

Problems of Social Exclusion and Double Marginalization of Roma in Slovakia after 1989

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(Based on the research conducted for the World Bank from November 2000 to April 2001)

The Shift in Understanding the so-called Roma Issues Over the Last Decade in Slovakia

I.

The Roma issue became the hottest topic in Slovakia over the period of last 10 years. Politicians and celebrities realized the importance of investing significant amounts of time, money, social capital, and especially political will into solving the so-called Roma issue. This was a remarkable shift from the past, in that Slovakia's political and social elite, regardless of their motives, began to understand the complexity of the issue and the urgency of dealing with it.

Interest in dealing with the issue peaked for the following three reasons during last few years:

1. Morality and the importance of human rights: Some began to realize their obligation to help the Roma, and that inappropriate, misguided, or directly discriminatory methods and policies applied to Slovaks in the past should no longer be tolerated on Slovak soil. This reasoning, however, is limited to a relatively small group of people who call themselves liberal democrats.

2. Integration and pragmatism: A significant number of Slovak representatives understand the importance of finding a solution to the Romany issue, because the country's integration ambitions and efforts to join the European Union (EU) and NATO depend on it.

3. Self-defense: A considerable proportion of the majority, represented mainly by the parliamentary opposition, admitted the necessity of solving the issue because of fears, which stem from Romany demographic developments, and from the practically uncontrollable birth rates in Romany settlements. (Vašečka, 2001)

II.

The Roma are the second largest ethnic minority in Slovakia. The latest census in 1991 showed a total of 75,802 citizens claiming Roma nationality, or 1.4% percent of the population. However, various estimates put the Roma population at exponentially higher figures. Head counts conducted in 1989 by local and municipal administrations showed that there were 253,943 Roma (4.8% of the population); however, these statistics registered only socially dependent citizens. Therefore, it can be assumed that the number of Roma in Slovakia is today even higher. Current estimates by experts put the total number at between 420,000 and 500,000, a number continuously on the rise due to the high Roma birth rate.

According to experts, there are approximately 12 million Roma worldwide, eight million of whom live in Europe. Many European countries have more Roma communities than Slovakia does. The largest Roma community in the world lives in Romania (estimated population of between 1.8 and 2.8 million). Relatively speaking, however, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Macedonia have the largest per capita Roma community in the world (8% to 9% of the country's population).

The Roma issue, the deteriorating socio-economic status of the Roma, and the majority's strongly negative perception of the Roma, are becoming the most important challenges Slovakia faces on its way to the EU. Slovakia has the largest Roma minority of all EU-hopeful countries, and the one with the worst

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social status. The European Commission (EC) has repeatedly stressed that the situation of ethnic minorities in candidate countries aspiring to join the EU was acceptable, with the exception of that of the Roma.

The Roma constitute a truly distinct minority, and solution of the Romany issue therefore requires a rather complex approach. The unsatisfactory socio-economic situation of most Roma in Slovakia raises the question of whether they are becoming a social, as well as a purely ethnic, minority. Expert and professional circles see the Roma becoming an underclass, a word that perhaps best describes Roma settlements.

The basic characteristics of the members of an 'underclass' are the following: long-term unemployment, fragmentary work history, permanent success on the secondary labor market only, dependence on social welfare benefits or on activities that have to do with the shadow economy. The underclass environment is characterized by general resignation, low respect for authorities, a low level of social self-control, reliance on welfare, and poor labor ethics. These general characteristics of the 'underclass' environment perfectly describe the situation of those Roma who dwell in Roma settlements and, increasingly, those who reside elsewhere.

Discussion of the underclass issue, which has been going on for several decades in some other countries, is perceived in Slovakia as having an ideological basis; many people seem to erroneously interchange the terms 'underclass' and *lumpenproletariat*. Nevertheless, opening such a discussion in Slovakia is vital for the country to prevent further negative consequences of the transformation from a modern industrial society to a post-modern, post-industrial one. Otherwise, the gap between the majority and the Roma will continue to widen, and ethnic poverty will intensify.

The Roma community has many different sub-groups. The most common are colonies of settled Roma (Rumungres) and nomadic Vlachika Roma; the remnants of the Germanic Sints represent a separate group. The Roma also differ by the language and dialects they use – in a Slovak environment, they use some Slovak language words and dialects, while in the Hungarian environment of southern Slovakia, they use Hungarian. Like the majority population, the Slovak Roma can also be distinguished by their place of origin (i.e. whether they are influenced by an urban or rural environment) as well as by their affinity to a particular region of Slovakia.

Regarding such differences, some Roma experts observe that the old caste system continues inside the Romany community, determining in advance a person's role within the social system (in the case of Slovakia, we may speak of clans and groups). The distinctiveness of the Roma minority is also illustrated by questions of whether the Roma are a nation or merely an ethnic group. As recently as 1991, the Slovak Roma ceased to be perceived merely as an ethnic group and were treated by the country's legislation as a full-fledged ethnic minority, equal to other ethnic minorities living on Slovak territory (Vašečka, 2001).

Pre-1989 Policies Toward Roma in Slovakia Leading to Their Social Exclusion

I.

The social, economic and political changes in 1989 brought an unprecedented transformation process to Slovakia. The communist regime deformed the general understanding and observance of civic and political rights, while developing social rights, which have been significantly expanded. In contrast to other totalitarian regimes, this one changed the system that determined the course of economy, making it unable to compete by disregarding the rules of demand and supply. But the most significant intervention into the functioning of the society was the forcible effort to change the organization of the society, changing its natural stratification. Within the frame of these efforts, a systematic favoritism towards lower social stratum of the society, at the expense of the higher ones, while directly discriminating several segments of the pre-communism elite and intelligentsia.

The majority of the Roma belonged to the lower layers of the society and they were the targets of different experiments by the communist regime aimed at the improvement of their social status. The change that

came in 1989 has caught the Roma by surprise, with most of the authors writing about these issues agreeing, that no stratum of the Roma population has been prepared for these changes.

The communist regime counted on the assumption, that if there is an equalization of living standard of the Roma and the average living standard, the reason for the differences between them and the majority population will be eliminated. In order to achieve this, different measures have been employed, which could be characterized as acts social engineering, such as:

- The diffusion of the Roma (within Slovakia but also from Slovakia to the Czech republic), directed and supported by the state policy,
- The disintegration of natural Roma communities,
- The movement of the rural Roma population from Roma settlements to cities and industrial areas,
- The destruction of natural binding between the Roma community and the majority population,
- Insensitive and administrative (forcible) allocation of flats to the Roma from socially disadvantaged environment,
- Forced compliance with the general compulsory labor service, under the threat of imprisonment,
- Statutory enforced obligation of school attendance by children,
- Obligatory participation of the Roma on health prevention.

These seemingly positive results have been achieved by forcible means, using measures in relation to the Roma community, which imposed external pressure without their active participation and acceptance. This was reflected among else by the behavior of some Roma towards the property, which was allocated to them.

Why are these measures considered to be forcible without active internal participation of the Roma? Despite of the fact, that the government managed to achieve much higher standard of living for most of Roma in comparison to the past decades, many of the forms of behavior typical for a traditional Roma family remained. The process of modernization of the Roma community during the era of communist regime was predominantly one-dimensional, taking place only on the level of material improvement.

The characteristic attributes of a traditional Roma family include the following:

- Life in a broader family, thus lacking the motion towards the nuclear family,
- Community oriented life style,
- An absence of borders between what is private and what is public (privacy is non-existent due to the way of life, but also because of the relationship to property),
- Considering the present housing as temporary, provisional,
- A clear division of roles in the Roma family (man as the provider, woman responsible for household maintenance),
- The demographic characteristic of the Roma families is multiple family members.

The Roma community can be characterized as a non-agrarian society, which is not able to sustain itself from their own resources, thus traditionally entered into relationships with agrarian cultures. Agrarian cultures, with their private ownership relationship to land and through land to the territory, have contributed to the establishment of institutional and customary norms in the non-Roma population. Since the Roma have never been an agrarian culture and their relationship to land has always been rather tepid, they did not establish mechanisms and institutions related to the agrarian type of private ownership relationships. Thus, the Roma never belonged to a territory and never attributed importance to the acquisition of property. On the contrary – their way of craftsmanship found demand thanks to their flexibility in relation to the territory.

A different relationship and responsibility of the Roma towards ownership and their differing cultural pattern of relationship towards premises disgorge into specific social structures of the Roma, based on kinship ties. These specific cultural norms of the Roma can be named as the strategy of permanent provisory. Education in its institutional forms (formal and contextual) puts limits on the Roma strategy of provisory. Educational institutions of the majority population thus lack an equivalent with the institutional structure of the Roma community. This is the cause of conflict between two types of organization and social system functioning. The participation of Roma on two important activities - work and education, is from the Roma point of view a confrontation with a different world. Their incorporation into these two spheres is an asymmetric process, with the Roma entering the rules of the game and regulations, to whose establishment they did not contribute in any way, they are marginal and their only choice is to adjust.

Many of the measures undertaken by the communist regime have undoubtedly contributed to the improvement of the living standard of the Roma population. But on the other hand these measures can be evaluated as being to the disadvantage of the Roma, because of the insensitive placement of a Roma family, adapted on the backward environment of a settlement, among the majority population, often causing unsolvable problems in city housing estates and becoming the source of hate on both sides. This fact is at the roots of present outbursts of violence and racism.

The Roma community became, through the policy of resettling, diffusion and employment, a part of the social provision policy, which helped them to escape the situation of total material need reflected in absolute merit of hunger and malnourishment. The result was, that the Roma got gradually used to the state paternalism, which replaced the traditional family solidarity. This process lead to the establishment of a new culture of dependence on state institutions.

II.

In the pre-industrial era (until the beginning of the 20th century) the most important jobs of the Roma included forging as smiths and the musical production, many also processing raw materials. Since the Roma did not own land, they had to purchase the basic foods from the peasants. The peasant in turn needed cheap labor force in collecting of potatoes, harvesting of grain, taking in of hay, building of homes, sinking of wells or preparation of wood for the winter. The Roma usually demanded pay in food, used clothing, old furniture or household items. The convenience of this system of coexistence for both sides has been reflected also in the relationships between families of the Roma and peasants. With the arrival of industrialization these relationships have been gradually broken and the Roma have been forced to become a resource of labor force for heavy industry. After 1989 the majority of them became useless for the new economy, mainly due to their qualification, and the former relationships between the Roma and the majority have almost disappeared.

The non-existent relationship to ownership and the strategy of provisory influenced the access of community to opportunities. The gradual process of social closure of Roma communities was taking place, leading to their social exclusion. The process of social closure has been taking place in two ways: one was marginalization and the other incorporation. The result of marginalization was the limitation of choices, often leading to the reproduction of poverty. During the communist regime the government tried to solve the problem of marginalization within the state organized economy by the incorporation of citizens living in rural areas into newly created zones of heavy industry, placing them mainly into working places for unqualified workers. This incorporation had the form of illusionary integration, since it did not lead to the improvement of social status.

The determining influence on the social situation of inhabitants of communist country was carried out by the second economy. Only those who based their living strategies on the participation in both economies had a chance for an improvement in their social status. The second economy required the existence of financial household management and production (own land and own means of production). But this has

and still is not being the case of the Roma. Their exclusive dependence on formal economy was the main factor of their deeper fall into poverty, than was observed in the majority population.

The poverty of the Roma during the communist era thus reached more significant forms than the poverty of the majority population with similar degree of education and qualification. The Roma were much more dependent on the income from social assistance, which made up a greater proportion of their income than did the income generated by work. Apart from the second economy, another significant factor contributing to the maintenance of the living standard of the majority population and their incorporation into the society was the participation of both partners in the working process, a so called two-income model of family. The risk factors contributing to the poverty of the Roma included the fact, that many Roma families had only one source of income (with the Roma women staying at home with their children) and a majority of the families having many children.

The income differentiation and living standard in communist Slovakia was not adequate to the achieved degree of education. Certain branches of industry, mainly the manufacturing ones, have been preferred, from the point of view of achievement of a certain social status there was a principal of collective, not individual mobility. Education was not exclusively understood as a means of reaching a certain living standard and social position. The possibility of working in a certain sector, while having the type of education required there was the guaranty of securing a living standard. The overall educational structure in Slovakia has been adjusted to this principal, with the majority of citizens having only primary or secondary education without the certificate of apprenticeship. An orientation on these types of education has become a trap after 1989.

Thus the relationship towards education and the placement on the labor market has been determined by two basic factors. The mechanism of closure of the Roma community, which lead to a life on the edge of society, ultimately leading to the reproduction of behavioral patterns in the area of education and labor market. The new generation of Roma from the closed communities does not perceive or feel the need to choose a different educational strategy, as the one chosen by their fathers and mothers. In this area the behavior of the Roma minority significantly differs from the behavior of other minorities, for example the Jewish minority. The Roma in the given community prefer the reproduction of approved patterns with an overwhelming orientation on the present. But education is adjoined to an orientation on the future. This reproduction of patterns was supported by the behavior of the majority population, who knowingly or unknowingly failed to create the conditions for the improvement of education and qualification of the Roma ethnic group. The communist form of extensive economy required a large unqualified working force and so the Roma did not need to improve their education or qualification.

The historic experience of the Roma resulted in specific types of reactions and behaviors towards the majority population. Their withdrawal onto the borders of society resulted in the Roma behaving as a endangered group - multiplying the cohesiveness of the community, with domineering strategies of escape (provisional escape - readiness to leave) or an offensive, almost aggressive strategy. This broadens the degree of seclusion and marginalization of the Roma.

III.

The family has always played a very significant role in the life of the Roma. The head of the family was always the father. When it came to raising children, the Roma usually paid attention to the older ones, who then took care of the younger children. Roma children are very reluctant to leave their parents, even once they reach adulthood and establish their own families. In general it is possible to conclude, that the Roma family represents the traditional type of multi-generation family. This is also the most important difference between the Roma and majority population family - the traditional Roma household is only beginning to divide into its nuclear forms in the present, while the same phenomenon has taken place in the non-Roma population during the first half of the 20th century.

The Roma family thus presently represents a different type of family, but the difference is not determined by the ethnicity but rather by a drift in time. This is the reason why it is possible to talk of a phase drift in regard to this area, rather than of ethnic specific behavior of the Roma. The data on demographic behavior of the Roma population in Slovakia strongly resemble data describing the demographic behavior of non-Roma population several decades ago, or are comparable with the data from developing countries. As an example one can mention the data on child mortality that in the Roma population during the 80's was very similar to the data from the whole of Czecho-Slovakia in the 50's. The anteceded medium length of life span of the Roma minority between 1970 and 1980 was similar to the situation in the entire Czecho-Slovakia between 1929-1933 (for Roma men) and to the era after the Second World War (for Roma women). It is realistic to assume, that the present Roma population will reach the demographic characteristics of the majority in one generation.

The demographic boom has not occurred among the Roma until 1945 because of high mortality of Roma children and inadequate health care. With a certain degree of simplification it is possible to conclude that the health state of the majority of Roma citizens was and still is worse than that of the non-Roma population in Slovakia (The health needs..., 1999). The communist regime has achieved significant success in the elimination of certain diseases and in the overall improvement of the health state of Roma population - lowering the child mortality, increasing the medium life span and eliminating certain diseases. It was mainly the mandatory health prevention, improved living conditions and quality of food that contributed to the significant growth of the Roma population during the communist regime. It is possible to assume that an important role in the demographic behavior of the Roma was played by the population policy of the communist state (economy of full employment, social policy), which did not cause the people to consider or re-evaluate their own reproductive behavior.

Despite of the fact that health care has been improved during the communist regime, the estimated medium life span of the Roma population has been and still is lagging behind the estimated medium life span of the majority population. This is due mainly to their unhealthy life style, socially disadvantaged environment, high incidence of alcoholism and most important of all low quality and cheap food. The basic ingredient of the Roma diet has traditionally been entrails, prepared in different ways. The food considered to be the most typical Roma dish is called "goja" and it consists of washed pork large intestine, turned with the fat side inside and filled with potatoes, corn meal, grits or rice. Also, traditionally floury pastry dishes dominated the diet in Roma families, with low consumption of vegetables.

Changes after 1989 - from Social Exclusion to Social Isolation

The social, economic and political transformation after 1989 begun in a situation, which in regard to the Roma population can be characterized by the following:

1. Relatively tense relationships between the majority population and the Roma, originating from feelings of unjust re-distribution of resources.
2. The Roma have fully adjusted to the conditions introduced by the communist regime and it's rules of the game.
3. The existent differences between some Roma groups have been marked as socially pathological behavior patterns and some Roma communities as socially not adapted. And the state approached them on the basis of these conclusions - the differences characteristic of the Roma have been considered to be manifestations of social pathology. The social policy was targeted on their elimination.
4. The Roma have entered the transformation period with considerably lower qualification in comparison to the majority population and in addition having working habits inadequate to the requirements of the transforming economy.

The gradual reconstruction of economic, political, cultural and social life of the society has taken away all of the securities obtained during the communist regime by the Roma. And the Roma have not been prepared for any of these changes.

I.

The liberalization of constraining rules related to the education, schooling system, placement of children in children's homes, the pursuance of control and law obedience is resulting in an increased number of absences and truancy by the Roma children. During the communist regime these situations have been solved with the assistance of police, by astitution of parents, removal of children into institutional care, reduction of social benefits etc. The Roma children from separated or segregated settlements are handicapped in three ways: for the first time at their arrival in the primary school, the second time at the entrance exams for higher education schools. When considering their chances, if they do decide to continue with further education, they end up choosing mainly apprenticeship schools (whose choice is mainly determined by their availability - distance from home). Later they are trapped in the position of unemployed graduates of apprenticeship schools, without a chance of finding employment, within the official formal economy, in the close surroundings of their home. If they finish their education, they go back to their original environment, where they reproduce the behavior of their parents. They fall into the social safety net and the young generation begins to perceive and consider this to be the normal way to behave. If they do get employed, its mainly informal jobs, illegal work or short-term jobs - opportunities for them diminish with growing segregation.

II.

The change in the area of health care to an insurance system with emphasis on the personal responsibility for health (for example including the cancellation of mandatory health prevention) is beginning to show effects on the worsening health state of the Roma population. This is also related to the orientation of the Roma on the present, neglecting preventive health care. The bad socio-economic situation and the inadequate housing and infrastructure conditions in the place of residency related to it are the reason behind the worsening health status of the Roma in Slovakia after 1989. All available data reflect the worsening health state, mainly in the constantly growing isolated Roma settlements. Since 1989 the incidence of upper respiratory disease has been on the rise, and in some settlements there have been repeated outbreaks of tuberculosis. Because of the above-mentioned fact, the risk of epidemics exists. Typical examples of the most common diseases include skin diseases and venereal diseases, also accidental injuries are common. Among the Roma children infectious and parasitic diseases are being observed, which are not to be found among the majority population anymore. Another big danger is the spreading of the infection of brain membranes. The socially disadvantaged environment is associated with the high incidence of different levels of mental retardation. Despite of the elimination of epidemics of typhoid, typhus and the efforts to gain control over specific diseases such as trachoma, respiratory diseases, intestinal diseases and syphilis on the national level, many of these diseases are still to be found in the Roma settlements.

III.

The area of housing policy is a sphere, where there was a total de-etatization. It is related to flats and houses, as well as the real estates adjoined to the given houses and flats. 90% of rental flats have been privatized, the real estates have their new owners. The lands, which were in the so-called private holding, could be given to their tenants free of charge, if the following two basic conditions have been fulfilled:

1. The house standing in the real estate had a valid building permit, or has been awarded the appropriate approval in the term given by law,
2. The real estate has to be registered in the land-register, and no application has been filled for its restitution.

When these conditions have been met, the tenant was free to apply for the transfer on the property on his name. While a majority of the population showed a significant lack of information on these procedures,

among the Roma it was even more intense. The issue of legal respectively illegal ownership of land was non-existent during communism. Thus the changes after 1989 uncovered a large group of Roma living illegally on someone else's land. And also, the conditions for the legalization of a property have become very complicated, with increased demands and pre-conditions for the issuance of the building permit (it requires 32 individual permits), as well as the adequate approval. The houses of many Roma do not fulfill the norm given by the law and the Roma lack financial resources for the reconstruction of their houses. If they have them, they often cannot use them, because they do not legally own the real estate.

After 1989 the government system of several types of loans for housing acquisition has been cancelled, as well as the building of new houses by the state, and the issues related to the problem of housing was transferred into the competence of communal municipalities and city councils. They begun to behave just like any other economic unit. The present situation of high demand prevailing the offer lead to an increase in prices of flats and homes, extreme from the point of view of citizens with average income. The chance of gaining and maintaining housing thus became minimal for the Roma, because they are unable to succeed in this competition.

The building of housing estates in Slovakia after 1989 is inadequately low when compared to the demand. Despite of saving programs and limited loans from the state, a system that would allow the citizen with average income to gain a flat in real time is non-existent. Thus the public reacts very sensitively to any form of unfair decisions regarding the housing policy, allocation of flats, provision of profitable loans etc. Social housing as a form of solution to the situation on the market with housing estates by far does not cover the demands and needs of families in social and material need. The Roma are understandably not alone in this situation, but are unquestionably the least successful ones at its solving. The rental price liberalization and privatization of flats, with the relevant significant increase in housing related expenses (rent by 200%, similar to expenses related to water, gas, garbage etc) pushes the Roma to cheaper flats or lodging-houses. The lack or absence of a realistic policy of social housing is dealt with by the Roma by withdrawal strategies - they go back to the settlements, revitalizing them. The reason for this is simple - housing in settlements has minimal or no expenses related to it.

IV.

The unemployment rate among the Roma raised up to extremes, reaching 100% in some of Roma settlements. Exact statistics for Romany unemployment do not exist, and one can only make estimates on the basis of assessing the overall situation in Slovakia's more troubled regions. Districts with the highest share of Roma are also those districts that are most severely hit by unemployment.

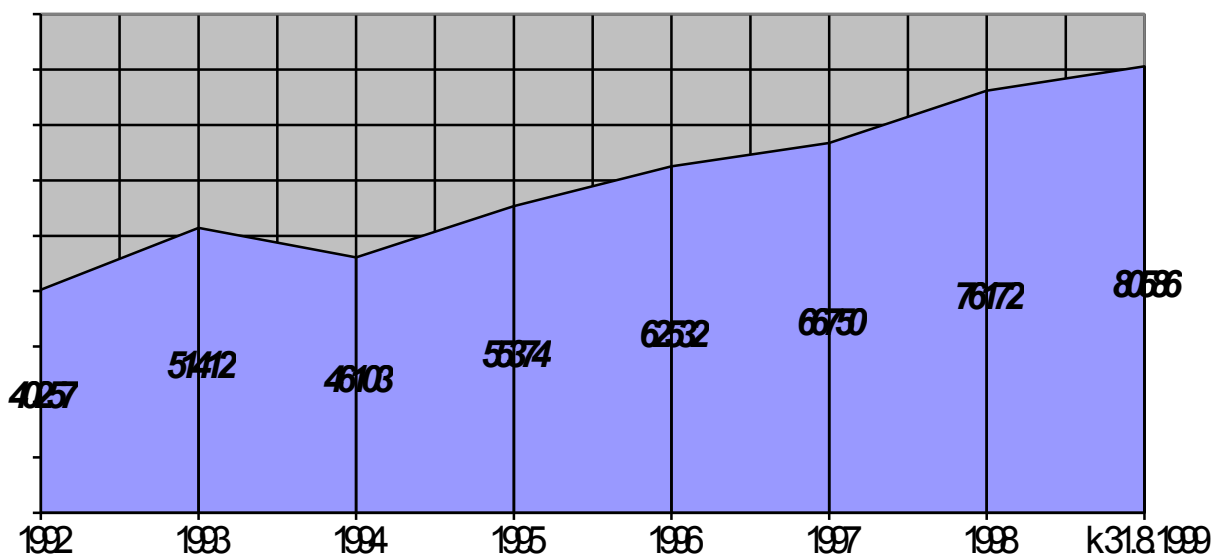
The only data available on Romany unemployment, which still cannot be considered fully representative, are the unofficial data of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family, which were recorded by district labor bureau officers who wrote the letter "R" in the dossiers of Romany job applicants. Since this practice was illegal and discriminatory, it was discontinued after 1998 elections. Unfortunately, one negative effect of the decision is that Slovakia now lacks a database on Roma unemployment. Nevertheless, unofficial data from the previous period show that the number of unemployed Roma in Slovakia is permanently increasing, and that the Roma represent a significant majority of the long-term unemployed in Slovakia. The main factors influencing the high unemployment rate among the Roma are the following: their low level of qualifications, the lack of interest among employers in hiring Roma due to the high supply of workers on the labor market, the poor work ethic of some Roma, the lack of interest among some Roma to find a job on public benefit work projects, and the general scarcity of job opportunities, especially in regions with a large Roma population.

According to expert estimates, approximately 10% of Slovak citizens are dependent on social security benefits, a significant proportion of whom are the Roma. The disbursement of social security benefits to the Roma has become one of the main causes for the growing tension between the minority and the majority population. The majority argues that in doing nothing, the Roma receive large sums of money, which they blow on alcohol. The Government's inability to better plan the disbursement of welfare

benefits, and widespread usury among the Roma, argue for the development of a supervisory mechanism through which the government could control the Roma's spending of their social benefits. The most serious objection to the two approaches was that they were implemented across the board, without applying individual criteria. The scheme was tested during the first half of 1999, and the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family is not now considering a broader application.

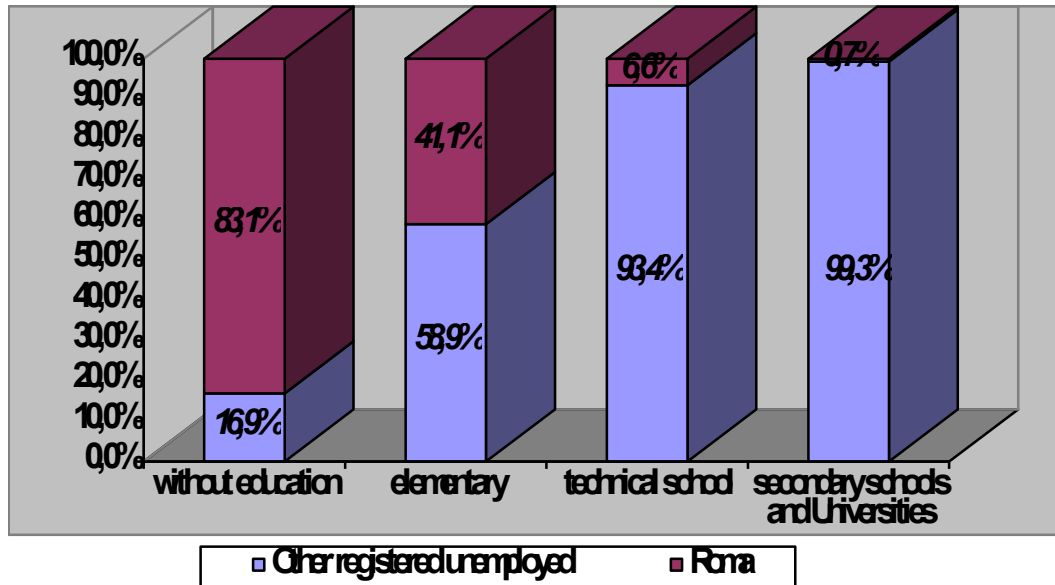
Unemployment, especially the long-term and permanent unemployment so common among the Roma, perpetuates the cycle of poverty and the unemployment trap. The Roma become dependent on social security benefits, resulting in a high rate of long-term unemployment. The situation is then passed from one generation to the next. Consequently, the number of families in which both parents and children are permanently unemployed is also increasing; moreover, children have no experience of stable and permanent employment. Hence, all current conditions support a subculture of unemployed Romany youth.

Graph 1: Numbers of unemployed Roma in Slovakia (as for 31-st December of each year)



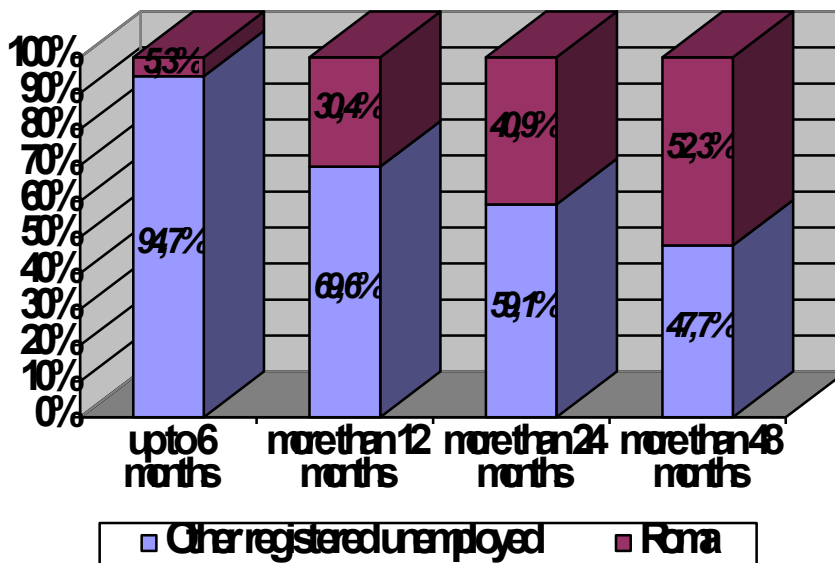
Source: Ministry of Work, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak republic, 1999

Graph 2: Percentage of Roma out of all registered unemployed according to structure of education (1999)



Source: Ministry of Work, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak republic, 1999

Graph 3: Percentage of Roma out of the numbers of unemployed according to the period of registration (1999)



Source: Ministry of Work, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak republic, 1999

Table: The structure of unemployed according to the period of registration (1999)

Period of registration	Registered unemployed together (RU)	Roma	Percentage of Roma out of RU
up to 6 months	194 737	10 380	5,33 %
more than 12 months	194 657	59 176	30,40 %
more than 24 months	100 020	40 922	40,91 %
more than 48 months	42 861	22 399	52,26 %

Source: Ministry of Work, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak republic, 1999.

Strategies to Cope with the Poverty by Roma and by the Majority Population

I.

The mentioned changes are the phenomenon of the new type of social stratification defined by new types of relationships in the society. The beat boards of this new stratification were two stratification pyramids, formed during communism: the pyramid of establishment (social capital) and the pyramid of second economy (private capital). These pyramids have been merging, with the social capital creating opportunities for the creation and access to material capital. The Roma did not belong to either of the pyramids providing potential for the integration into a higher class of society. They did not have the chance nor did they manage to fulfill, with the help of the double life strategy (relational - social and material capital), the requirements for the integration into the new market relationships and successfully master the new rules of the game on the labor market and the market with privatized property.

Poverty was existent during the communist regime and it was a problem concerning the Roma as well, with having an above standard representation in the category of poor citizens. After 1989 the term poverty gained a new content, based on the inequality between individuals on one hand and whole social categories on the other. The individual criteria involve the old demographic poverty, where the basic factor of poverty is the number of children. This type of poverty can be escaped by individual strategies, mainly changes in reproductive behavior (this strategy was implemented by the majority population in the middle of 20th century). The communist regime implemented the same concept of poverty as demographic, which means poverty pushed into families and its connection to certain living situation. Thus it transformed the poverty from a public issue to a personal problem, which meant that poverty lost its dimension of a social status. Poverty was understood as personal failure. The state regulated this poverty with means based on strong re-distribution, subventions into the infrastructure, prices of basic foods and incomes.

The group characteristic is being described as the new vertical poverty, which, through the changes in the structure of employment, moves a whole social category into social dependence. The main factor is not the number of children but low degree of education in fields that are vanishing - whole disappearing branches of industry result in long-term unemployment. The specific characteristic of the Roma minority is the combination of old demographical poverty with the new vertical poverty. In the case of group vertical poverty, individual living strategies are an unavoidable prerequisite of successful solution of the life situation, but in itself it is not enough. The chances are determined by the system of social provisions and rights. The state of vertical poverty is the result of systemic changes and not of individual failures. The degree and scale of poverty of the Roma is at large the result of the degree of their disintegration, the income and property inequality is the direct result of this disintegration.

From the point of view of the economic structure, the Roma in Slovakia are to a large degree a homogenous group when it comes to social class and qualification. A majority of them belongs from the point of view of the socio-professional status into the category of non-qualified workers, which is the reason why they have such high representation among the low-income groups of the Slovak population. From the point of view of employment, a certain "monotype" of the Roma family could be observed already during the communist regime: Roma families were those of unqualified building or agrarian workers, without professional or general higher education, low average income per family member, with a prevailing majority of men working away from the place of their residence. Since 1989 the unemployment of Roma men has been on the rise, as well as the number of Roma families with both partners unemployed.

The state reacted after 1989 by creating system of social assistance, a social safety net. But it narrowed the comprehension of poverty to a state of the so-called material and social need. The state does not create nor reflect the poverty as a social status, thus narrowing its comprehension to the procurement - granges necessary for the maintenance of life (excluding entitlements for those, who respect the norms regulating behavior of the status bearers). The absence of entitlements and emphasis on procurement reflect the comprehension of poverty as individual responsibility, individual failure and predetermines the provision of social assistance by testing, measuring, monitoring of individual behavior and strategies. This reproduces and strengthens the culture of dependence with all the signs of reproduced poverty: feelings of marginality, being in danger, of fatalism, desperation, passivity, aggression, communal closure, impulsiveness, absence of planning and saving, distrust towards the authorities.

II.

The basic strategy for solving life situation in the majority, as well as in the Roma population, is family cooperation, mutual help within families, broader family appurtenance. Differences are in the type of help provided by the family, and whether it is actually able to provide any help at all. Family strategies are determined mainly by the cultural and historical background and living conditions of individual families. Which type of family strategy becomes prevalent in a settlement or village is dependent much more on its socio-cultural character and the micro-climate in the settlement, then on demographic characteristics of the families. The socio-cultural character of separated but mainly segregated settlements is a type of collective marginalization and social exclusion without a potential for mutual help. The living strategy oriented on family networks is ineffective in these circumstances. The more homogenic a settlement is, the smaller are the chances for the effectiveness of supporting family networks. In segregated settlement these living strategies have zero effectiveness. Some NGOs are trying to replace the absence of support family networks and mutual help with their own activities (creating community centers).

In the new social conditions, it is mainly old, well known and time proven family strategies that are being implemented as coping mechanisms. The traditional majority family revitalizes apart from family networks the strategy of in-house consumption (self-catering) and the departure with the goal of finding work abroad. But the method of self-catering has never been used by segregated Roma communities in the past nor in the present (so there is nothing to revitalize). The non-acceptance of this strategy by the Roma is considered by the majority not to be a result of traditional and typical behavior patterns for the Roma, but as the proof of the laziness and affiliation towards stealing - choosing the easy way, unwillingness to actively change their living situation. The more open a Roma community is, the more heterogeneous the environment is, the greater is the chance of reproduction of the self-catering strategy.

The Roma are left with only one active strategy - departure. This strategy is not possible to be implemented in marginalized, segregated settlements (because a departure requires some resources). A specific phenomenon for the Roma is collective departure, the departure of entire families from a certain locality, while in the majority population its usually one member of a family that leaves to work. The collective departure of the Roma creates and multiplies the existing tension in the society - the majority

population is being “punished” by the introduction of visa requirement in the individual countries (defensive measures by countries trying to stop the inflow of Roma).

It is not easy to establish a clear profile of the typical Romany asylum seeker from Slovakia according to classic demographic categories. Most asylum seekers came from the Košice and Michalovce districts, especially from the town of Michalovce and the villages of Pavlovce nad Uhom and Malčice. The typical Romany asylum seeker:

- Hails from eastern Slovakia (the western Slovak territories have remained virtually unaffected by Romany migrations);
- Speaks Slovak (Hungarian-speaking Roma do not often migrate);
- Resides in towns and larger villages (smaller villages and settlements have also remained virtually unaffected);
- Enjoys an above-average social status (most migrants are recruited especially from among members of the Romany middle class);
- Has an above-average education (most migrating Roma have completed primary, some of them even secondary, education);
- Has experience of work outside his own region (among migrants, a significant number of Roma have worked in remote regions of Slovakia or abroad in Prague or in the mining region of northern Moravia);
- As far as Romany sub-ethnic differentiation is concerned, most migrants are Rumungres and not Vlachika Roma (although in terms of their habits and traditions, Vlachika Roma are much closer to the nomadic way of life than Rumungres).

All of the above mentioned strategies have the character of short-term and fast solutions, lacking the perspective of significant long-term improvements in the living situation. The revitalization of strategies with long-term effects, typical for the rural areas in the pre-communist era, like the development of agrarian small-scale production, the animal farming, or retail handicraft is rather sporadic and uncommon. Apart from lack of experience, there is also a lack of government support. For many villages, after the disappearance of the "Collective Farming Cooperatives" and State farms, which employed an overwhelming part of the population, majority and Roma in agriculture, the above mentioned activities are the only possibilities of job creation. The extinction of agricultural production thus lead to the departure of majority population - either happening through shuttle migration to working places or the abandonment of rural homes. The typical Roma handicraft, being mainly supplementary production or services adjoined to these types of productions, thus lost demand in these villages. Some NGOs are trying to supplement the absent government support, running several projects for the support of revitalization of “classical” handicraft, several of them successfully.

III.

In the cases of some Roma settlements or in the case of a socio-spatial marginality of an area, there are specific social circumstances with up to 100% unemployment in some places. Thus a situation is created, which within the Slovak circumstances has been given the title “valley of hunger”, being areas with visible “islands of poverty”. The “hunger valley” is endangered by total social disorganization and the creation of the culture of poverty as the only possible form of adaptation on the situation. Its results include the formation of the so-called underclass, rural and urban. Besides the structural dimension, the transformation after 1989 also had a territorial, regional and micro-regional dimension. Some territories have been shifted to the margin of the socio-economic development, becoming socio-economically marginalized territories. Marginalization has its roots in the previous period of the so-called socialist industrialization and industrial urbanization of Slovakia. After 1989 the socio-economic marginality of the inherited regions has been deepened, continually spreading to other territories. The marginalization, that has taken place within the economic transformation, has created larger compact entities within marginal

territories in borderland regions of the northern, eastern and southern Slovakia. These territories are inhabited by minorities and that is why the issue has also an ethnic dimension.

Generally, the regions have several dispositions in common. They have increasing or “stabilized” levels of unemployment as well as other problematic qualities. These dispositions refer especially to the human potential as well as to the infrastructure, spatial position of the region and the persistence of imbalance inherited from the past. They also share spatial, civilization and other marginal positions. There are concentrations of old demographic and new vertical types of poverty, low entrepreneurial spirit, and small influx of capital. Marginal regions are characterized by a decline of civilization and cultural standard of its settlements and life conditions. Problems with access to education, social and cultural activities have been observed, adjoined to the limited potential for social and civilization development. These regions have problems adapting to the current transformation, also lacking social subjects able and willing to take over the initiative and responsibility for the activation of the region, finding ways out of the marginal existence. Marginal regions are seldom entirely marginal. Marginality is a problem especially in some villages. These regions are ethnically mixed, which adds political meaning to this feature of marginal territories.

The Roma living in segregated settlements of marginalized regions thus find themselves in a situation of double marginalization. Weakened and very limited possibilities of a marginalized region in combination with the absence of potential for self-help, self-organization and activation require specific approaches, support and developmental social programs targeting the marginalized regions and the marginalized segregated settlements of the regions. Any concrete program cannot achieve long-term success without systemic changes especially in the area of employment policy and housing policy (social housing). It is not possible to overcome double marginalization with an individual living strategy (unless it means moving). The multiplied effects of disintegration and marginalization are reflected among the Roma in long-term lack of material security and the life in absolute poverty. Material security means the availability of food, drinks, clothing, housing and warmth, enabling biological survival and the fulfillment of primary needs and the orientation of activities of the fulfillment of the need to “have” this necessary security. But this is orientation on survival, not on life. The orientation on material security is the bridge, a pre-condition to the achievement of social security and the fulfillment of secondary needs - mainly of self-identity and self-affirmation, education, culture etc.

The most basic requirements for the achievement of social security are **social contacts, being the only possibility of incorporation into the social organization of the society**. The segregated Roma live under the pressure of trying to reach material security, leaving them without the potential for other activities, for the benefit of themselves or others. So they themselves cannot ensure their participation in informal social networks. Their creation for the Roma and with the Roma is the most basic task for all social activists. The strategies of segregated Roma oriented on the survival make them dependent. This dependency is of material character, because their survival depends on the state social assistance benefits and other institutions. The same risk of dependency hangs over the creation of social dependency on other people. The double marginalization of the Roma is accompanied by a double dependency effect - material and social dependency. Double dependency means the inability of any kind of activation, participation, bringing upon a loss of self-confidence and self-respect.

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