



Mentoring and employer engagement to support the employment of low-skilled Roma youth

A promising practice

23 December 2020

Short summary of this promising practice:

This practice was developed and piloted in the Hopes for Low project between 2018 and 2020. The aim was to strengthen existing NGO activities focusing on Roma youth in segregated settlements, by developing a systematic approach that combines mentoring to low skilled youth with engaging and counselling employers. The approach was piloted in Hungary and Slovakia. It includes the training of mentors and coordinators, sensitisation training and counselling for employers and mentoring for Roma youth.

Scope:

Small pilot in Hungary and Slovakia

Timing:

The development of the tools and training materials started in January 2018. Mentoring started in January 2019. The project was closed in December 2020 but mentoring has continued in the Hungarian locations.

Target group:

Low skilled (less than 12 years of completed formal education) Roma aged 16-30, living in a segregated settlement

Driver for introducing the practice:

The Hopes for Low project aimed to develop services that support employers in developing inclusive hiring and employment practices and thereby promote the integration of unskilled Roma youth into the labour market.

Low skilled Roma youth face multiple barriers to finding a job: they often lack even basic skills and have little or no experience in formal employment. They often have low self-esteem and weak job search skills. Local NGOs assisting Roma communities tend to focus on meeting basic needs and may also support job search but they rarely have the capacity and skills to systematically engage employers. Without encouragement and support employers often shy away from hiring disadvantaged Roma youth. Also, recruiting practices often have elements that unwittingly create barriers for low skilled Roma, such as the formal language of job descriptions, health checks and administrative requirements that elongate the recruitment process, or the exclusive use of online channels.

Activities:

The first phase involved developing the method, preparing training materials and training mentors. In the second phase these were tested in the field. Roma youth received continuous support from their mentors that continued after their employment. In the Hungarian pilot, mentors were involved on a voluntary basis while in Slovakia, they were paid and had some prior experience (and/or training) in social work. Employers received group training for their HR unit and middle management and individual counselling to help integrate young Roma in the workplace.

Outputs:

The project produced training materials for (1) mentor training (2) mentor coordinator training (3) sensitising employers, in Hungarian and in Slovak. During the project, 37 mentors and 18 mentor coordinators were trained in Hungary and 24 mentors and 11 coordinators in Slovakia. Sensitisation training was offered to around 120 HR professionals and managers at 4 employers. The approach was disseminated among NGOs at an online webinar in both pilot countries, with a total of around 60 participants.

The tools and training materials were tested in the field by NGOs: Bagázs in Hungary and Epic in Slovakia, involving 43 young Roma during 2019 and 2020. In the *Hungarian pilot*, participants received about 7 months of mentoring and nearly 70 % got a job interview or made the first steps towards starting their own business. Of all participants, 61 % got hired and 36 % kept their job for at least 3 months. Many of them managed to keep working through the lockdown during the spring of 2020. The *Slovak pilot* faced more difficulties as it was started from scratch, in a settlement where Epic had no prior experience, and that was also hit harder by the first phase of the Covid pandemic. In their case, the 10 participants received 4 months of mentoring on average and only one of them was interviewed and hired. However, several other participants made an important step towards getting employed by successfully completing vocational training or obtaining their residence permits with the help of their mentors.

Lessons for further development and transfer:

The approach works well when an initial level of mutual trust has been established in the Roma community. It may also work well with low-skilled youth living in a less segregated environment. Volunteer mentors can work more flexibly than paid mentors, but they need to be supported by professional casework and coordination. Sensitisation has to be flexibly adjusted to the needs of each employer and team, which requires experienced trainers. Engaging employers may prove difficult and requires particular attention and resources.

Coordinator:

Budapest Institute for Policy Analysis

Implementing organisations:

The Hopes for Low project was coordinated by the Budapest Institute for Policy Analysis (bpinst.eu) and the pilots were implemented by BAGÁZS public benefit association (bagazs.org) and EPIC Slovakia (epic-org.eu). The Salva Vita Foundation (salvavita.hu) supported the development of training materials while the Hungarian Employers Forum on Equal Opportunities (mef.forum.hu) helped in contacting employers.

Resources involved:

This project was funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020), project ID 777339. The total budget was around 175 000 EUR. In the pilots, employer services were offered either for free but on a limited basis, or at a modest fee. It is hoped that employers committed to the cause will be willing to co-finance the sensitisation training of their own employees.

More information:

http://bpinst.eu/index.php/projektek/adatlap/supporting_employers_hiring_low_skill_roma_youth/en

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