

A bottom-up approach to employment

An example of good practice

LUCIA BOSÁKOVÁ



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Foreword

Employment is one of the main socioeconomic determinants of health and, conversely, good health is one of the main prerequisites for being an efficient, satisfactorily productive employee. Therefore, every society would be wise to pay attention to investing in a health system that functions well and that ensures health promotion, disease prevention and health care services, creating job opportunities and preparing an adequately skilled mixed labour force.

At present, the unemployment rate in Slovakia is almost 13% and a major proportion of the unemployed are Roma people. It is estimated that up to 10% of the Slovak population are Roma, whose employment rate lags significantly behind the respective indicators of the non-Roma population. Indeed, there are entire Roma families and even communities in which the unemployment rate reaches 100%. A complex set of factors lies behind the exclusion of the Roma population from the labour market, including a generally low level of education, regional segregation, the effects of economic transition and a high level of employer discrimination towards hiring Roma, highlighted by many studies. Roma employment is also characterized by a high level of fluctuation, which implies considerable job instability. This is further reinforced by community employment programmes which provide employment for a limited duration (only months) at a time, thus perpetuating a cyclical and unstable lifestyle for those affected.

The National Roma Integration Strategy adopted in 2012 calls for better Roma inclusion through specific policy developments in the fields of education (especially the need to ensure effective access to high-quality inclusive mainstream education, starting with preschool) and employment (promoting measures to encourage Roma engagement in employment, and supporting transition to the labour market). In light of these developments one can also assume subsequent improvement in the health of the Roma population, which is one of the desired goals of professionals and activists working for better health.

No single universal approach can be employed to tackle the problems of vulnerable or marginalized populations, but there are many examples of good practices that have worked in various conditions and that may serve as inspiration for others when action is required or desired. This publication is one of those excellent examples, which has already proven its viability and sustainability and is highly valued by all of the partners involved. From a WHO perspective I should like to point out not only the situation analysis on the basis of social health determinants and equity in health, but also the setting of targets and their monitoring throughout the project. One of the project objectives was to upgrade the skills of the participants; to achieve this, they had the opportunity to attend regularly various types of training. Although improvement of health was not a primary objective of the project and health impact was not considered as one of the project outcomes, from the evidence gathered it can be concluded that the project had a positive effect on health inequalities, or at least improved the opportunities of the participants and their families to be healthier, and thus contributed to the reduction of health inequalities compared with the majority population.

Foreword

The Roma are the largest ethnic minority group in Europe and the most marginalized. According to the European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, the Roma face the highest levels of discrimination in the European Union; on average 41% of Roma in the surveyed European Union Member States, including Slovakia, felt discriminated against because of their Roma heritage. The results show that 40% experienced discrimination when looking for a job and 17% were affected at work during the past five years. Almost one out of two Roma people consider discrimination based on their ethnic origin to be fairly or very wide spread in their country.

This report outlines the Equality of Opportunity project, an initiative to promote the labour participation of Roma people in a labour market dominated by the rules of the majority population. It is a bottom-up approach that implies a combination of individual-level actions (the selection, training and evaluation of the participants), and community development activities (social activities, intercultural dialogue, corporate social responsibility, and others), that allows participants access to (first) temporary and (later) permanent positions in the U.S. Steel Košice (USSKE) firm, a subsidiary of the United States Steel Corporation in Slovakia. The outcome of this initiative is the effective incorporation of Roma people as full-time permanent employees in a labour market in which they were previously excluded, as well as an increase in their qualifications and skills, and better health and greater opportunities for their families.

The report explains the social context and the institutional mechanisms and processes implemented to achieve the initiative's aims. The report provides the analysis of interviews conducted with different stakeholders. The narratives obtained reflect the coexistence of both dominant narratives against Roma people (American psychologist Julian Rappaport describes the dominant narratives as the oppressive internalized stories, well-known within a culture, that shape the identities and social perceptions of members of both dominant and minority groups) and liberating counter-narratives.

The results of the Equality of Opportunity Project implemented within USSKE show that Roma people can improve their employment conditions when a strategy considering their needs and daily social conditions is applied; this is the case even when they live in segregated or separated settlements, in poor conditions, and face social prejudices and stereotypes. The case-study describes both the challenges and failures of the programme in terms of participant turnover and other indicators, which provides a balanced analysis that makes the report relevant for those interested in improving social policies to tackle social inequities.

This report shows important work that is increasingly being carried out by nongovernmental organizations, the public sector, social movements, professionals, and corporate social responsibility initiatives to promote social change across Europe and other countries. To the extent that these experiences are published and shared, all of society benefits. This case-study serves as an excellent guide to inspire them.

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Lucia Bosáková has obtained a master's degree as well as a PhD in economics and corporate management (Faculty of Business Economy in Košice of the University of Economics in Bratislava). At present she is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Business Economy in Košice (University of Economics in Bratislava), and also a senior researcher at the Department of Health Psychology of the Faculty of Medicine's Institute of Public Health at the P.J. Šafárik University in Košice. She is also a member of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children research network and the Community and Health Research Network. She has participated in several national and international research projects, such as the H2020 EURO-HEALTHY project and FP7 health project SOPHIE, among others. Her research is centred on public health, with a particular focus on socioeconomic and health inequalities and socioeconomic determinants of health.

Abbreviations

ACEC	Association for Culture, Education and Communication
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSDH	Commission on Social Determinants of Health
EC	European Community
EEC	European Economic Community
EU	European Union
HR	human resources
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPRE	Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (of the Administration for Children and Families)
OSH	occupational safety and health
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USSKE	U.S. Steel Košice



Photo: Jozef Jarošík

Executive summary

This report reviews the bottom-up approach to employment of a particular group of people living in Slovakia. This approach, which is unique in Slovakia, might be a good contribution to solving the problems relating to employing Roma¹ – a large, hard-to-employ group of citizens. It could have a substantial impact on health inequalities and possibly become the background for a new policy measure. This review may also be beneficial by increasing knowledge and understanding of the topic, both in Slovakia and further afield.

The bottom-up approach to employment was implemented within the Equality of Opportunity project created by U.S. Steel Košice (USSKE), which is a subsidiary of the United States Steel Corporation (headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States of America) and an integrated steel producer with major production operations in the United States, Canada and central Europe. The subsidiary in Košice is the largest employer in the region of East Slovakia. The main goal of the Equality of Opportunity project is to integrate Roma citizens from the surrounding settlements into the work process² through the so-called Agreement on the temporary assignment of employees to another employer, and thus to decrease unemployment and increase the qualification level within Roma communities. The Equality of Opportunity project focuses on four main areas.

1. It supports hard-to-employ groups to find employment, aiming to involve them in the work process and to ensure a stable income that enables them to support their families.
2. It works to develop qualifications and skills in hard-to-employ groups, aiming to improve their opportunities in the labour market.
3. The project focuses on improving quality of life within the community, aiming to make the employment of one family member beneficial for the whole family, and ultimately for the entire community.
4. It also supports children's education, aiming to motivate and encourage children to acquire education and skills that could increase their opportunities in the labour market.

Principles of the bottom-up approach to employment

The unique nature and success of the bottom-up approach to employment seems to reside in the fact that it tries to look at the problem in a broader context. In summary, it is based on the principles listed here.

¹ "Roma" applies mostly to the members of segregated and separated communities in this publication.

² The intention is to give Roma individuals an understanding of the commitment and approach required to maintain employment.

An **offer of employment** is key. The fundamental point is to create an appropriate employment position and then to offer a job (and with it a regular income), taking into account the possibilities and capabilities of the target workforce.

The **bottom-up approach** consists of five phases, based on the cascading principles of the selection process. Along with the mechanism itself (the bottom-up principle is preserved when shifting into the higher skill categories and also when transitioning from temporary to permanent employment), this phased format provides both participants and coordinators with time and space to adapt. On the one hand, it takes into account the specifics of Roma history and creates an adequate period and scope for participants to become familiar with the rules of the majority population and to increase their skills and qualifications. On the other, it provides space for coordinators to understand this history and, bearing it in mind, to create and adapt particular rules and to map all the participants and their abilities, giving those who are most reliable the opportunity to develop in the workplace.

Motivation is an essential element of the bottom-up approach to employment. Participants are motivated to improve their skills in order to receive extra pay within the variable wage component, and non-financial motivation is also widely used (for example, the organization of social and cultural events in which project participants and their families are involved).

Children are a key focus of the project. USSKE tries to develop children and to build up their sense of responsibility, both for themselves and for their education. The company therefore cooperates closely with local primary schools, supporting them financially and practically. Moreover, children are engaged in various other activities aiming to encourage them to complete primary school and to acquire further education, at least at partner vocational schools if not in a traditional academic setting. The company also cooperates with the Salesians brothers (a missionary team), who try to stimulate children's learning using their own methods, as well as providing religious education.

Personal contact and relationships form a substantial part of the project. First, participants are selected in all municipalities in the presence of the mayors (or their deputies) and community worker(s), who often personally knows each participant. This means that the selected individuals are indeed the most reliable candidates and, in addition, the personal relationship between the individuals involved would seem to imply a greater level of commitment to the project, for all concerned. Furthermore, a personal approach is taken to solving any problems and difficulties that arise within the project.

Community specificity is key to the design focus of the bottom-up approach to employment. It takes into account that project participants mostly come from three main settlements: Velká Ida, Košice-Šaca and Košice-Luník IX, which are – in terms of size, type of settlement, density and history – markedly different and therefore need to be approached individually.

Local development is central to the project orientation. It focuses entirely on Roma in the immediate vicinity of the USSKE factory. First, it has been shown that other potential candidates from destinations further afield were typically not willing to overcome the greater distance to work. Second, including these principles

(personal contact and community specificity), which are crucial to the project, is only possible at local level. Thus, the project participants are mostly inhabitants of adjacent localities (Veľká Ida, Košice-Šaca, Košice-Lunik IX), which are within a radius of about 15 km of the plant. Furthermore, development of a region is a part of USSKE's corporate culture.

Expectation of countervalue has proven to be vital. Many years of experience with this project have shown that to give money or anything else to members of the segregated communities for free, i.e. without expectations of any countervalue, might become counter-productive in the long-term (via supporting opportunist rather than engaged attitudes). This seems to apply also to the communities' children, who appeared to be motivated by experiential rewards (camps, entertainment, performances, zoo visits, and so on) than by gifts.

Active involvement of participants is also important. The project considers it essential to involve participants actively in part(s) of the decision-making. Meetings are therefore held regularly. Participants can brainstorm ideas and express their opinions about the work process and the project at these monthly meetings. Coordinators consequently try to incorporate all reasonable and constructive suggestions.

Features of the bottom-up approach to employment

The bottom-up approach to employment realized within the Equality of Opportunity project has produced important learning on the principles of effective interventions focused on hard-to-employ groups. In this context, several features seem to have had an impact on the project's sustainability and success, but are also influential in terms of taking the work forward. These are described in detail here.

In terms of multisectorality, the project provides engagement with various sectors. This is important because **multisectoral collaboration** enables the bringing together of several individuals and organizations to handle problems from many different directions simultaneously. It also strengthens the project's capacity to address important issues by connecting and combining the knowledge, resources, skills and networks of particular concerned individuals and institutions. In this case, this means the involvement of particular municipalities, a city council, schools, the Salesian brothers, community centres and even some general practitioners for children and adults.

Another important feature of this project is that it creates an **alliance between stakeholders** and therefore does not perceive multisectorality separately. This means that all the stakeholders (individuals and institutions) know each other; cooperate with, support and respect each other; carry out their responsibilities; and do not impede each other's (or joint) activities.

Custom design of projects – paying particular attention to the **Roma community's history** – is beneficial. Each of the Roma communities has some common features, but the key is the specific history of a community, with respect to which the project has been designed. In the case of this particular project, these

specifics probably influenced the creation of several barriers, such as generational poverty, different perception of values, and so on. The results of this may also subsequently influence the relationship of the community to work and education, to ownership in general, to responsibility for their own lives and health, as well as to the life and health of their families. In general, when these specifics are disregarded by the coordination team in the designing of a similar project, the project runs the risk of failing. Conversely, when something fails, it is necessary to examine whether this disregard for specifics might be one explanation for why the project did not work.

The goal of this study is primarily to build and expand on knowledge gained through the above-mentioned project, and to promote it as an example of good practice for employing Roma in the public and private sectors. The project has generated substantial knowledge that can be used to develop and test new strategies, initiatives or interventions, with greater potential to succeed in the relevant area(s).

Introduction

The health of an individual reflects many aspects of a human being, including those of a genetic or biological nature, but also factors arising from the external environment. It is obvious that the health of individuals is to a large extent affected by the nature of their living conditions. It is not just inherent factors and individual lifestyle that matter, but also social networks, housing and work conditions, as well as the general cultural, environmental and socioeconomic environment, all of which impact health. These factors and their interrelations determine public health (Dahlgren & Whitehead, 1992). It is commonly



Photo: Jozef Jarošík

"The Roma community is the largest ethnic minority in Europe and is characterized primarily by the situation of social exclusion and wide-ranging poverty experienced by a significant proportion of its members. Inadequate access to housing, education, employment and other needs, along with the existence of barriers to Roma accessing health services and an ineffective use of these services owing to their lack of adaptation and even to discrimination, all contribute to a range of avoidable injustices suffered by this community with regard to their health situation."

(Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2009)

understood that poorer people typically have worse health and shorter life expectancy than those who are better-off (The Marmot Review, 2010). It is also known that people in deprived areas die sooner on average and usually face more health problems throughout their shorter lives. Such systematic differences in health do not arise by chance and cannot be simply attributed to genetic makeup, so-called bad behaviour or difficulties in accessing health care. Socioeconomic differences in health reflect and are caused by social and economic inequalities in society (The Marmot Review, 2010). The Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) established by WHO acknowledges that social inequalities in health arise because of inequalities in the conditions of daily life (the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age), which reflect unequal access to power, money and resources (Solar & Irwin, 2010). It follows that inequalities in health are not completely inevitable and might be significantly reduced by effectively addressing other types of social inequalities. In order to achieve this, the processes that factor into this equation need to be better understood.

In recent years, attention has shifted from the assessment of health outcomes toward examination of the relationships between health inequalities and their social and cultural determinants. Indicators include the economic activities of individuals, participation in the labour market, and various government measures aiming to increase employment. For example, according to the study by Avendano, Mackenbach & Johan (2011) individual health seems to be strongly dependent on participation in the labour process during productive age, even though the institutional mechanisms that could explain this association remain unknown.



Photo: Jozef Jarošik

Not only might economic disadvantage cause health problems, but health problems themselves can also lead to further economic disadvantage (Aittomäki et al., 2012). Redistribution of economic resources, including income and wealth distribution, or social security measures that provide buffers for income loss, could lead to changes in health inequalities (Aittomäki et al., 2012). Unemployment is one clear example of a trigger event that could have crucial impacts on inequality levels (Gangl, 2006).

In addition, certain groups in society are left out of the labour market, seem to face serious challenges regarding long-term employment and are also deemed to be difficult to employ (Butler et al., 2012). According to the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) (an office of the Administration for Children and Families) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, such groups usually include long-term welfare recipients, disabled or mentally ill people, along with former convicts, to name a few (Butler et al., 2012). Problems with behavioural control, a lack of skills and a criminal record might place many of these people at a further disadvantage in a competitive labour market (Bloom et al., 2007). It is clear that hard-to-employ populations require special assistance to find and keep work. They may need training in an array of job skills, assistance with searching for a job, or help to access health care and other services (Butler et al., 2012).



Photo: Jozef Jarošík

In general, ethnic minorities also tend to have higher unemployment rates, lower occupational attainment and wages, and often weaker labour market involvement. When measured according to participation rates, they are less likely to find and keep jobs than the majority population (Zimmermann et al., 2008). The Roma community is the largest ethnic minority in Europe and is characterized primarily by a situation of social exclusion and the wide-ranging poverty experienced by a significant proportion of its members (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2009). Moreover, Roma subpopulations experience serious difficulties with labour market involvement across all of central and eastern Europe (Zimmermann et al., 2008). Inadequate access to employment, housing, education and other needs, along with the existence of barriers to Roma access to health services and ineffective use of these services – owing to their lack of adaptation, and even discrimination – all contribute to a range of avoidable injustices suffered by the Roma community (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2009). Roma also represent one of the largest ethnic groups in Slovakia. With respect to their specific history, they are considered among the country's marginalized and vulnerable populations, endangered by unemployment, and thus similar in characteristics to other hard-to-employ groups, in terms of their labour market success.

Furthermore, demographic estimates predict that Roma people will eventually be a substantial part of the total workforce in Slovakia (Marcinčin & Marcinčinová, 2009). Along with improving their social position and health status, increasing Roma employment opportunities might prevent major economic losses, and this may be relevant not only to Slovakia, but also to other countries concerned.

The bottom-up approach to employment presented and analysed in this report takes into account the socio-cultural specifics of the Roma community and represents an interesting example of an unusually sensitive attempt to address the Roma social inequality issue, with all of its economic and health consequences.

Study design and data sources

A multiperspective qualitative study was conducted with the aim of creating an overview of the bottom-up approach to employment and its presumed impact on health equity. The study brings into focus reliable current data on the bottom-up approach to employment, as well as on the individuals participating in the programme supporting employment in a particularly hard-to-employ group. Moreover, the study strives to consider reports from the perspective of all the relevant groups and individuals concerned, as well as the interaction between them.

Data were collected from relevant academic and grey literature, in-depth structured interviews and also through focus groups, using the concept mapping method. This is an innovative and unique participatory qualitative research method that yields a conceptual framework for how a group views a particular topic or aspect of a topic, and thus far has not been used by any other research team in Slovakia.

In terms of the literature, both academic and grey sources were included in the research, to describe the socioeconomic and political background and the project overview, as well as to confirm or contradict the evidence collected. Grey literature sources included reports, plans and presentations at various government levels (reports by international health organizations, ministries, national agencies, regional authorities, and so on), but also material from USSKE.



Photo: Jozef Jarošík

In-depth structured interviews (n=12) were carried out with relevant stakeholders or key actors: representatives of USSKE, the city council of Košice and local authorities (Veľká Ida); Roma project participants, the missionary Salesian brothers at Lunik IX and a cultural anthropologist. Given the present dominant cultural narrative regarding Roma in Slovakia includes both new racist and outright antigypsyist ideas, local counter-narratives are presented by including responses from not only the Roma participants but also from activists and a social scientist working on their behalf.

Some of the data (such as those gathered from the children of participants from Veľká Ida, teachers from the primary school in Veľká Ida, and representatives and workers from the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family in Košice) were collected using a concept mapping method (n=28).

The overall sample consisted of 40 respondents (25 Roma, 15 non-Roma). The analysis comprised the literature review, studying the transcript of records and then carrying out the recursive abstraction analysis with the aim to identify the context, mechanisms and outcomes of this approach as well as to explore its impact on health equity.

Part 1.

Socioeconomic and political background in Slovakia

- » Certain regions are at risk of declining, with long-term problems relating to high unemployment levels and depleted resources.
- » More than 60% of the unemployed population are without work for more than one year.
- » A high proportion of the unemployed population is young people aged up to 24 years.
- » Many unemployed people have a low level of (or incomplete) education.
- » A disproportionately large proportion of the unemployed population are Roma.
- » Roma represent a hard-to-employ group.



"The current position of the Roma in Slovakia is influenced by both the country's pre-1989 history and its transition to democracy and market capitalism thereafter. The communist regime's policies regarding the living conditions, education, and work patterns of the Roma still determine the growth potential of these Roma communities. The changes that took place after 1989 have resulted above all in a social stratification of the Roma population that affects their way of life."

(Radičová, 2003)

For over 40 years, prior to about 1990, unemployment in Slovakia was not a social problem. The reason for this was the mostly state-driven full employment strategy maintained throughout the communist era (1948–1989), during which time the unemployment level was virtually zero (Myck & Bohacek, 2011). This era was followed by a period of economic transformation, characterized by (among other things) a decrease in total employment. Substantial numbers of jobs disappeared in all sectors and spheres of the national economy. The only exception was an immediate significant increase in employment in banking and state administration, as well as in services for the manufacturing sector, which separated from production as individual entities (Korec, 2005, 2009). In 1990, therefore, the unemployment level registered by the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family first appeared in Slovakia at 0.07% (representing about 2000 job seekers). However, owing to insufficiently prepared economic reforms the unemployment rate at the end of 1991 was already up to 11.82% (302 000 job seekers) (Korec, 2005; Rosič, 2002). In addition, this abrupt increase also initiated an extremely negative trend in the form of rapid growth of long-term unemployment. Moreover, the intense rise in the unemployment rate was characterized by strong regional differentiation, with the highest rates in the southern districts of central Slovakia and those of eastern Slovakia.

Between 1992 and 2001 the unemployment rate continued to rise (with a modest decrease in 1995) and culminated in 2001 at 19.2%, representing more than 500 000 unemployed individuals, of which 55.7% were long-term unemployed and 37.3% were young people aged 15–24 years (Korec, 2005; Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2013). This unfavourable trend was probably influenced by the adoption of new legislative measures related to contributions to sickness, health and retirement funds (established in 1993 and still valid today), the result of which was that the unemployed population tried to remain registered with the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family as long as possible (Korec, 2005). In addition, a new territorial-administrative division was introduced in 1996 (still valid today), resulting in eight regions and 79 districts, without respecting the existing spatial interactions between cities and their often non-functional surroundings (Bezák, 2001).

After 2003, a decreasing trend in unemployment was observed (with a slight increase in 2004), which reached its lowest level since 1990 (9.6%) in 2008 (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2013). This could also have been influenced by legislative actions implemented in the field of social policy, for example, introduction of the obligation to actively search for a job and to demonstrate this to the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family every 14 days; a reduction in the amount of social support benefits and limits placed on their total amount per family; flexible adjustment of employment terms (such as working hours, and so on) (Korec, 2005).

In 2007 and 2008 the Slovak economy was among the fastest growing economies in the European Union (EU) and among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. However, in 2009 a decline was recorded in economic growth and one of the highest decreases in the dynamics of real gross domestic product. This seems to have been a consequence of the great openness of the Slovak economy and its extreme dependence on exports. These factors probably increased the fragility of the current economic growth and the economy's sensitivity to cyclical fluctuations in the world economy. Consequently, a break

in economic growth was associated with a reduction in economic activity (in the market for goods and services), which led to a surplus of workers and a decrease in employment in the national economy. These, in turn, caused an increase in the supply of labour, which – given the reduced labour demand – led to a rise in unemployment (the unemployment rate was 12.1% in 2009) (Karasz, 2009; Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, 2010).

The unemployment rate in recent years has been oscillating around 14% (14.4% in 2010, 13.6% in 2011, 14% in 2012, 14.2% in 2013, 13.2% in 2014) (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2015). The overall unemployment situation in Slovakia today is characterized by a high proportion of long-term unemployed people (more than 60% of unemployed individuals have been without work for more than a year); a high proportion of young unemployed people (the unemployment rate among people aged 15–24 years has been oscillating around 34% since 2010, with the exception of 2014, when it decreased to under 30%); a high proportion (in fact, the majority) of unemployed people with only primary-level or no education and strong regional differences (mainly between the north-west and south-east of the country) (Korec, 2005; Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014).

A disproportionately large number of the unemployed population in Slovakia belong to the Roma minority. Within most communities of this socio-culturally specific subpopulation, the unemployment rate is extremely high (close to 100% in so-called segregated areas) (Korec, 2005).

Across the central and eastern European countries, particular Roma communities share a common ancestry (both cultural and physical) and occupy analogous social niches. Yet, owing to their long-term isolation and lack of common institutionalized traditions, even within countries they simultaneously exhibit great diversity in many aspects of their everyday lives (Crowe & Liebich, 2007; Marushiakova & Popov, 2001). Consequently, it is complicated to define the Roma population in general terms coined for other homogeneous settled groups in the region, such as other nations or ethnic minorities (Stewart, 2010). Characterization of any particular Roma population in any respect thus requires a rather extensive list of specifications that are often still variable. Extensive lists of ad hoc specifications for the Slovak Roma minority can be found, for example, in Uherek & Novak (2003), Marcinčin & Marcinčinová (2009) or Hajioff & McKee (2000). With respect to health status, recent United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reports provide more detailed summaries of various related data (Filadelfiová & Gerbery, 2012; Filadelfiová, 2013a, 2013b). According to the degree of their integration, three types of Roma settlements were proposed.

1. The term **segregated** settlements refers to those distant from a village or town and/or separated by a physical barrier.
2. So-called **separated** settlements are Roma settlements concentrated in particular areas of villages or towns (including peripheries).
3. Settlements referred to as **diffused** (mixed) comprise Roma households dispersed among the majority population in a village or town (Filadelfiová, Gerbery & Škoblá, 2007).

Inhabitants of the first two types of settlement typically exhibit socio-cultural characteristics least similar to those of the non-Roma majority, including a broad range

of circumstances, behavioural traits and preferences that make their spontaneous and unassisted inclusion into the social life of the majority scarcely conceivable. Such traits and preferences include a lack of (or fragmentary) work experience, education and qualification; lack of availability of standard infrastructure; lack of social bonds outside the settlement; insolvency and indebtedness, often as a result of usury; disinterest in planning; distrust and lack of respect for official authorities; expressive negotiation styles; valuing economic opportunism; substandard personal hygienic standards, and so on (Korec, 2005; Marcinčin & Marcinčinová, 2009; Public Health Authority of the Slovak Republic, 2008; Vašečka & Radičová, 2002). In line with the CSDH causal framework, health-related studies dealing with segregated Roma populations typically add that most Roma individuals also have poorer health, higher rates of illness and lower life expectancy compared with the majority population or the national average (Babinská et al., 2013; Filadelfiová, Gerbery & Škobla, 2007; Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2009; Kolarčík, 2012; Rosičová, 2013).

This combination of factors leads to segregated Roma people having a reputation for being, among other things, a hard-to-employ group (Korec, 2005). Yet, given the long historical record of failed simplistic integration attempts on the one hand (Barany, 2002) and recent examples of local integration successes on the other (Mušinka, 2012), such (and similar) labelling seems both too general and unjust (that is, uninformative and exaggerated). Instead, attempts to overcome the tendency to homogenize and make essential apparent Roma specifics, using more localized and field-based interdisciplinary approaches appears to be rather more practical and just. The inclusion of qualitative techniques for analysis (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights & UNDP, 2012) and some truly participatory intervention programmes (such as the extensive network of Roma field health workers developed and run by the Association for Culture, Education and Communication (ACEC)) are good examples of this.

Translated into theory, any grand explanatory models of Roma specificity – whether they tend to emphasize the socioeconomic (poverty trap), market (unemployment cycle), historical (1989 market transition), political (marginalization), traditional (Roma tradition) or cultural (Roma identity) aspects – seem to face a high risk of violating the heterogeneity of actual Roma circumstances and experience, and should ensure they are backed up by relevant data (see, for example, Marcinčin & Marcinčinová (2009) for a list of competing theories in the context of Slovakia). Translated into research, interdisciplinary participatory case studies also need to be carried out to the fullest extent possible, including in the area of increasing health status through employment.

Part 2.

Bottom-up approach to employment: overview

- » Employment-related support is required for hard-to-employ groups.
- » Increasing qualifications and skills would help to improve the situation.
- » Integrating Roma citizens into the work process would be helpful.
- » Focusing on children and community is essential.



Photo: René Říha

"There are an unbelievable number of positive examples in this field, and it is a great shame that the public only learns about them sporadically."

(Mušinka, 2012)

The bottom-up approach to employment was implemented within the Equality of Opportunity project, created by USSKE, which is a subsidiary of the United States Steel Corporation (headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States of America) and an integrated steel producer with major production operations in the United States, Canada and central Europe. The subsidiary in Košice is the largest employer in the region of East Slovakia.

The Equality of Opportunity project was initiated in 2002 by the first president of USSKE, J.H. Goodish, who offered job vacancies to the then mayor of Veľká Ida (F. Šnír) in response to a request for support to reduce a number of problems (increasing level of criminality, usury, and high unemployment) in the nearby Roma settlement. All the informants stated that the project initiation was "a virtue of necessity" given that a segregated Roma settlement is located near the USSKE plant, with an unemployment rate of 100% for a long period of time – a fact that led its inhabitants to commit numerous thefts. The main motive was to offer a job and with it a stable income and thus ultimately to reduce crime in the area. All the informants agreed that creation of the project was largely to the credit of Mr Goodish. One key informant stated:

"Mr. Goodish, as the first CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of USSKE, responded to these problems in another way – paradoxically positive – he offered to the inhabitants of this settlement jobs. It was a major change from the current approach to solving this issue. He was the first person who really offered a helping hand."

Another informant added:

"Mr. Goodish was probably the first to realize that the solution does not lie in one-time aid but has to be more conceptual."

Subsequently, in cooperation with the mayors of Veľká Ida and Košice-Šaca (municipalities in the vicinity of the company with a high density of Roma population) and a priest fulfilling his mission in Lunik IX (a municipality of Košice, with the largest Roma settlement in Slovakia), USSKE has managed since 2002 to create more than 150 jobs. USSKE has an interest in continuing the project, in order to stabilize the work force and to search for new partners from within the business area who would be able, on the basis of the USSKE model, to create new employment opportunities.

Project implementation is ensured by several departments within USSKE. These are primarily the Recruiting & Selection and Public Affairs departments and the company plants in which the jobs are carried out. The main project partners are the council leaders of the village Veľká Ida and the Košice-Šaca and Košice-Lunik IX municipalities, the Principal of the L. Podjavorinskej Elementary School, as well as the Social Affairs Department at Košice city council.

The project focuses on supporting the employment of hard-to-employ groups, as well as increasing their qualifications and skills. The main goal is to integrate Roma citizens from the surrounding settlements into the work process and to increase their qualification level and consequently their chance to succeed in the labour market. The core principle of the project is its stepwise structure

(present in all major phases of the project) and cooperation with the actors involved (municipalities, the city council, community centres, the church, schools, and general practitioners).

First, workers are selected by local authorities and then trained by USSKE. Successful candidates become employees of a particular municipality and are assigned temporary work with USSKE under the so-called Agreement on the temporary assignment of employees to another employer. After a certain time has elapsed, the best of the participants (the most reliable workers with consistently high performance and attendance levels) have the opportunity to become permanent employees of the company. USSKE finances the entire project from its own resources.

The focus of the project is also much broader. It tries, by cooperating with the third sector (non-profit-making organizations), to increase the quality of life not only of its participants but also of their families (see Box 2.1).

An important feature of the project is also the focus on the participants' children. The company tries to work with children, to help them to move forward and to build up their sense of responsibility for themselves and for their education (see Box 2.2).



Photo: Jozef Jarošik

Since the project aspires to take the socio-cultural specificities of its participants (the Roma culture) into account, it makes a great effort to develop effective recruitment and retention strategies, as well as to maintain workplace culture, based on the respect and integration of all employees (see Box 2.3).

Box 2.1

USSKE worked together with the non-profit-making organization Environmental Training Project Centre for Sustainable Development for Central and Eastern Europe on the project Chances for Roma, carried out in the municipality of Košice-Šaca, and their cooperation continues through the project entitled "Community on the road to prosperity". The aim of this project is to increase the level of education of Roma children, young people and adults. The target group comprises only the USSKE Equality of Opportunity project participants and their families. The company was also involved in an initiative to establish the community centre in Veľká Ida, which opened in April 2011. Various courses, training sessions and preschool teaching are carried out there. In addition, in September 2011 the project participants attended the eight-day "Crossroads" programme, which focused on personal development and labour issues.

Box 2.2

USSKE closely cooperates with local primary schools, not only by monitoring school attendance and the behaviour of project participants' children, but also by involving all schoolchildren in various projects, attempting to motivate them to complete primary school education and continue their studies at least at partner vocational schools. USSKE also supports the cooperating schools financially and practically.

Box 2.3

In January 2012, foremen and coordinators from USSKE (participating in the project) completed – together with representatives from the partner governments – a training programme called "B.R.I.D.G.E.S". Its aim was to create awareness of diversity and integration within the company, with further goals including: learning to better understand how people are affected by cultural differences and their impact on labour relations; exploring and understanding individual and interpersonal effectiveness in multicultural situations; and being able to effectively communicate with people from other cultures.

Part 3.

Bottom-up approach to employment: context, mechanisms, outcomes

Understanding the **context** of the project includes consideration of the following elements: the high unemployment level; the unusual social system structure; health and safety at work; medical examination (enforced by legislation); offer of a salary; size of the company; size and stability of the settlement; distance from work; and cultural differences.

The **mechanisms** involved in the project include: an employment offer; understanding and applying the bottom-up principle; considering the profile of the project coordinator(s); training; personal contact; social networking; activities specifically related to children; cooperation with the municipalities and city council, as well as local primary schools; corporate social responsibility; intercultural dialogue; increasing motivation; and social activities.

Expected **outcomes** of the project include: individual employment; acquired skills and improvement of work ethic and working habits; increase in qualifications; improvements for children (school attendance, completion of studies), family (increase in income, improvement in quality of life), community (impact on community, improvement in quality of life) and housing (improvement in precarious housing situations and conditions); decrease in crime; improvement in health; and increased social inclusion.

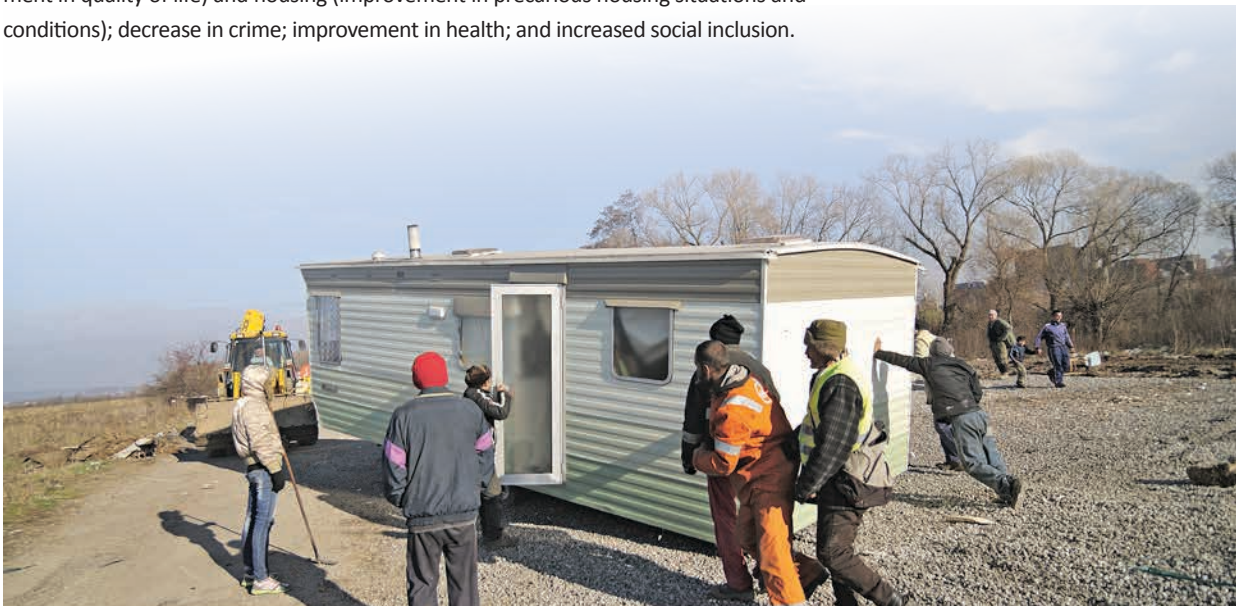


Photo: Jozef Jarošik

"While work as a legitimate source of income gives people the greatest possible economic independence and self-fulfillment, having one's access to the primary labour market restricted is one of the most significant risk factors for poverty and social exclusion."

(Džambazovič & Jurásková, 2003)

"Unemployment in the Roma population is mainly long-term unemployment, which causes Roma women and men to lose the remainder of their qualifications for work. This creates a "cycle of deprivation" and reinforces a culture of poverty, which has very negative effects on the life outcomes of the unemployed and also their families."

(Filadelfiová, Gerbery & Škobla, 2007)

It would be misleading to focus only on the results of the project being examined. In order to maintain the objectivity of the study, it is necessary to examine the specific context, as well as all possible mechanisms that may play a role in the case at hand, because the project outcomes and, ultimately, its success are directly dependent on their combination.

Context

For the evaluation of similar approaches it is important to have a broader overview of the setting in which all of the processes take place. First, it is necessary to understand the multiple contexts in which the project is carried out, which themselves have several levels and facets. Macroeconomic, legislative, corporate (microeconomic), and socioeconomic and cultural contexts are all defined in the subsections that follow.

Macroeconomic context

The macroeconomic context includes all of the elements that define the nature of the relationship between the company/project and the national and global economy. An important contextual factor is the **high unemployment rate** in the region, which is favourable from the viewpoint of the project because it means there are plenty of candidates wanting a place in the project. In addition, both governmental and nongovernmental organizations are concerned with decreasing the unemployment rate and supporting marginalized groups in order to decrease socio-pathological phenomena (Government of Slovakia, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2012b). In several policy statements the Government has committed to addressing the issue of unemployment among marginalized groups; therefore, initiatives to promote local employment are expected to be welcomed by the Government and, if not directly supported, at least not obstructed.

Legislative context

Legislation exists to regulate employment and business opportunities within the country. The project is carried out in accordance with Labour Code Regulation No. 311/2001 Coll. The relationship within which participants are employed in particular municipalities – but carrying out work for USSKE – is regulated according to Labour Code § 58 (temporary assignment). In compliance with this regulation, municipalities created so-called temporary employment agencies, licenced by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, which covered all of the appurtenances associated with the above-mentioned use of personnel. The relationship between municipalities and USSKE is regulated under the Annual Framework Contract.

Legislation defines the characteristics and structure of the **social system**, which is another important contextual factor. The existing social system in Slovakia is regulated by various laws,³ and seems to be transparent and difficult to exploit in its current form, because the payment of certain benefits is always subject to several conditions. Hence, in terms of the bottom-up approach to employment considered here, it should be taken into account as a factor that encourages employment integration. In certain cases (such as

that of a large family with multiple children), however, the total amount of social benefits per family might be equal to or slightly higher than the income arising from employment that pays the minimum wage. Moreover, when one spouse gets a job with a salary higher than the minimum wage, the other spouse automatically loses the entitlement to certain benefits (for example, the so-called material needs benefit payment provided by the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family for unemployed or low-income families). From this point of view, the social system might be seen as a contextual factor that discourages employment integration. On a related note, all of the informants agreed that the social system might to a certain extent present a deterrent, as expressed by one informant, who noted:

"When the husband takes a job, the wife automatically loses her entitlement to certain social benefits, so it is not profitable for them to go to work but rather to stay dependent on state social benefits."

Another informant added:

"This was a big problem, mainly at the beginning of the project, around 2002–2003, when the offered wage was markedly lower, so they [project participants] really didn't have any motivation to work. Gradually, however, the wage increased and some of the rules related to the payment of state social benefits also changed; therefore, I think the situation has improved."

In addition, social benefits are not subject to execution proceedings (no distraint can be issued), and therefore if the citizen affected by the execution enters into employment, her/his salary is automatically subject to levy as part of the execution procedure. As one interviewee said:

"The existing social system is set up so that the social benefits are not subject to execution, but income coming from employment is; so, those who face execution proceedings are better off not going to work."

Another informant added:

"The salary after executions is too low. They [project participants] do not realize that's because they repay part of their debt. They are oriented only by the final amount they receive in cash or on account."

³ For example, Act No. 235/1998 Coll., Act No. 571/2009 Coll., Act No. 627/2005 Coll., Act No. 561/2008 Coll., European Economic Community (EEC) Council Regulation No. 492/2011 adjusting the coordination of social security, European Community (EC) Council Regulation No. 883/2004 as amended by the act, EC Council Regulation No. 987/2009 as amended by the act, and so on.

Responding to the question of why so many of the project participants are struggling to deal with execution proceedings levied against them, one key informant stated:

"Lots of Roma here took a loan, or bought some goods on instalment credit, both at home but also in the United Kingdom. Many of them returned from the United Kingdom feeling cheated, robbed and penniless, thus unable to repay those loans. In some cases gangs in the United Kingdom took their birth certificate or ID from some individuals and purchased goods on instalment credit in their name. Those who were robbed then came back to Slovakia and automatically asked to participate in (or return to) the USSKE project to have at least some income."

Health and safety at work – an important legislative contextual factor – is regulated by Act No. 124/2006 Coll. and by Labour Code Regulation No. 311/2001 Coll. In USSKE, however, occupational safety and health (OSH) is also part of corporate policy, upheld in addition to the law. This can also be considered as an important legislative factor in the project.

A **medical examination** represents another key legislative contextual factor. It is regulated according to Act No. 355/2007 Coll. Given the nature of the work carried out, as well as the fact that project participants are mostly from segregated settlements with sub-standard personal hygienic standards, USSKE provides superior service in this area, going beyond what is required by law. Preventive medical examinations are obligatory and are planned and carried out regularly, in a nearby contracting hospital. These circumstances considerably facilitate the access of participants to health care, helping to reveal and treat health problems, including those deriving from previous health care neglect.

Cooperation with other stakeholders (such as primary schools, the Salesians, and so on) is informal and not regulated by any contract or written agreement.

Regarding the issue of legislative context, most of the key informants agreed with the statement:

"In general, legislation didn't have a substantial impact (in terms of strong enabling or precluding) on the project start-up or implementation. The project was created and is carried out within the existing legislative framework."

Corporate (microeconomic) context

Every corporation operates within a unique environment, which must be understood when analysing processes within the company. Each company has a different capacity for the implementation and execution of projects, and not all companies can afford them. The nature of the corporation itself creates a space in which it is appropriate or inappropriate (or possible or impossible) to implement various projects, approaches, philosophies, cultures, and so on. An important contextual factor encouraging employment is the basic **salary** offered, which is currently significantly higher than the minimum wage, certainly in the first skill category and even more so in the higher skill categories (from January 2017 the net minimum monthly wage in Slovakia is €374).⁴

Corporate size may be also seen as a crucial contextual factor, as a large enterprise with greater capital strength has a greater possibility to introduce such a model than small and medium-sized businesses or sole traders.

Socioeconomic and cultural context

The socioeconomic and cultural context, in terms of this study, includes factors related to the general socioeconomic status and background of individual project participants, as well as the community background from which they originate. From this perspective, the **specifics of Roma history** over centuries significantly shaped by discrimination, racism and outright Antigyptism, seem to be one of the most important contextual factors. Many segregated Roma communities share certain common features, but each particular place is also shaped by its specific social history. Not atypically, in this particular place a long history of social seclusion and discrimination has probably led to the adaptive formation of self-exclusionary values and practices on the part of the Roma community. In this respect, regardless of their ethnicity most of the informants claimed the existence of a specific relationship to work, education, the concept of ownership in general, responsibility for their own lives and health, as well as the life and health of their families in the community. Most informants expressed their view that the approach of the participants to work, their lack of interest and life motivation, as well as lack of stability presented a serious problem for the project. Some of the informants added:

"Most of them [project participants] are not really trustworthy. It is often necessary to warn and control them. Although they mostly work very fairly and without any troubles for two or three months after such a warning, after this period something else usually occurs."

Most of the interviewees claimed that working with Roma participants is often much more difficult because of their [project participants] typically low education levels. Families with multiple children are also typical of Roma settlements located near the USSKE plant. In many cases a family has between 3–6 children. Some informants understood this circumstance as a factor threatening to endanger the project and Roma employment more generally, because participants tended to have relatively numerous absences from work as a result. As one informant stated:

"Participants often have to stay at home and help with children or go to doctor with some of them, while the mother takes care of the rest of them at home."

Many of those interviewed also believed that most of the participants do not think conceptually, but rather impulsively, which often leads them to leave their job for trivial reasons. As one informant elaborated:

"The Roma react impulsively. There is often nothing behind it, just momentary dissatisfaction or confusion. Regarding the job, oftentimes, they [project participants] find something displeasing and leave, but then they almost always return. It is important to understand that this is not the mentality or lack of capacity, it is the way they have seen from childhood people around them face up to inner conflicts."

Many informants claimed that the size and stability of the settlement represented another important contextual factor which could endanger the project through discouragement of the Roma participants' employment. On a related note, one key informant stated:

⁴ See Part 4 for a more detailed explanation of this system of skill categories.

"There is a difference between taking such an approach for a community, with about 400 relatively stable and 'shapeable' people (e.g. the settlement in the Veľká Ida), and attempting it in the settlements where there are about 8000 vulnerable people. An example of such a settlement is Lunik IX, the composition of which is not typical or representative for the concept of Roma, as most of its inhabitants haven't moved there voluntarily but were forcibly relocated from other city districts owing to a series of problems (avoiding rent payments and energy fees, problem behaviour, imprisonment, and so on). In addition, it is a highly dynamic area, so the positive impact of an individual's improvement is negligible on average in comparison with the predominant negative aspects of the whole community."

Distance from employment might also be a contextual factor discouraging Roma employment, as according to many informants other potential candidates from destinations further away were typically not willing to overcome the greater distance to work; thus, the given model, according to the informants, seems to work only in settlements in the vicinity (project participants are inhabitants of adjacent towns and municipalities – Veľká Ida, Košice-Šaca, Košice-Lunik IX – which are within a radius of 15 km from the plant). This resentment was, however, supposed to be confounded also with the settlements' inhabitants' typically less enthusiastic attitude regarding wage labour as well as with the necessity to take care of a relatively high number of children. As explained by several informants, local Roma were willing to travel for work only within a distance they perceive to be as walking distance so that they can get home quickly, e.g. when necessary.



Photo: Jozef Jarošík

Key actors

The key actors also represent a substantial contextual factor for the project, given that they not only belong to the environment in which the project is located, but they also create and influence it.

The project's key actors were divided into three main categories according to the knowledge and information gained from the informants.

1. The actors at the top of the hierarchical structure are the **decision-makers**. Among them are representatives of USSKE and mayors of the particular municipalities.
2. The category **frontline players** includes all of the executive staff, who are in direct and regular contact with the project participants. It comprises human resources (HR) staff and foremen (coordinators) from USSKE, executive workers from the municipalities in charge of the USSKE project, teachers of partner schools, the Salesians, and community workers.
3. Three subgroups of **recipients** can be identified.
 - » **Primary recipients** are a subgroup comprising the project participants (employees) – most of the key informants in this group believe their outcome from the project is mainly positive;
 - » **Secondary recipients** are a subgroup comprising employees' families and children – most of this category of key informants also believe their outcome from the project is mainly positive;
 - » **Tertiary recipients** are the rest of the community – most of this type of key informant believe that the project has had an impact on the community. As one individual stated:

"In some cases project participants are maybe not 'welcome' and in other cases even 'set apart', but they definitely have an impact on community."

Another informant stated:

"Despite the 10 years of the project life, there may be in certain communities a negative rather than positive response, because of envy, inferiority complex, etc. Often, however, it is only a comparison between individuals, which ultimately causes others to also desire a 'higher life standard' and therefore we can say that the project has an impact on the community."

This key informant also added:

"We can't expect everyone to enthusiastically welcome this programme. It could, for instance, evoke a lot of negative emotions for people who wanted to participate but who didn't pass the selection process because of illiteracy or unreliability."

Mechanisms

"Roma who live in marginalized regions and in socially and geographically isolated settlements generally lack job opportunities, especially owing to their limited social contacts outside the settlement – contacts that might help the inhabitants of the settlement find a job. Social networks and links are very strong in segregated communities, but the fact that they are locally homogeneous limits the information they can provide."

(Džambazovič & Jurásková, 2003)

Mechanisms present a concrete tool or measure which triggers specific outcomes within a particular context. For this project, several types of mechanisms can be distinguished that have led to various outcomes.

Main mechanisms

The main mechanisms include those related only to the primary objective of the project, which is employment. The **employment offer** in USSKE is a fundamental mechanism. The first point is to offer a job and therefore, through the job, to offer a regular income and working routine. Many informants also believed, when the participants are at work, at least 40 hours per week of their time is meaningfully spent.

The **bottom-up principle** itself is another important mechanism of the model. A series of steps is maintained during the selection process, which consists of five bottom-up phases, as well as in the advancement stages of the project, in which the bottom-up principle is preserved by shifting into the higher skill categories and transiting from temporary to permanent employment. The goal is to provide both participants and coordinators with adequate time and space to adapt, taking into account the specifics of Roma history. According to many informants, it allows project participants to become familiar with the rules of the majority, as well as to increase their skills and qualifications. Many participants also believed that it provides time and scope for coordinators to understand the specifics of the situation and to create and modify particular rules, as well as to map all of the participants and their abilities, giving the most reliable candidates the opportunity to develop.

The **coordinators' profile** appears to be another significant mechanism. Many informants claimed that not just anyone can be involved in such work, and the success of the project depends on the coordinators' team, which must consist of people who are patient and tenacious, with the grace and determination to change something in society. As one key informant remarked:

"Foremen as well as other coordinators who work with participants on a daily basis perform a really meritorious activity. They expend every day enormous effort, because this work is not at all easy. It seems that for them it is not only a job but a mission."

The offer of various **training** (related in part to the work itself) is another mechanism that enables skills and qualifications to be increased. Most of the informants agreed that, in addition to helping participants to increase their chances of succeeding in the labour market, the training also helped them to acquire self-worth and the desire to develop.

Cooperation with the municipalities and city council is another of the project's main mechanisms. As already mentioned, workers are selected by the local authorities and are then trained by USSKE. Successful candidates become employees of a particular municipality and work within USSKE under temporary assignments. According to most informants, this mechanism also strengthens the project's capacity to address important issues, mainly by connecting and combining the knowledge, resources, skills and networks of the individuals and institutions involved. Most of the informants claimed that all of the aforementioned stakeholders know each other,

cooperate together, support each other and respect one another's roles and responsibilities. Most of the informants also concurred that cooperation is very important and is a positive feature of the project. One interviewee stated:

"I think that good cooperation and communication between USSKE, the municipalities and the city council leads to 50% of the project success."

Personal contact also seems to be an important mechanism. According to most informants, the majority of the project is based on personal contact and relationships. First, participants are selected in all municipalities in the presence of the mayors (or their deputies), and community worker(s), who often personally know all of the participants. Many informants believed that those selected really are the most reliable, and a personal relationship between the individuals involved does seem to be more binding. As one key informant stated:

"This is a very important moment, as they [project participants] might be confused, because we are for most of them a completely foreign community – and the personal contact in the selection process seems to be a genuinely functioning mechanism! Moreover, they might already through the selection process get to know some officials and HR staff who can help them somehow in the future. On the other hand, the personal contact ensures the candidate is offered a suitable job in terms of their abilities, according to what positions are available."

In addition, many informants reported that all of the difficulties that arise within the project are discussed and solved directly and in person.



Photo: Jozef Jarošik

Box 3.1

In terms of the motivational elements of the project, each year the most diligent pupils achieving good results (as effort is already considered to have been made when a Roma child attends school, involvement in after-school activities is considered an added value) have the opportunity to spend a week in a children's activity camp; those who are most active and achieve excellent results are rewarded further and they also have the opportunity to take part in the events organized by USSKE for permanent employees (International Children's Day at a zoo, attending a Christmas concert in a theatre, etc.).

Supportive mechanisms

This category includes mechanisms that trigger secondary outcomes, as well as all the means that are not directly related to employment and financial remuneration.

Activities related to children are among the crucial supportive mechanisms. The aim is to motivate and encourage children to acquire an education and skills that could increase their opportunities in the labour market (see Box 3.1). Many informants claimed that through the project, USSKE tries to help them progress and to build up their sense of responsibility for themselves and for their education, taking into account that they are at a marked disadvantage compared with the children from the majority population because of their poverty, poorly equipped households and typically lower support from families and the community at large. The company **cooperates very closely with local primary schools**, in which most of the pupils are Roma, and also supports them financially and practically. All of the informants claimed that project participants who are parents are expected to ensure their children attend school regularly. Consequently, pupils are evaluated every month according to their school attendance, behaviour and participation in after-school activities. Potential problems are discussed in individual meetings, at which teachers, parents and also their boss at USSKE are present. As most of the informants stated, children are also engaged in various other activities aiming to encourage them to complete primary school and to acquire further education, at least at partner vocational schools if not in a traditional academic setting. Besides the schools, the company also cooperates with the Salesians (carrying out their mission in the Košice-Lunik IX area), who try to stimulate children's learning using their own methods, along with religious education.

The existence of **social responsibility** in the corporation were also seen by some informants to be an important supportive mechanism. One informant mentioned that:

"The sense of social responsibility in USSKE definitely affected the project start-up, of course in positive way."

Another noted:

"This project is proof that the company does not think only about economic aspects and efficiency, but also about the social benefit. If this were not so, this project would no longer exist."

Intercultural dialogue represents according to many informants another supportive mechanism, expressing the effort made to ensure social inclusion and to integrate, and the mutual pursuit of dialogue. Many informants believed that a bottom-up approach to employment can be thought of as USSKE's part in making efforts to encourage integration and employment; the Roma people perceive time and priorities differently from the majority, but the programme respects diversity, which gives them the time and opportunity to adapt. According to many informants, the programme tries to encourage project participants to understand that if they want to succeed, they must also adapt somewhat and accept some principles from the majority culture. It is a mechanism that requires consistent commitment from both parties.

Motivation was seen by most of the informants as an essential element of the bottom-up approach to employment. As most of the informants claimed, participants are motivated to improve their skills in order to receive extra pay within the variable wage component of the project. According to many informants, in order to take into account the specificities of the Roma ethnic group, non-financial motivation is also widely used; for example, **social activities** are organized (social and cultural events), in which project participants and their children are involved along with representatives of USSKE. Most of the informants stated that these events are hugely successful and even seem to be motivating and encourage integration.

A few mechanisms, such as **respect for the specifics of Roma history**, and **social networking**, are considered among both the main and the supportive mechanisms, or lie somewhere on the border between them.

Respect for the specifics of Roma history was seen by many informants as one of the most important project mechanisms and one of the reasons for the project's ongoing success. As some of the informants explained, the bottom-up principle itself (along with other mechanisms) was used in the project design, based on respect for precisely these specifics. Some informants understood that rules cannot be generalized for all employees, and that Roma people need to be approached individually, bearing their specific history in mind.



Photo: René Říha

Box 3.2

USSKE was involved in the establishment of a community centre in Velká Ida and has cooperated with the community centres in Košice-Lunik IX and Košice-Šaca. Together with the latter, the company organized a social event for which a cultural programme was prepared by the participants' children (in pre-school and those of school age) and during which top managers of the company acknowledged the most active students. According to many informants, these activities allow families to acquire social experiences that are fundamentally lacking in their environment. Many of the participants also believed such gatherings are highly motivational for project participants and their families and encourage integration with their surroundings and communities.

The involvement of **social networking** as a mechanism means according to many participants that the project considers socialization and integration from the very beginning. Many participants also believed that it enables participants to maintain certain personal contacts and relationships with the majority population right from the selection and recruitment stage of the process, which might also be helpful in cases in which the candidate is not successful. As one informant mentioned:

"The fact that they [project participants] come to the selection procedure and make contact with the mayor (or his deputy) and the other recruiters is already a first step toward making them feel more confident. Many of them, even the unsuccessful candidates, then often later seek out these people and ask their advice in various areas."

Some informants are considered to be crucial, as the information flow in segregated areas is rather homogeneous and therefore quite limited.

Another informant stated:

"Aside from finding work, they [project participants] come into contact with adults who are outside their community, who may have information, options, can offer encouragement, provide support, assistance with various things – because in their community they often cannot find an 'expert' for solving various problems."

Countervalue was seen by many participants as another notable mechanism. According to many informants, experience with this project have shown that to give the members of these communities anything "free of charge" without expectations of any countervalue might become counter-productive in the long-term (via supporting opportunist rather than engaged attitudes). Many informants believed, this is also the case for Roma children, who tend to be motivated instead by experiential rewards (a week in a children's activity camp, spending International Children's Day at a zoo, a Christmas concert in a theatre, and so on – see Box 3.1 for details and Box 3.2 for further examples of Roma children's involvement in the planning of community social activities). One interviewee noted:

"At first, parents whose children had good school attendance were rewarded financially. This system was abused and the money was often not used to meet the children's needs; that's why it was later ruled out and the kids now receive a material award, such as school equipment, etc."

Outcomes

Outcomes include certain desired results but also side-effects produced by causal mechanisms being triggered within a given nexus. In the context of the bottom-up approach to employment, this particular project's effects were divided into primary and secondary outcomes, and possible side-effects.

Primary outcomes

Primary outcomes are directly related to the project's principal goal: employment. This is therefore represented by all of the participants who gained employment as a result of participating in the bottom-up employment programme. This outcome is connected with another important effect of the project: a **stable income**. As many of informants claimed, considering the fact that welfare benefits are often the only income in the

localities involved and are usually not sufficient to meet even basic needs, income from the project on one hand enables participants to take care of their families and provides a certain level of economic independence, and on the other hand it relieves some of the burden on public funds.

Skills acquisition was seen by most of the informants as a very important outcome. As explained by some informants, before participation in the project most of the employees belonged in the unskilled labour category; thus, any improvement in this respect is regarded as a great success.

Improvement of work ethic and working habits was understood by many informants as another crucial outcome. As many informants claimed, before participation in the project, most of the Roma had inadequate working habits; therefore, any improvement of these habits resulting from the project develops the participants and increases their opportunities within the labour market.

Qualification increase was seen by most of the informants as another important primary outcome. Almost all of the informants mentioned that Roma from the settlements involved do not have (as unemployed individuals) any opportunity to gain or improve their qualifications. Even the training offered by the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family is seen by most of the interviewees as inadequate and impractical. On the other hand, the training offered through the project is perceived by these informants very positively. Almost all agreed that the project has a substantial impact on improving their skills and qualifications, especially for those involved in the project for longer periods. As one key informant remarked:

"The process of getting job in the project is not easy. If the candidates succeed and also take part in some training, their chance to succeed in the labour market grows rapidly."

Most of the informants also agreed that all of the aforementioned benefits might consequently have an impact on the participants' self-confidence and courage relating to change (see Box 3.3).

According to many informants, many participants leave the project, albeit often to accept another job offer. As explained by some informants, from the company's (economic) perspective this is not a positive point, but from the perspective of the region and social responsibility it certainly is.

On the topic of work morale, a few informants noted that:

"In terms of work ethic, the project did manage to improve it, but more so in the older participants."

Secondary outcomes

Secondary outcomes comprise all outcomes aside from the primary ones. The first type relates to **children**. In this case as claimed by most of the informants, the desired project result represents a change in the perception of education, both by participants and their children, leading to improved school attendance and the completion of studies (mostly completion of compulsory education or vocational school, with a vocational certificate, or (better) completion of secondary school with a leaving certificate). One interviewee stated:

"It is important to me that my sons attend school regularly and learn well, because without school they will not find a job. Maybe I'm hard on them, but it is for their own good. You know, those who do not work are not so tough on their kids, but then they do not go to school."

Box 3.3

A good example is the man who, thanks to the project, had the chance to participate in various training opportunities, helping him with the desire and ability to completely change his life, to the extent that he completed secondary school and has now been accepted by a university.

Another interviewee said:

"My father works in the project and our family is therefore well, certainly better than those children whose fathers do not work. I'm proud of him. I'm also learning well, so I can then continue to study and also find a good job."

Another group of secondary outcomes is related to the **family**. One of the most important outcomes according to most of the informants is the improvement of quality of life, together with improvement of the family's lifestyle and their relationship with the majority population. As one of the informants noted:

"The project ensured a stable income for many people. They can now afford to buy many more things, such as clothes and school materials and tools for their children, the absence of which was often previously a barrier to their school attendance."

Another informant added:

"The fact that father is working not only in the project can be seen not only in the entire family, but also in smaller communities, such as Veľká Ida and Košice-Šaca. Also, the difference between those who participate in the project and those who do not is visible in terms of clothes, hygiene, behaviour and total look."



Photo: Jozef Jarošík

Most of the informants pointed out that another effect of the project might be an impact on the **community**, specifically improving quality of life within the community. According to many informants, most of the local Roma live in the community, in which the behaviour of individuals mirrors the experience of the entire community and the model of mutual imitation is widely used. One interviewee remarked:

"They like to compare and emulate themselves. When there is a family or individual who is, thanks to the project, visibly successful and in better shape, others will try to follow."

Some of the informants, however, expressed doubts about whether this also applies to Lunik IX, given the size and stability of the settlement.

Improvement of precarious housing situations and conditions was seen by many informants as another notable project outcome. As claimed by most informants, many of the project participants managed to improve their housing conditions. Some even moved from shanty housing into public-assistance dwellings, as they started being able to pay rent regularly (see Box 3.4).

Crime reduction was seen by most of the informants as another important secondary outcome. Almost all of the informants agreed that the project has had an impact on crime reduction in the localities involved, with a visible effect in particular in Velká Ida and Košice-Šaca. The same informants also agreed that Košice-Lunik IX is a dynamic, unstable settlement, where the positive impact of an individual's improvement is largely insignificant, considering the prevailing negative aspects of the whole community.

Social inclusion is according to many informants a further project outcome, enabling participants to have personal contact and a relationship with individuals (colleagues, superiors, the mayor) from the majority population, which seems to be helpful in terms of obtaining information in a heterogeneous way (something that scarcely occurs in their community), as well as helping to eradicate barriers and prejudices. As one informant mentioned:

"Participation in the project has changed my view on life! I'm interested in what my 'white' colleagues think about me and I'm glad they treat me as a peer."

Health improvement was seen by all of the interviewees as a crucial effect of the project for many reasons. This outcome is discussed in further detail in Part 7.

Possible side-effects

The primary goal of the project was to achieve certain improvements; however, unexpected circumstances are bound to arise. As many potential negative outputs of participation in the project as possible were considered, as detailed here. The first, which was also mentioned by a few of the informants, is **tension in the community**.

Box 3.4

In 2008, in the village of Velká Ida, 24 public-assistance dwellings were consigned, with almost all the tenants being project participants. Currently, for various reasons, only about half of the tenants are working for USSKE. Some of them are employed elsewhere, and others have lost their jobs entirely. However, in this case the local authority showed support by retaining the apartments for those tenants. Their rent is paid through their social benefits, directly into the account of a local authority, which saves them some money.

As one informant explained:

"Most of the settlements are very much categorized into groups, especially from a socioeconomic point of view. Evidence suggests that there are great symbolic hierarchies in which there are families (households) who identify with Roma ideals more and those who identify less. When we look within these communities at the people (families) who are on the top of the socioeconomic scale, they are often those who are willing to become 'non-Roma'. Below this group there are many other people who identified themselves more or less with Roma ideals."

Exclusion of the family from the collective was identified by some informants as another of the project's possible side-effects. One interviewee remarked:

"There might be a couple of cases when the individual or family was symbolically excluded from the collective, as they were considered to become non-Roma because of their socioeconomic status increasing."

Another informant stated:

"It's only envy. Some of the neighbours would like to participate in the project as well; some of them also did, but they didn't go to work properly and there were always problems with them. They wasted their chance."

According to a few informants, some of the participants might be at **risk of being mistreated** at work, foremost because of their disadvantaged position, as most of them are not permanent staff member, so it may be that some workers do not consider them as peers.

As stated by some informants, a project may also represent a **burden on time and patience**, given that it mainly involves working with people with lower educational levels. According to some informants, it should also be taken into account that working in such a programme may be **challenging for the staff involved**; not everyone can work in such an environment for a long period of time. Some informants also believed that the coordinator and administrator needs to invest not only time and patience, but also a personal contribution. Some informants stated that a project like this can be costly as training and equipment cost money, so the outlay for the company might be expensive, particularly if the employee leaves after just a few days.

Part 4.

Bottom-up approach to employment: process

- » The bottom-up approach to employment is based on the cooperation of USSKE with the selected municipalities, whereby the employer is a particular municipality and USSKE enlists the workers by means of personal leasing.
- » Each candidate must undertake a challenging recruitment process, which consists of five phases.
- » Financial remuneration has been gradually increased over the years. Currently, a project participant's gross wage is more than 30% higher than at the beginning of the project in 2002.
- » A so-called production meeting is held each month, in which participants have the opportunity to express their opinions related to the work process and the project itself, as the active involvement of participants in the decision-making is considered an important part of the project.



Photo: Jozef Jarošik

"It is true that it is useful to see the positive examples and to learn to distinguish them more closely. In many cases, the administrators themselves are not always fully aware of their positive impact. We often find burned-out and frustrated people lacking inspiration behind high-quality work. Nearly always these are people devoted to their work, doing it as best they can – the only way they know how – or as best the circumstances around them will allow (financial, human, local conditions, and so on). Not a lot of positive things can be done without the willingness to do them."

(Mušinka, 2012)

The bottom-up employment procedure is based on the cooperation of USSKE with the selected municipalities, whereby the employer is a particular municipality and USSKE enlists the workers by means of personal leasing, through the Agreement on the temporary assignment of employees to another employer. The advantage for the municipalities lies in the fact that USSKE finances the entire project from its own resources, without financial support from the other parties. On the other hand, the workers do not figure in the company expenditure, so administrative and accounting matters – along with medical examinations – are charged to the municipality.

After successful completion of all initial phases, participants become municipality employees for a fixed period (one year), assigned to the first skill category and with a basic salary. The contract is automatically renewed after each year, if there are no problems with the staff. An employee may proceed to the next (higher) skill category either on their own initiative or if required by the company. In both cases, the employee must first receive the appropriate training. Workers who show consistent good performance without any problems can, after certain period, become ordinary USSKE employees with a permanent contract. However, this option has been dormant since 2008 owing to the economic recession.

Recruitment process

Before the candidates become a project participants, they must undertake a challenging recruitment process, which consists of five phases: pre-selection, Zone 1, OSH training, assessment centre and medical examination.

Pre-selection

Anyone in the selected communities can apply to participate in the project. Candidates must first submit an application form. These are continuously collected throughout the year in the selected municipalities. During this phase the mayors (or their deputies) make the first selection mainly based on personal experience. There are usually around 100 candidates, and in this phase usually around 20–30 candidates who obviously do not meet basic criteria are removed from the selection. Interest in project participation is consistently high in all areas.

Zone 1

During this phase, recruitment is carried out in the offices of the local authorities involved (Velká Ida, Košice-Šaca, Košice-Lunik IX). This normally takes place once per quarter according to the relevant framework agreement for the project (Agreement on the temporary assignment of employees to another employer), under which the number of participants from the three main areas must be observed. If the situation requires, recruitment can also be carried out at other intervals, usually driven by staff and project participant turnover. This selection phase is only open to candidates with a properly completed application. Recruiters involved in candidate selection are usually representatives of USSKE (selected HR staff) and the local authorities (mayor, deputy mayor). The applicants are informed about the possibility of participating in

the project (given the location and date on which recruitment will take place) through the local authorities, and by means of visits in person by recruiters to the local community centres of each settlement. The aim of this phase is to collect the basic data relating to education and work experience, as well as to explore the applicants' literacy and social situation, and to create an overall profile for each of them.

Recruitment consists of two parts: completing a questionnaire and a personal interview.

Details of the **questionnaire** are listed here.

- » Basic personal data are required. Applicants are asked to write their name, surname and date of birth. These are then compared to those given on their identification.
- » Education details are required. The aim is to find out the applicant's level of education; that is, the number of years completed at primary or secondary school, and whether the applicant has a vocational certificate or passed a school-leaving exam.
- » Work experience is to be recorded. The aim is to find out whether the applicants have worked before, and if so, where and why the previous employment was terminated, as well as whether they are currently looking for a job and what job preferences they have.
- » For recruiters it is important to know whether applicants have already participated in the Equality of Opportunity project and, if so, what the reason was for their termination (moving abroad, finding another job, theft or other behavioural issues and so on) and what they have been doing in the meantime.
- » Residence details are required. The aim is to find out if the applicants have a place to live and, if so, whether they live alone, with their own family or with their parents.
- » Details of interests are to be recorded, with the aim of finding out the applicants' hobbies (sport, music, etc.) and what they do during their leisure time.
- » The applicants are asked if they have children and, if so, the number of children and whether the children go to school.
- » Consent to data processing is requested in the questionnaire.

All the data collected are subject to the Act on personal data protection and, for that reason, the provision of data is voluntary and only with written consent of the project participant. These data are not collected purely for employment and administration purposes, but also to support the social inclusion aspect of the project.

After filling in the questionnaire, candidates are asked to write a short essay on various topics specified by the recruiters, such as: "what I did yesterday", "my children", "my job", "my education", and so on. The questionnaire and the essay are used to determine the literacy level of the candidates, their capacity for written expression and their social situation. The personal interview consists of the same questions, in essence. The recruiters ask in addition for references from previous employment, certificates, and so on. The aim of this interview

Box 4.1

The literacy screening was included in this phase for health and safety reasons, because many of the project participants were unable to read the safety rules and safety notices in work buildings and hallways, which could lead to serious injuries.

is to find out the applicant's capacity for verbal expression and to obtain an overall profile.

During the first phase, candidates are evaluated according to the following criteria: literacy (see Box 4.1), previous employment, general impression, recommendations and references (from previous employment or the local authority). However, when considering candidates, assessing their housing and family situations is also important. As some informants explained, it is assumed that if candidates have a family, house or flat, they are trying to find a stable income, and at the same time the risk of turnover is reduced (for example because they are less likely to be looking to move abroad). According to some informants, USSKE also wishes to offer opportunities to those who do not have any accommodation and have difficulties obtaining a stable income for their household. Assessing information on housing allows USSKE to see (a) how the participants are shaped and developed by the project, (b) what their living circumstances are like and (c) what improvements they have managed to attain while participating in the project.

OSH training

Applicants must first go through OSH training, comprising the cardinal rules of safety equipment. It is necessary to learn and understand the rules. According to many of informants, this one-day training is considered to be quite demanding. At the end of it, participants have to undergo a written test on OSH, which they must pass to be able to participate in the project. Sometimes participants do not pass the test the first time and in such cases the training must be repeated (for some of the applicants more than once). Without successful completion of this training, it is not possible to move to the next stage.

Assessment centre

During this phase applicants have the opportunity to show their skills, while being observed and assessed. They are also tested on whether they understand the safety regulations and their communication skills are evaluated. Moreover, the extremes, such as hidden aggression, excessive passivity or submission are also assessed during this phase of the recruitment process. Participants are asked to solve simple tasks while being observed by experienced HR professionals, who evaluate their behaviour.

Medical examination

This phase represents an important part of the whole process in terms of the nature of the position offered within the company. The work is often carried out in a rather noisy and dusty environment, so it is important that all personnel are in good health. This is why the entry medical examination is compulsory (defined by law) for all candidates. Moreover, preventive medical examinations are also carried out regularly for all employees.

Type of Contract

If a candidate succeeds in the recruitment process and passes through the training, they can then have a contract with USSKE. The so-called cascade and upstream

chain, through which the participants have enough time and space to adapt, are a cornerstone of the bottom-up approach to employment can also be found in promotion processes at work.

There are two main types of contract at various job levels, related to the skill and training levels of the individual candidate and the length of project participation.

1. A fixed-term contract (1 year) is available at four job levels.

- » **The first job level** is a basic entry-level job which can be attained after OSH training (learning the cardinal rules).
- » **The second job level** is an extension of the first level and may be achieved after completion of the "Operation of belt conveyors and work on these devices" training.
- » **The third job level** signifies inclusion into continuous operation, including shift-work.
- » **The fourth job level** signifies a skilled labour position to cover ordinary workers.

2. An indefinite period contract, joining the regular staff, requires an evaluation to be carried out every year, with the three best candidates chosen from among all the participants (initially only from Velká Ida, then later one from each settlement); these individuals then become permanent employees. However, this option has been dormant since 2008 owing to the global financial crisis.

Remuneration

Financial remuneration of project participants has been gradually increased over the years. Currently, a project participant's gross wage is more than 30% higher than at the beginning of the project in 2002. Wages also rise (by a further 15%) after completion of the training "Operation of belt conveyors and work on these devices". Project participants are entitled to the relevant bonuses for difficult working conditions (for example working in noise, shift-work) and incentive bonuses for positive monthly assessment (attendance, performance, personal safety at work). Further increases take place along similar lines to those of permanent employees, on the basis of rules set out in the collective agreement.

As most informants stated, an important point is that the basic salary in the first skill category is already significantly higher than the minimum wage, so the participants have an incentive to participate in the project. As already mentioned, the wage is increased again for additional training and transition to higher skill categories, providing additional motivation for workers. See Box 4.2 for further information on the system of skill categories in effect.⁵ The salary consists of a fixed and a variable component, and the variable component reflects attendance, performance and safety compliance, with extra pay for additional qualifications (completed training courses). These criteria are assessed by foremen, who keep records on them, and only those participants who meet all three

Box 4.2

Regarding the job category, participants perform work appropriate to their level of educational attainment. In particular, auxiliary and cleaning jobs are carried out within the project, but there is of course also the possibility of getting more professional jobs, such as work in the various plant divisions – on the coke ovens, blast furnaces, active coating and packaging branch, steelworks, radiators and pipes, and in the transportation department. Promotion into skilled and better paid positions depends above all on a willingness to learn, consistent high performance, and respecting safety at work. To maintain transparency in terms of employee advancement, the company has defined the four skill levels (categories) within the project.

⁵ Box 6.1 in Part 6 also provides details on the training involved in progressing through the skill categories.

criteria simultaneously are entitled to a bonus. This bonus is €16 per month and is paid quarterly. Some informants concurred that:

"Since this reward was introduced, attendance together with performance has improved. It really helped."

The salary is paid monthly to participants in accordance with the Labour Code of the Slovak Republic. Moreover, project participants also have additional bonus payments of a 13th (and even a 14th) month of salary payments, along with various other bonuses.

Regulation and control

Regulation and control are carried out on a daily basis by foremen (coordinators) who are the direct superiors of the project participants. In addition, a so-called production meeting is held each month at which the attendance, performance and workplace safety of the project participants are discussed and evaluated. First is a meeting between the HR staff and foremen, who draw attention to any problems or shortcomings, and then a subsequent meeting takes place directly between HR personnel and the project participants, whereby these issues are discussed and communicated. As the active involvement of participants in the decision-making process is considered to be important in the project, these meetings also represent a kind of brainstorming, where participants have the opportunity to express their opinions related to the work process and the project itself. Project coordinators consequently try to incorporate all reasonable and constructive suggestions. One interviewee added:

"Many ideas and suggestions arose during these meetings. Several of them, such as the organization of a cultural event for project participants, were also carried out."

Part 5.

Participants' profile and composition

- » The project participants are mostly the inhabitants of adjacent localities and municipalities which are within a radius of about 15 km from USSKE plant.
- » Participants are only men, given the nature of the job and the particular traditions of the communities from which they originate.
- » The majority of participants are aged 21–30 years.
- » Participants have usually completed only primary education.



Photo: USSKE

Box 5.1

In the past USSKE has also created a framework for women's work. The company contacted other corporations with foreign participation in Košice (non-Slovak and mixed, joint-stock companies), which consequently created and offered jobs for women from settlements. However, there was no interest in these positions from the women of the communities involved.

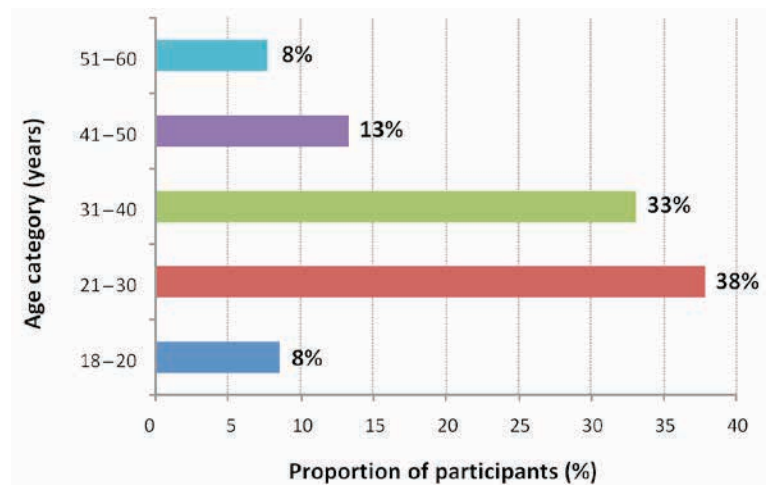
Project participants are mostly the inhabitants of adjacent localities and municipalities (Veľká Ida, Košice-Šaca, Košice-Luník IX), which are within a radius of about 15 km of the plant.

Regarding gender, participants are only men, given the nature of the job and as many of the informants explained, also the traditions of the communities from which they originate. According to many informants, in these settlements, women do not work but rather take care of the household and children (see Box 5.1). On this subject, one key informant added:

"The vision that within the Roma family both males and females are employed is rather unrealistic. They are willing to have a very low standard of living, as the price to pay for the fact that only one of the partners works. The idea of actively maintaining the 'family hearth' is very important for them and they are not willing to give it up."

The age structure of project participants ranges from 18 to 60 years. Many informants claimed that it is influenced by the fact that in adjacent localities most of the Roma population is composed of children and people of productive age, while the ratio of post-productive people is markedly lower. Distribution of the project participants' age structure is shown in Fig. 5. 1.

Fig. 5.1. Age structure of project participants (September 2012)



Source: USSKE, unpublished data, 19 March 2013.

Nearly three quarters of participants are aged 21–40 years. The smallest age categories consist of participants aged 18–20 and 51–60 years.

Many of the informants expressed their opinion of the younger project participants rather critically. As one informant stated:

"The young are quite a big problem. They [younger project participants] want to get a job, but as soon as they get it, they are not really willing to work properly. They often leave the job and then want to come back, just speculating much more than older participants."

Another added:

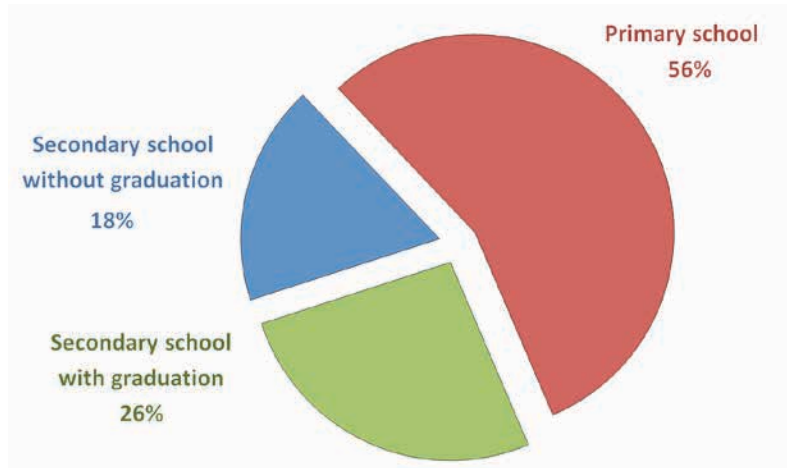
"The problem is also that they [younger project participants] are not used to work. Therefore, they are often absent, often giving various false stories as their reason for absence, such as a death in the family, etc."

The education level of the settlements concerned is rarely higher than primary level. This is therefore also reflected in the educational level of project participants: they have usually completed only primary school (more than half of all participants from the project beginning had completed primary-level education) and possibly some secondary schooling, either with graduation (quarter of all participants) or without graduation (almost one fifth of all current participants have completed secondary school without graduation) (see Fig. 5.2).



Photo: Jozef Jarošík

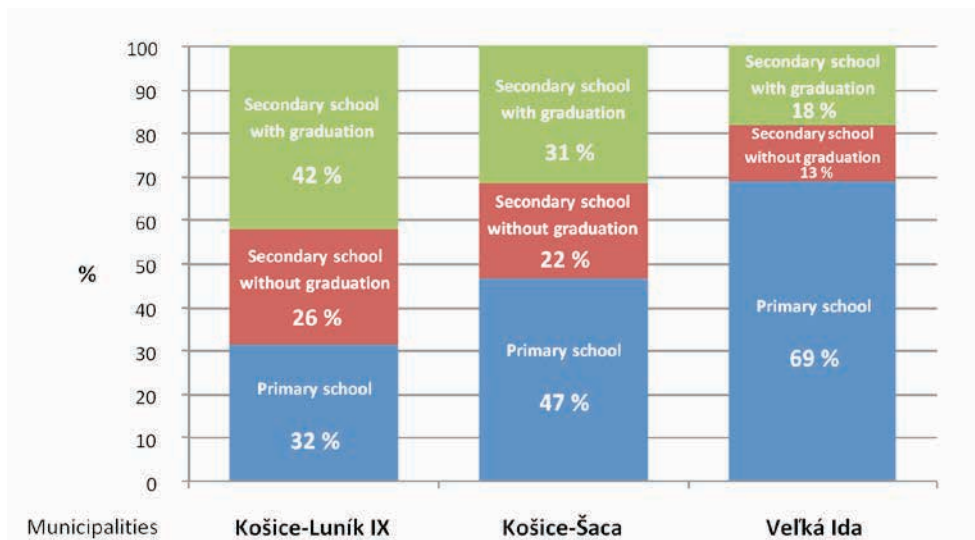
Fig. 5.2. Education structure of project participants (December 2012)



Source: USSKE, unpublished data, 19 March 2013.

The distribution of the educational level according to particular employers (municipalities) is slightly different, although all of the employers have project participants with only a primary- or secondary-level education. Košice-Luník IX is the settlement with the highest proportion of participants having graduated from secondary school; the lowest proportion can be found in Veľká Ida, where at the same time most of the participants have only completed primary-level education (see Fig. 5.3).

Fig. 5.3. Education structure according to individual employers (December 2012)



Source: USSKE, unpublished data, 19 March 2013.

Part 6. Project success

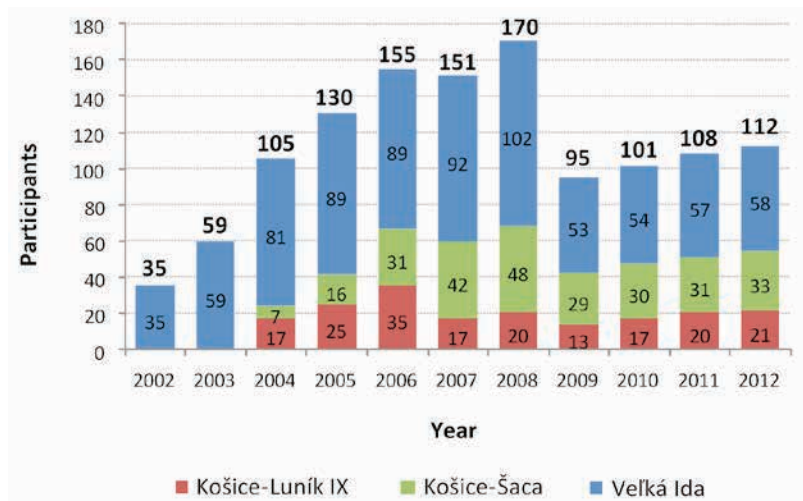
- » The largest number of project participants was 170.
- » The average number of participants is 111.
- » Most of the participants achieved only the first skill category (56%).
- » Many participants took part in the project for less than one year (32%).
- » The main reason for leaving the job was termination of employment by the employee (about 68%), and the most common official reason given was moving abroad or finding another job.



Photo: Jozef Jarošik

Fig. 6.1 shows the number of project participants in various years according to the locality (municipality).

Fig. 6.1 Number of project participants by locality (2002–2012)



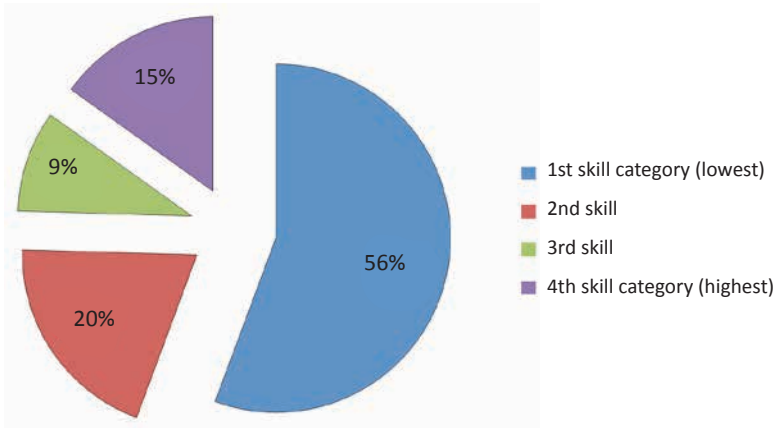
Source: USSKE, unpublished data, 19 March 2013.

The largest number of participants has been consistently from the village of Velká Ida, which is according to most informants probably owing to a fact that it is the closest location to USSKE. The lowest number of participants was in 2002, at the beginning of the project. The largest number was observed in 2008 (170 participants), followed by a significant decrease in 2009 (95 participants). Previously, any vacancy had to be replaced under the agreement, but in 2008, this replacement mechanism was suspended because of the global financial crisis; this according to most informants resulted in a significant reduction in the workforce in 2009.

The average number of participants was 111. Within the project, where the employers are particular municipalities, there is one main type of (fixed-term) contract at various job levels related to the candidate's skill, training and length of project participation. The indefinite contract period can only be obtained if the participant becomes a permanent USSKE employee. Throughout the project (2002–2012), 17 former project participants became full-time employees, of which 13 are still active.

Fig. 6.2 shows the proportional project participants' distribution among the four skill categories and Box 6.1 describes the training offered to project participants.

Fig. 6.2. Skill categories (September 2012)

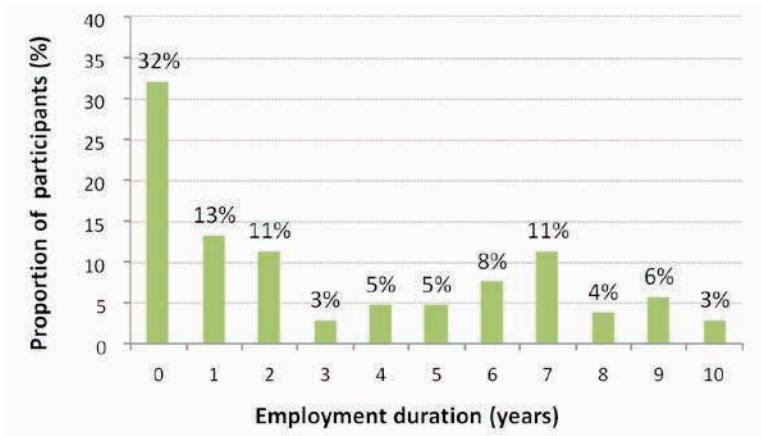


Source: USSKE, unpublished data, 19 March 2013.

As depicted in Fig. 6.2, during the 10 years of the project most of the participants have achieved the first skill category (56% on average) and 15% attained the fourth skill level (the highest).

In terms of duration of participation, most of the participants take part in the project for less than one year (32%), or for only one year, respectively (13%) (Fig. 6.3). Three per cent of the total number of participants have remained in the company for 10 years.

Fig. 6.3. Duration of participation



Source: USSKE, unpublished data, 19 March 2013.

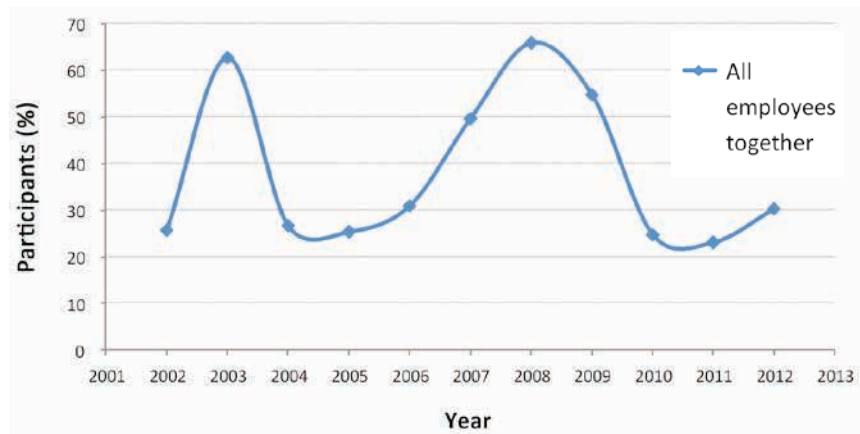
Box 6.1

As already mentioned, one of the project objectives is also upgrading the skills of project participants; they therefore have the opportunity to regularly attend various training sessions. Each project participant regularly attends compulsory training in OSH. In addition, in 2004, 15 project participants from Košice-Lunik IX (over 88% of the total number of participants from that municipality) completed the basic management training course offered, supplemented by social, economic and legislative information. In 2007, 23 project participants (15.2% of the total) attended the "Flame cutting" training and 16 participants (10.6%) attended the training entitled "Machinist for metallurgical equipment". In 2008, 15 project participants (8.8%) attended the "Flame cutting" training, and the new training "Machinist for transport equipment" was introduced, attracting great interest (47% of the current project participants have completed the course) and participants continue to undertake this training.

Turnover

In terms of the average length of participation in the project, the participant turnover level represent according to many informants a serious problem for USSKE. In 2007, 2008 and 2009 the total project participant turnover increased by almost 20%. This increase, however, was seen by many informants as positive from the perspective of improving the aspirations and opportunities of temporary workers in the labour market by improving their skills and encouraging better work ethic and working habits within USSKE. Many informants claimed that temporary workers therefore had more chance of finding employment in the labour market at the time when the market was rich with job opportunities. The participant turnover for 2002–2012 is shown in Fig. 6. 4.

Fig. 6.4. Project participant turnover (2002–2012)



Source: USSKE, unpublished data, 19 March 2013.

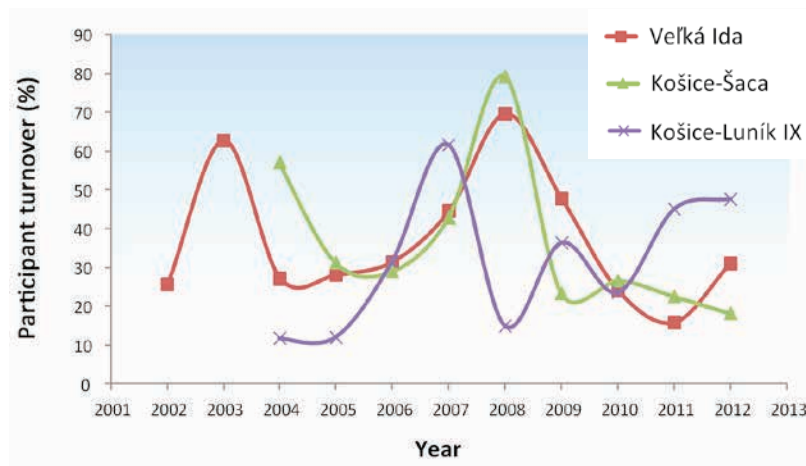
The adverse trend among the particular areas (for example between Košice-Šaca and Lunik IX in 2008) was according to many informants influenced by the following factors: in 2007, 14 volunteers moved to Košice-Šaca owing to the termination of the role of project coordinator in Košice-Lunik IX; also, in 2008, a notable outflow of temporary workers abroad was observed, resulting in a reduction in the number of project participants, while the migrating participants were not replaced owing to the financial crisis.

The highest turnover, as can be seen in Fig. 6.5, is currently in the district of Košice-Lunik IX. The other two areas (Veľká Ida and Košice-Šaca) were relatively stable at the time of writing. According to most of the informants, the likely reasons for this are as described below.

- » **Distance** is a key issue. The municipalities of Veľká Ida and Košice-Šaca are in the immediate vicinity of the factory (about 2.5 km away), while Košice-Lunik IX is the furthest from the plant (11.5 km away) and as most informants claimed, participants from that area are probably not willing to travel that far for work.
- » **Personal contact** is another important factor. The selection process in Veľká Ida and Košice-Šaca has been from the beginning carried out in the presence of the mayor (or his deputy), who personally knows all the participants. According to most informants, this means that those selected are likely to be the most responsible and reliable and, in addition, a personal

relationship between the individuals involved seems to be more binding. However, in Košice-Luník IX the selection process and project coordination were for a long period carried out by the city council, and as stated by most informants, the personal relationship between the individuals concerned was lacking.

Fig. 6.5. Participant turnover according to the municipality (2002–2012)



Source: USSKE, unpublished data, 19 March 2013.

The reasons for leaving the job were identified by the most informants as follows.

An **increase in qualification and skills** opens up new options for project participants within the wider labour market, and as a consequence their expectations are also higher. According to many informants is, however, seen by USSKE as a positive social benefit.

Moving abroad is an attractive prospect, particularly to western countries (United Kingdom, Ireland and Belgium, for example). These have been according to most informants popular destinations for Roma from Slovakia for many years. The motive, however, has according to many informants often not been a job opportunity, but rather the social system in the particular countries. However, many informants believed this trend is decreasing. As one informant stated:

"Many of the Roma here returned from the United Kingdom feeling cheated and robbed. Their language barrier, low education levels and illiteracy often lead many of them to fall into the hands of criminal gangs. In some cases those gangs take their passport, ID or birth certificate and purchase goods on instalment credit against their name; in other cases Roma work without remuneration, as it is confiscated by these groups."

Execution (distrainment of debtors) as explained by most informants while not applied to social assistance benefits, is automatically carried out in the case of income from employment. Most informants expressed their view that debtors are therefore often motivated to leave their job and remain dependent solely on state social benefits.

The **existing social system** may according to most informants also in certain cases partially impact the level of participant turnover. As explained by some informants, for example, if a husband enters a job, his wife immediately loses entitlement to various social benefits, since the joint family income is above the minimum wage as

defined by law. In some cases, however, income from social benefits for both (unemployed) spouses is equal to or slightly higher than the income of one spouse from legal employment. This might be according to most informants one reason for Roma and other disadvantaged groups of the population being discouraged from actively participating in the labour market.

» **Loss of motivation** is an issue, especially for those who participate in the project over a long period, as explained by many informants. Such a loss of motivation occurred, according to many informants, markedly in 2008 when, because of the crisis, the replacement of vacancies was suspended and the possibility of obtaining a contract of indefinite duration and joining the permanent staff became dormant. As one informant noted:

"The possibility to join the permanent staff was for a project participant very motivating. They knew that as permanent employees they would have the opportunity to earn significantly higher salaries. They have no target now and do not see any benefit to this project."

Another informant added:

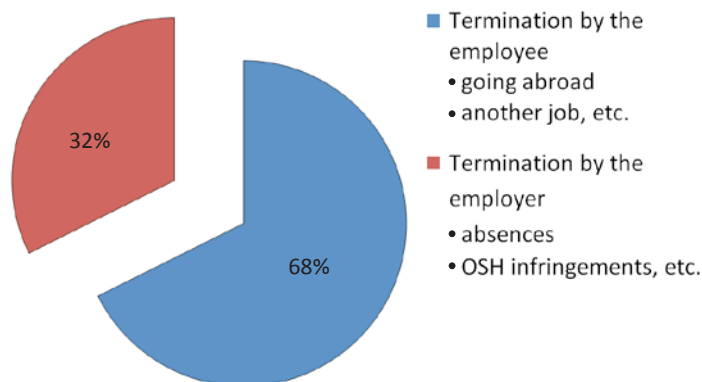
"For example, there is one project participant who has worked here since 2008 and gave notice last month and went to the United Kingdom, despite the fact that he is around 50 years old, because he realized that there is no longer any benefit to him being involved in this project, because he probably will not be able to join the core staff."

However, as explained by some informants, the hiring policy is in line with the company's strategy, applied equally for both project participants and employees alike.

» The **nature of the work**, according to some informants, is another reason for many of the participants leaving their jobs, as they considered it to be very hard and carried out in a noisy, dusty and dirty environment.

The main reason for leaving the job is termination of employment by the employee (about 68%), while the most common official reason given is that the employee is moving abroad, or finding another job. The remainder (about 32%) were terminated by the employer, mostly owing to absenteeism, breaking OSH rules, and so on (see Fig. 6.6).

Fig. 6.6. Reasons given for termination of employment



Source: USSKE, unpublished data, 19 March 2013.

Part 7.

Bottom-up approach to employment versus health

- » The project has a positive effect on health inequalities.
- » It improves the chances of participants, their families and children to be healthier.
- » The four main areas of health improvement within the project are: hygiene, housing, disease prevention and mental health.



Photo: Jozef Jarošik

"Health is just one of the many problems influencing the overall socio-economic situation of the Roma, which in turn, along with poor housing and infrastructure worsen the poor health condition of the Slovak Roma."

(Šaško, 2003)

Improvement of the project participants' health was not a primary objective of the project, and therefore the health impact has not previously been considered as one of the project outcomes. In any case, there is some presumption that the project has a positive effect on health inequalities (or at least improves the chances of participants, their families and children to be healthier), as it works with a major socioeconomic determinant – unemployment (there is already an assumption that programmes increasing employment also have a positive impact on health) – and it is designed primarily for Roma, a particularly hard-to-employ group of citizens from adjacent segregated or separated settlements (which have a substantial impact on health inequalities).

Based on the informants' statements, four main areas of health improvement were identified, as discussed here.

Project participants' personal **hygienic standards** have been improved, according to most informants. As many informants claimed, at the beginning of their involvement in the project, many participants had a problem with admission to public buses due to unpleasant smell, lice and fleas. Many informants believed that for many of the project participants, the employment presented their first opportunity to enjoy regular showers. The project participants were under pressure to adopt higher hygienic standards also because they were viewed as presenting a threat to the health of the permanent staff (owing to the aforementioned hygiene issues), as explained by many informants. It can therefore be concluded that the project has enabled the improvement of the hygiene standards of its participants.

The project participants' **housing** situation has often been improved, as claimed by most informants. As a result of the project, many participants were enabled to improve their housing conditions. Many informants noted that some of the project



Photo: René Říha

participants managed to move from shanty housing into public-assistance dwellings, as they became capable of regular rent payments and acquired the skills required to maintain locally endorsed hygienic standards.

The project participants' approach to **prevention** has been improved, as stated by most informants. A medical examination upon entry to work is defined by law and is compulsory for all candidates; without this examination nobody can be accepted as an employee. Moreover, preventive medical examinations are also carried out regularly and in a nearby contracting hospital. Many informants believed that all of these examinations markedly facilitate participants' access to health care and could help to reveal and solve health problems resulting from their previous lesser attention to personal health care (see Box 7.1).

The **mental health** of project participants has been improved, as noted by most informants. According to many informants, at least for some participants, alone the fact that they have for the first time become involved in regular working activities, might have improved their mental health. As many informants believed, in addition, mental health of the project participants might have been improved also indirectly, e.g. through increased sense of dignity and self-worth based on acquisition of new both working and social skills, as well as of new social acquaintances. Many informants also believed that financial freedom might also be a crucial factor for improved mental health.

On the other hand, according to many informants it seems there are some areas in which the project has not had a significant impact. For example, dietary preferences of the project participants were supposed to have remained the same, and – owing to the increased / enabling regular income – participants seemed to have increased only the quantity, but not the quality, of their food intake (a lack of vegetables, a large proportion of meat, a lot of sweets, soft drinks, and so on). Many informants also believed that for many of the participants, their personal regard of health and their health awareness might not have improved much - in many cases, most health-related practices endorsed within the project were regarded and followed merely as compulsory company requirements and adopted only temporarily.

Box 7.1

A good example of improved health and quality of life resulting from the USSKE project is the case of one man who applied for employment in the project but was excluded after a medical examination discovered he was partially deaf. He was immediately offered surgery, however, which solved this problem. He now has no hearing problems and is a successful project participant.

Conclusion

"It is necessary to keep in mind that no universal solution exists. Thus, since Slovak society is not homogeneous (monolithic) and is divided into many social layers (religious, political and regional groups and so on), so the Roma community is also not homogeneous. Therefore, it is not possible to create a single functional model which would apply everywhere. Such a model simply will not work effectively everywhere."

(Mušínska, 2012)

Box 7.2

It is also worth mentioning the cooperation that takes place with some of the general practitioners for adults and children (who cooperate in turn with the municipalities), as well as with medical assistants from Košice-Lunik IX (who in turn cooperate with the city council). This cooperation is important, for example, in terms of obligatory vaccinations; if vaccinations are missing for a child whose parent is a participant in a project, this participant is immediately alerted by his superiors and asked to solve this problem as soon as possible.

The bottom-up approach to employment created within the Equality of Opportunity project – based on the concept of cooperation with partners in the community – is an example of a successful solution for a hard-to-employ group (substantially contributing to the health inequalities) in Slovakia. The project is focused on employment support as well as improving qualifications and skills. It was created and implemented by USSKE with the purpose of offering equal opportunities predominantly for Roma citizens from the surrounding segregated settlements. The project is based on the assumption that work and subsequently a regular income are essential for the reduction of poverty and crime, for better health and family care, and to ensure regular payment for schools, accommodation, energy and public services.

Thus, the idea is that the project enables the participants to improve working habits and skills and to acquire a regular income that subsequently enable appropriate family care. Long-term unemployed people from surrounding settlements may earn a regular income for their families and provide them with better housing and living conditions. An important feature of the project is also its focus on children's health (see Box 7.2) and quality of life, as well as the health and quality of life of the community in which the project participants live. USSKE believes that it is important to support children and youth in positively moving forward, as a group in which social responsibility and education can be developed. The company therefore cooperates closely with local primary schools, not only by monitoring school attendance and behaviour of the project participants' children, but also by involving all schoolchildren in various projects, aiming to help them to understand the value of their education, encouraging them to acquire education and skills in full (to complete primary school and continue their studies at least at partner vocational schools, if not in further education). Achieving this could bring a greater chance of success in the labour market.

The project tries to address a real local problem. It helps to solve specific issues in the region, which has a high unemployment rate, and thus to improve the economic situation and living standards of people living in generational poverty. It also tries to facilitate the integration of segregated Roma and their children into society and to enable them to acquire positive social experiences, which are otherwise fundamentally lacking in their environment.

The main principle of the bottom-up approach to employment comprises a step-by-step employment process and cooperation with the stakeholders involved (municipalities, the city council, community centres, the church, and schools).

Despite our effort to offer room also for counter-narratives (see Design), among the presented study participants' verbatim quotes ones reproducing local stereotypical dominant cultural narrative regarding Roma, especially in their wording, remained salient. However, based on the analysis of the actual program practice, including the activities of the non-Roma participants, it is possible to conclude that this project works, and that it has positive effect on health inequalities. There are two main

explanations for this. First, the project works with a major socioeconomic determinant – unemployment – based on the assumption that programmes increasing employment also have an impact on health. The second explanation might be that project is designed primarily for Roma (from adjacent settlements, which are mostly segregated or separated), who are marginalized and vulnerable, and therefore are also considered to be a hard-to-employ group. In general, if the health of such a group is improved, a decrease in health inequalities is certainly also involved, as it is this target group of the population that reflects the breadth of health inequalities in Slovakia.

It is important to remember that no universal solution exists, and it is probable that the approach described in this report has its own imperfections and weaknesses. However, the project's more than 10-year history – continuing to exist even in times of economic downturn and austerity – bears witness to its abundant experience and success. The project and this related report can be seen as an interesting example of an unusually sensitive attempt to address the Roma social inequality issue, with all of its economic and health consequences.



Photo: Jozef Jarošik

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