or advise Roma trainees actually find work with private businesses or with the government administration. It would also be good if the government programs began encouraging trained Roma to become entrepreneurs and start their own businesses.

One more possible recommendation is to change the indicators of success within government programs. As mentioned, when government programs are assessed on whether or not they meet certain statistics, like number of employed Roma trainees, it makes is probable that these numbers could be reached artificially, such as Roma would be employed in short-term work to count them as employed but when this work ends they are once again unemployed. Instead of doing this, indicators should be changed to a more long-term standard, so instead of measuring how many Roma trainees were employed within one year of completing their training course, it could be instead how many Roma are employed three or five years after being trained, and whether it is with the same business or in the same industry.

It is also important to remember that programs intended to improve the employment status of Romanian Roma must be focused on rural areas, not only because these are areas where employment opportunities are the lowest, but also because it is in the rural areas where most Roma are living, as well the poorest ones. Programs from both the NGO and Government sectors should include and work with administrators on the local level, which should be in contact with the Government and/or NGO actors so that there is cooperation between the sectors and there is a full transfer of information and services between the urban areas, business centers, and government or non-governmental offices and the rural communities.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyze the labor market situation regarding the young Roma in the rural areas in Romania. It has closely looked at both governmental and NGO sector that set up programs targeting the employment of the youth of the Roma population in the past two decades, situating Roma in an historical context.

The main question that this thesis has addressed was: *what can be learned from the main actors involved on cutting down the unemployment of Roma: are the projects implemented by different sectors complementing or clashing with each other?*

As this study has shown, the most successful programs initiated to help improve the employment of young rural Roma came mostly from the non-governmental sector. While government programs tended to concentrate on policy changes, such as anti-discriminatory policies or incentives to employers who hire Roma, the programs from the NGO sector were more geared toward helping Roma directly. Vocational training was a central component of the NGO programs in almost all cases, and as well some have even tested the students at the end in order to determine if they had acquired the necessary skills. On top of this, many of the programs provided help or counseling for the new workers to find jobs and become members of the workforce which was essential to make any program of vocational training actually effective in improving the employment situation of Roma.

When government programs attempted to integrate Roma into the workforce, they did it by setting up craft shops or other places for production specifically for the trained Roma workers. Instead of doing this, the notable NGO programs analyzed in this thesis tried to prepare Roma in order to become attractive candidates to open positions. This meant that when the young Roma did enter the workforce, they did so on their own merits and in a way

that was not positively discriminatory. These young Roma were also able to compete for jobs in more diverse sectors of the economy, because NGO programs trained them in a variety of fields (as discussed, from bartending to computer operating), while government programs focused on improving or adding to the number of Roma in areas of work already dominated by Roma workers (such as day labor jobs and crafts).

As it has been discussed in this thesis, providing education is one of the first steps that should be followed in order to ensure a fair and sustainable further development of the Roma community. It can, thus, be inferred that the employment sector and the education sector do not fuse together. More specifically, there is a lack of continuity in the projects that should link the two sectors and, implicitly, should provide advice for the young Roma and support in the long term for their families.

This study is only one attempt to focus the policy analysis of Roma on youth employment in rural areas. Its main argument can be, however, further developed and investigated within a similar type of approach.

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