



Roma-Net

Integration of Roma Population

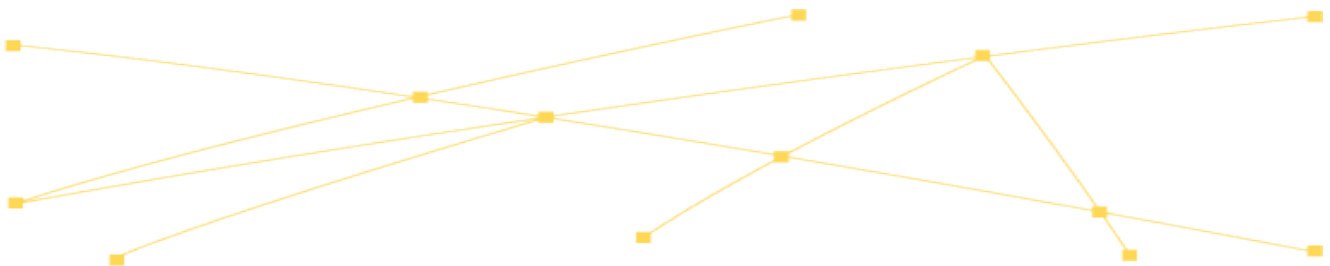


Case Study

Report on the European Commission High Level Event,
Slovakia 23rd - 25th May 2011

Case Study – Kosice Field Visits – US Steel and Lunik IX

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DEVELOPMENT





Introduction

At the end of May, Marie Wright, Glasgow Project Coordinator, represented Roma Net at the European Commissions High Level Event on the use of Structural Funds for Roma Integration in Slovakia at the end of May. This case study will provide an overview of the event and report on the field visits that were undertaken by the delegation. It will also make some comparisons between the systems experienced in Kosice and those in operation in Glasgow.

Background

The overall objective of the event was to mobilise the increased use of EU funds to significantly improve the social inclusion of the marginalised Roma communities in Slovakia, as well as to share experience on what has worked well and what can be improved in the field of Roma Inclusion.

The three day event was held in both Bratislava and Kosice, a partner in the Roma Net project. Delegates heard from Iveta Radicova, the Slovakian Prime Minister; Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for Regional Policy and many other speakers from local, national and regional governments, NGO's and the European Commission. The event consisted of plenary sessions, workshops and field visits.

Field Visits

An important aspect of the programme was field visits to areas and projects of significance in relation to Roma integration. The purpose of these field visits was to demonstrate good practice and also to highlight some of the issues faced by the Roma community and the methods being undertaken to respond to these issues.

US Steel

US Steel is an integrated steel company working in Kosice in eastern Slovakia.

Since 2002 US Steel has been working with the village councils in Šaca and Lunik IX to run a special employment programme for Roma. Within the programme "Equality of Opportunity" the company provides training for the Roma community who have been excluded from the labour market.

On day one of the High Level Event we heard from the HR department of US Steel Kosice, who presented the Equality of Opportunity programme.

Clients are identified by recommendations made by local community workers or Council leaders and it appears these recommendations are individuals closer to the labour market. This is made more evident when the presenter highlights that selected participants are those who are "eager and able". It was unclear from the presentation how those who were furthest from the labour market were targeted, if at all, and given the opportunity to increase their capacity to enter the programme. Furthermore, clients are employed by the local Municipal authorities rather than US Steel, however USS do finance the programme.



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During this presentation it was highlighted that 110 participants take part in this programme, 90% of which are Roma.

Analysing the data presented on job sustainability, the following statistics are concluded:

- 25% of the employees in the programme have less than one years service;
- Only 24% have been there 5 years or more.

2 of the main reasons for the lack of sustainability for some employees were absenteeism and poor job performance.

Following the presentation in Bratislava, we travelled to Kosice and the first field visit was a trip to the US Steel plant. The majority of the visit consisted of touring the plant and its facilities. This meant that very little time was left for the question and answer session with the Roma workers.

During the short session we had, the Roma workers were given the opportunity to give us an insight into what they do for the company and how finding employment had helped improve their standard of living. They were all keen to show their appreciation for the opportunities they had been given. An example given was a worker who had been there for a number of years and had encouraged his son to join the company upon leaving school.

Despite this, there was limited information on the sustainability of the posts and the conditions or salary that the jobs attracted. Without this detail it was difficult to make any comparisons to similar programmes in Glasgow. While there could be some loose comparisons to Glasgow's apprenticeship initiatives or the Clubhouse model for those with mental health issues, it is difficult to comment without further information.

Lunik IX

The delegation then visited Lunik IX, an area of the city that houses around 4 to 6000 Roma at any one time and is an area of high deprivation and poverty. This is the highest concentration of Roma in Slovakia. High unemployment and low educational attainment levels are prevalent and there is limited access to infrastructure, such as water and electricity, for the Roma living there.

It was very difficult to make comparisons between Lunik IX and areas of deprivation in Glasgow. While many of the issues faced by the residents are the same, debt problems, unemployment, poor health, the overall conditions were considerably worse than those witnessed elsewhere. It appears to be a very hopeless social trap while the physical location of the estate on the outskirts of the City compounds this perception.

There are two community centres operating in Lunik IX however it was not clear how these two centres worked together to tackle some of the issues faced by the local residents. The main community centre hosts 5 outreach workers who deal with a number of social issues however they claim that the Roma lack interest in activities that are aimed at changing their environment and family situation.





While the workers in Lunik IX faced similar problems to those in other cities, lack of funding, resource issues, resistance from the local community, the attitude of the workers was slightly more negative than expected. There were frequent references to the amount of social welfare the Roma receive and the idea that the Roma themselves were responsible for the poor living conditions. There was also mention that the “better” Roma could be moved, within the estate, to slightly better quality accommodation while the “worse” Roma would continue to be housed within “low grade” housing as they “do not care about their environment”.

Overview and conclusion

It is initially very difficult to make comparisons between Kosice and Glasgow.

Different systems of social welfare and housing policy made the visit to Lunik IX a very difficult yet enlightening experience and despite their very poor living conditions, it was encouraging to see the very friendly and welcoming faces of the local Roma children.

The social infrastructure in Glasgow would appear to be more advanced, yet the Roma client group is presenting new problems. In contrast Kosice has experienced many years of dealing with the Roma community but with slow progress.

This event gave Roma Net a critical networking opportunity. A meeting with the Deputy Mayor of Kosice, Renata Lenartova, was extremely useful as it highlighted the important role Kosice has to play in the Roma Net Partnership. A personal invitation was extended to the Deputy Mayor to attend the Roma Net meeting in Glasgow in November.

Ladislav Perhac, the Roma Net representative from Kosice, presented to the conference the work of Roma Net, with a particular focus on the opportunities for mutual learning between partner cities.

The conference was an important platform for various organisations to express their view and contribute at an EU level. Some significant messages were conveyed during the conference:

“There are 10-12 million Roma in Europe and they are the most discriminated group today. In an EU of the 21st century this is not acceptable.” Commissioner Hahn.

“If we give life to a plant then do not give it water, sunlight or fertiliser for a month, it will inevitably die...the Roma have the right to define their own lives,” Morten Kjaerum, Director of the Fundamental Rights Agency

“Without Roma, you cannot do anything...” Lucia Nicholsonova, State Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family.

“It has been very difficult for generations of Roma to get out of this vicious circle...” Maros Sefcovic, Vice President of the European Commission.

“We are in the golden age of European projects...in terms of the housing programmes, what has improved? Well, when it rains we don’t get wet...” Jarmila Vanova, Roma Media Centre.

