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LESSONS OF A PILOT ON SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYMENT OF LOW SKILLED ROMA YOUTH

Internal evaluation report (published version)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a qualitative evaluation of the main activities of the Hopes for Low project, implemented between 2018 and 2020. The analysis was conducted by the project coordinator and based on a review of internal project documents, several interviews and an external evaluation.

- *Aims and relevance of the project*

The project aimed 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 target group was low skilled Roma youth. In designing the project, the assumption was that existing programmes for this target group rarely tackle employer discrimination. Low skilled Roma youth face multiple barriers to finding a job: they often lack even basic skills, 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.

Thus, the project aimed to develop services that support employers in introducing inclusive hiring and employment practices and thereby promote the integration of unskilled Roma youth into the labour market.

Field experience collected during the project confirmed these initial assumptions, and proved the relevance of the project. The analysis has also highlighted some elements where the approach needs to be further developed.

- *Activities and outcomes*

The approach was piloted in Hungary and Slovakia, including the training of mentors and coordinators, sensitisation training and counselling for employers and mentoring for Roma youth. The development of the tools and training materials started in January 2018. 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. Mentoring started in January 2019. 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. The project was closed in December 2020 but mentoring continues in the Hungarian locations.

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 and 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.

Overall, the design of the approach can be considered appropriate and training materials are of good quality. Implementation was successful in the Hungarian pilot, while less so in the Slovak case.

- *Main challenges*

The analysis identified four main challenges that affected project outcomes. First, in the Slovak pilot, the mentors had no prior experience in the pilot location and it took much longer than expected to build trust in the Roma community. Also, this weaker basis of mutual trust deepened the negative impact of the lockdown in the spring of 2020. Second, the Covid pandemic disrupted the mentoring process, it required a redesign of training and dissemination activities, and also reduced employers' willingness to cooperate and more generally, to hire low-educated Roma youth. Third, even before the Covid crisis unfolded, it proved very difficult to engage employers, especially in Slovakia, where the project team could not rely on the support of an existing network of committed employers. Fourth and last, it proved difficult to engage NGOs to participate in mentoring (in Hungary) or in transferring the method to other organisations and regions (in both countries).

- *Lessons*

Several lessons emerged concerning the main activities, and also the overall sustainability of the approach.

Mentoring. First, there is a need for much preparatory work before job-focused mentoring can begin, to build trust and to develop the employability of mentees. This was implicit in the methodology but should be stressed more in future dissemination. Second, unpaid mentoring may be more flexible and no less productive than paid mentoring.

Sensitisation. Sensitising employers can be very useful when hiring low-educated youth, but it has to be adjusted flexibly to existing conditions and attitudes of the employer and their existing staff. This requires experienced trainers, and can be supported by prior data collection.

Elements of the approach. Some elements of the approach may need to be strengthened or distinguished more clearly in training materials. These include the need for casework (as separate from mentoring), the tools for engaging employers, tools for mentees to handle prejudice in the workplace, providing support in reviewing the recruitment process, training internal buddies, or peer mentors for a particular employer, and offering support in the introduction of diversity tools within the company.

Engaging employers. Two effective routes were identified for approaching potential employers: first, employers that are based near the Roma settlement and facing labour shortages, and second, existing, popular fora of HR managers.

Sustainability. Some elements of the programme, namely, sensitisation and some part of the individual budgets for mentees may be financed by employers, while the others need external funding. Using voluntary mentors can substantially reduce the need for external financial support. In Hungary, Bagázs will continue the whole programme, while in Slovakia, some elements of the approach will feed into a new project to promote social entrepreneurship in disadvantaged regions.

Upscaling. Dissemination among NGOs will continue, however, national upscaling requires the



involvement of public service providers. In Hungary, there is some scope for incorporating some or part of our approach in local employment pacts and/or local development projects for highly disadvantaged small regions.

ÖSSZEFOGLALÓ (SUMMARY IN HUNGARIAN)

Ez a jelentés a Hopes for Low projekt főbb, 2018 és 2020 között megvalósított tevékenységeinek kvalitatív értékelése. Az elemzést a projekt koordinátor a projekt partnerek által küldött adatok és dokumentumok, partnerekkel és mentoráltakkal készült interjúk és a külső értékelés alapján készítette el.

- *A projekt célja és relevanciája*

A projekt főként arra irányult, hogy megerősítse a telepeken élő roma fiatalokat támogató civil szervezetek módszertani eszköztárát. E célból egy olyan szolgáltatáscsomagot fejlesztettünk ki, mely az alacsonyan képzett fiatalok mentorálása mellett a munkáltató megszólítására, érzékenyítésére is hangsúlyt fektet. A projekt célcsoportját képzetlen roma fiatalok alkották. A projekt és a szolgáltatáscsomag megtervezésében nagy szerepet játszott, hogy a hasonló célú kezdeményezések ritkán célozzák a munkáltató érzékenyítését, a munkáltatói oldalon potenciálisan felmerülő diszkriminációt. Az iskolázatlan roma fiatalok munkába állását számos hátrány akadályozza: sok esetben támogatásra van szükségük az alapkészségek elsajátításához, alacsony az önbizalmuk, vagy kevés álláskeresési- és munkatapasztalattal rendelkeznek. A romákat segítő helyi civil szervezetek általában az alapszükségletek kielégítésére fókuszálnak és nincs kellő kapacitásuk, vagy módszertani tudásuk a munkakeresés támogatására és a munkáltatók bevonására. Megfelelő támogatás és tanácsadás nélkül a munkáltatók sokszor előítéletesek a hátrányos helyzetű, fiatal roma munkavállalókkal szemben. Emellett a toborzási gyakorlatok is megnehezíthetik az álláskeresést a képzetlen roma fiatalok számára: például az álláshirdetés bonyolult megfogalmazása, a szükséges orvosi vizsgálatok, beszerzendő hivatalos igazolások és bizonyítványok miatt költséges és hosszadalmas jelentkezési folyamat, vagy az online hirdetési csatornák kizárólagos alkalmazása miatt.

Ezért a projekt inkluzív toborzási és foglalkoztatási gyakorlatokat elősegítő szolgáltatásokat fejlesztett ki, mellyel a képzetlen roma fiatalok munkaerőpiaci integrációját is támogatta.

A projekt során szerzett tereptapasztalatok alátámasztották a kiinduló feltevéseket, és igazolták a projekt relevanciáját. Az értékelés azonban olyan elemeket is azonosít, melyek mentén a szolgáltatáscsomag továbbfejleszthető.

- *A projekt tevékenységei és eredményei*

A projekt során a módszertant Magyarországon és Szlovákiában teszteltük: mentorokat és mentorkoordinatorokat toboroztunk és képeztünk, roma fiatalokat mentoráltunk, illetve érzékenyítettük a munkáltatókat érzékenyítő tréningeken és tanácsadáson keresztül. Az eszközök és tréning anyagok kifejlesztése 2018 januárjában kezdődött. A projekt során tréning anyagok készültek (1) mentor tréningekhez, (2) mentor koordinátor tréningekhez, és (3) munkáltatói érzékenyítéshez, magyar és szlovák nyelven. A projektben Magyarországon 37 mentort és 18 mentor koordinátort készítettek fel, míg Szlovákiában 24 mentort és 11 mentor koordinátort.



A mentorálás 2019 januárjában kezdődött. A roma fiatalok mentoruktól folyamatos támogatást kaptak, mely munkába állásuk után is folytatódott. A magyar tesztben önkéntes mentorok vettek részt, míg szlovák partnerünk olyan fizetett mentorokkal dolgozott együtt, akiknek már volt korábbi mentorálási, és/vagy szociális munkához kötődő tapasztalata. A projektben résztvevő munkáltatók HR döntéseket hozó vezetői és középvezetői csoportos tréningen vehettek részt, melyet a roma fiatalok munkahelyi beilleszkedése érdekében egyéni érzékenyítő tréningek és tanácsadás egészített ki. Ugyan a projekt 2020 decemberében lezárult, a mentorálás a magyar pilot helyszíneken folytatódik.

A projekt *magyar megvalósításában* a résztvevők kb. 7 hónapig kaptak mentorálást és közel 70% jutott el állásinterjúra, vagy tette meg az első lépéseket a saját vállalkozása elindításához. Az összes résztvevő 61%-át vették fel dolgozni, 36% pedig 3 hónapnál tovább is megtartotta az állását. Sokuknak a koronavírus járvány miatt bevezetett vészhelyzet alatt is sikerült megtartania állását 2020 tavaszán. A projekt *szlovák megvalósítása* több akadályba ütközött, így őket a koronavírus első hulláma még súlyosabban érintette. A szlovák megvalósításban ezért összesen 10 résztvevő vett részt, átlagosan négy hónapig kapott mentorálást, akik közül egy mentoráltat vettek fel az állásinterjút követően.

Összességében a projektben kidolgozott megközelítés és tréning anyagok jó minőségben készültek el. A projekt megvalósítása sikeresnek bizonyult a magyar tesztelés során, míg a szlovák tesztelés során kevésbé.

- *Fő kihívások*

Az értékelés négy fő kihívást azonosított, melyek a projekt eredményeire jelentős hatással voltak. Először: a szlovák pilotban részt vevő mentorok nem rendelkeztek korábbi tapasztalattal a kiválasztott romatelepen, így sokkal tovább tartott a bizalom kiépítése a roma közösségben. A projekt során kiépített bizalom ingatagnak bizonyult és a 2020 tavaszán kialakuló járványhelyzet rendkívül negatív hatással volt a szlovákiai pilot megvalósítására. Másodszor, a projekt második felében a világjárvány miatt megszakadt a mentorálási folyamat, a kialakult helyzetben a képzéseket és a disszeminációt is teljesen újra kellett tervezni. Harmadszorban, a munkáltatók megszólítása a koronavírus előtti időszakban is kihívásnak bizonyult, különösen Szlovákiában, ahol a projektet tesztelő partnerek nem tudtak az inkluzív gyakorlatok felé nyitott munkáltatók meglévő szakmai közösségére támaszkodni. Végül, nehézséget jelentett a mentorálásba bevonható civil szervezetek megtalálása (Magyarországon), és a kifejlesztett módszertan átadása más szervezetek számára (mindkét országban).

- *Tanulságok*

A projekt tevékenységei és fenntarthatósága kapcsán is merültek fel tanulságok.

Mentorálás. A projekt egyik legfontosabb tanulsága, hogy a mentorálás megkezdését előtt szükség van egy felkészítő szakaszra, melynek célja a bizalom kiépítése és a mentoráltak foglalkoztathatóságának felmérése és fejlesztése. A felkészülés fontosságát az eredeti módszertan is tartalmazta, azonban további disszeminációban ezt fontos külön is hangsúlyozni. A projekt másik, mentorálással kapcsolatos tanulsága, hogy az önkéntes mentorok alkalmazása több rugalmasságot biztosít és nem bizonyult kevésbé hatékonynak, mint a fizetett mentorok alkalmazása.



Érzékenyítés. A munkáltatói érzékenyítés nagyon hasznos a képzetlen, alacsonyan iskolázott fiatalok toborzása során, de tartalmát a munkáltató körülményeihez, a csapattagok attitűdjéhez és igényeihez kell szabni. Ehhez tapasztalt trénerekre van szükség, illetve érdemes az igényeket egy előzetes adatfelvételben felmérni.

A megközelítés elemei. A kifejlesztett szolgáltatáscsomag bizonyos elemeit meg kell erősíteni, vagy jobban ki kell emelni a tréning anyagokban. Ilyen elemek a mentorálást megelőző felkészítés, a munkáltatók bevonásának módszerei, a mentoráltakat a munkahelyi diszkriminációval és előítélettel szemben felvértező eszközök és gyakorlatok, a toborzási folyamat felülvizsgálatának támogatása, és a munkahelyi befogadó gyakorlatok bevezetésének szakmai támogatása (pl. belső „buddy”-k képzése).

A munkáltatók megszólítása. Elsősorban két hatékony csatornát azonosítottunk: (1) olyan munkáltatók közvetlen felkeresése, akik a roma telephez közel helyezkednek el, és munkaerőhiánnyal küzdenek, valamint (2) a HR menedzserek megszólítása meglévő, népszerű HR fórumokon keresztül.

Fenntarthatóság. A program egyes elemei, például a munkáltatói érzékenyítés és a mentoráltak számára biztosított személyi költségek fedezhetőek a munkáltató finanszírozásával, míg más költségek tekintetében külső pénzügyi forrásokra van szükség. A magyar pilotot a Bagázs tovább működteti, míg a szlovák partner a módszer egyes elemeit egy új projekt eszköztárába integrálva használja fel a hátrányos helyzetű régiókban elindított társadalmi vállalkozások fejlesztésére.

A módszer továbbadása. A civil szervezeteket célzó disszemináció folytatódik, azonban a módszer országos szintű elterjesztéséhez az állami munkáltatók bevonása is szükséges lenne. Magyarországon a módszert, vagy egyes elemeit a helyi munkaügyi paktumok és/vagy a hátrányos helyzetű térségekben indított fejlesztési programok integrálhatnák meglévő eszköztárukba.

SUMARIZÁCIA (SUMMARY IN SLOVAK)

Ide o kvalitatívne hodnotenie hlavných aktivít projektu *Hopes4Low* realizovaného v rokoch 2018 až 2020. Analýzu vykonali koordinátor projektu na základe preskúmania interných projektových dokumentov, niekoľkých rozhovorov a externého hodnotenia.

• Ciele a relevantnosť projektu

Cieľom projektu bolo posilniť existujúce activity mimovládnych organizácií pracujúcich s rómskou mládežou v segregovaných osadách a to rozvíjaním systematického prístupu, ktorý by poskytoval mentorstvo pre nízkokvalifikovanú mládež a efektívne zapájal do procesu zamestnávateľov s možnosťou využitia poradenských služieb. Cieľovou skupinou bola rómska mládež s nízkou kvalifikáciou.

Pri navrhovaní projektu sme vychádzali z predpokladu, že existujúce programy pre túto cieľovú skupinu len zriedkavo riešia diskrimináciu zo strany zamestnávateľov. Nízkokvalifikovaná rómska mládež preto pri hľadaní zamestnania čelí mnohým prekážkam: často im chýbajú základné zručnosti, majú nedostatočné alebo žiadne skúsenosti s formálnymi náležitosťami



a bežným postupom pri zamestnávaní. Často majú nízku sebaúctu a slabé zručnosti pri hľadaní si zamestnania. Miestne mimovládne organizácie, ktoré pomáhajú rómskym komunitám majú tendenciu zameriavať sa na riešenie základných potrieb a môžu tiež podporovať hľadanie zamestnania, ale len zriedkavo majú kapacity a zručnosti na to, aby mohli systematicky do tohto procesu zapájať aj zamestnávateľov. Bez povzbudenia a podpory sa zamestnávatelia zvyčajne vyhýbajú tomu, aby prijali rómsku mládež zo znevýhodneného prostredia. Náborové praktiky tiež často obsahujú aspekty, ktoré pre nízkokvalifikovaných Rómov nevedomky vytvárajú prekážky: ako napríklad používanie formálneho jazyka pri popisoch práce, zdravotné prehladky a rôzne administratívne požiadavky, ktoré náborový proces ešte viac predlžujú, ako aj výlučné používanie online kanálov pri komunikácií.

Cieľom projektu bolo teda vyvinúť služby, ktoré podporia zamestnávateľov v rozvoji inkluzívnych postupov pri prijímaní a zamestnávaní, a tým podporia integráciu nekvalifikovanej rómskej mládeže na trh práce.

Terénne skúsenosti zhromaždené počas projektu tieto počiatočné predpoklady len potvrdili a taktiež aj dôležitosť tohto projektu. Analýza nám navyše ukázala, ktoré oblasti je potrebné rozvíjať aj naďalej.

• *Aktivity a výsledky*

Maďarsko a Slovensko sa riadilo poznatkami z tohto prístupu po prvý raz – vrátane odbornej prípravy mentorov a koordinátorov, senzibilizačného tréningu a poradenstva pre zamestnávateľov ako aj mentorstva pre rómsku mládež. V januári 2018 sa rozbehla príprava nástrojov a školiacich materiálov. V rámci projektu sme pripravili školiace materiály pre (1) školenie mentorov (2) školenia koordinátorov mentorov či (3) podklady na senzibilizáciu zamestnávateľov v maďarčine a slovenčine. Počas projektu bolo v Maďarsku vyškolených 37 mentorov a 18 koordinátorov mentorov a na Slovensku 24 mentorov a 11 koordinátorov.

Mentorstvo začalo v januári 2019. Rómska mládež dostávala od svojich mentorov nepretržitú podporu a pokračovala aj po ich zamestnaní. V maďarskom pilotnom projekte sa mentori zapájali ako dobrovoľníci, zatiaľ čo na Slovensku boli platení a mali predchádzajúce skúsenosti (alebo už absolvovali školenia) v sociálnej práci. U zamestnávateľov prebehli pre personálne oddelenie a stredný manažment skupinové školenia a bolo im poskytnuté individuálne poradenstvo, čo im malo pomôcť pri integrácii mladých Rómov na pracovisku. Projekt sa ukončil v decembri 2020, ale mentorstvo v maďarských lokalitách stále pokračuje.

V *maďarskom pilotnom projekte* si účastníci prešli cca 7-mesačným mentorstvom a takmer 70% absolvovalo pracovný pohovor alebo podnikli prvé kroky k rozbehnutiu vlastného podnikania. Zo všetkých účastníkov bolo 61% prijatých do zamestnania a 36% si udržalo zamestnanie najmenej na 3 mesiace. Mnohým z nich sa podarilo pokračovať v práci ešte na jar 2020 počas núdzového stavu. Slovenský pilotný projekt čelil väčším ťažkostiam a o to ťažšie ho zasiahla aj prvá fáza pandémie Covid-19. V ich prípade si 4-mesačným mentorstvom prešlo 10 účastníkov a iba jednému z nich sa podarilo absolvovať pohovor a zamestnať sa na pracovný pomer.

Celkovo možno považovať tento prístup za vhodný a školiace materiály sú vypracované kvalitne. Implementácia maďarského pilotného projektu bola úspešná, zatiaľ čo v slovenskom prípade sa javí ako menej úspešná.



- *Hlavné výzvy*

Analýza identifikovala štyri hlavné výzvy, ktoré ovplyvnili výsledky projektu. Po prvé, v slovenskom pilotnom projekte nemali mentori žiadne predchádzajúce skúsenosti s vybranou komunitou Rómov, a preto budovanie dôvery trvalo oveľa dlhšie, ako sa očakávalo. Túto krehkú základňu v rámci budovania vzťahov a vzájomnej dôvery ešte viac prehĺbilo obdobie núdzového stavu na jar 2020. Po druhé, pandémia Covid-19 narušila celý proces mentorovania. Museli sa prepracovať tréningové a iné aktivity súvisiace so šírením informácií o projekte, a tiež sa pod vplyvom týchto okolností znížila ochota zamestnávateľov spolupracovať a všeobecne prijímať nízkokvalifikovanú rómsku mládež. Po tretie, ešte predtým, ako sa rozvinula kríza v dôsledku pandémie Covid-19, bolo veľmi ťažké do procesu zapojiť zamestnávateľov, najmä na Slovensku, kde sa projektový tím nemohol spoľahnúť na podporu existujúcej siete angažovaných zamestnávateľov. Nakoniec sa ukázalo, že bolo rovnako ťažké zapojiť mimovládne organizácie do účasti na mentoringu (v Maďarsku) alebo keď sa vyskytli problémy s prenosom metódy na iné organizácie a regióny (v oboch krajinách).

- *Ponaučenia*

Majúc na pamäti hlavné činnosti projektu a tiež celkovú udržateľnosť spomínaného prístupu, z predošlých zistení nám vyplynulo hneď niekoľko ponaučení.

Mentoring. Pred začatím mentoringu zameraného na zamestnávanie osôb s nízkou kvalifikáciou treba najskôr vykonať veľa prípravných prác, ako napríklad budovanie dôvery a rozvíjanie zamestnateľnosti účastníkov/mentees. V metodike je tento aspekt obsiahnutý, avšak pri budúcom šírení treba tomuto aspektu venovať oveľa väčšiu pozornosť. Po druhé, z praxe sa neplatené mentorstvo javí byť flexibilnejšou a prinajmenšom rovnako takou produktívnou možnosťou ako platené mentorstvo.

Senzibilizácia. „Zcitlivovanie“ zamestnávateľov môže byť pri prijímaní nízkokvalifikovanej mládeže veľmi užitočné, musí sa však pružne prispôbiť existujúcim podmienkam a postojom zamestnávateľa a jeho existujúcim zamestnancom. Na to sú však potrební skúsení škoolitelia, a rovnako vieme tento proces podporiť predchádzajúcim zberom údajov.

Aspekty tohto prístupu. Zrejme bude potrebné posilniť alebo jasnejšie si zadefinovať niektoré aspekty daného prístupu. Medzi ne môžeme zaradiť nutnosť zapracovať na jednotlivých prípadoch a ich štúdiách (oddelené od mentorovania); nástroje, ako zapájať zamestnávateľov; nástroje pre zamestnancov, ako zvládnuť predsudky na pracovisku; poskytnúť podporu pri hodnotení procesu náboru; poskytnúť školenia interných tútorov alebo kolegov-mentorov pre konkrétneho zamestnávateľa, ako aj podporu pri zavádzaní rozmanitých nástrojov v rámci podniku.

Zapojenie zamestnávateľov. Identifikovali sme dva efektívne spôsoby, ako osloviť potenciálnych zamestnávateľov: po prvé, vhodní kandidáti sú zamestnávatelia, ktorí majú sídlo v blízkosti rómskej osady a čelia nedostatku pracovných síl a po druhé, efektívne sa javia byť existujúce verejné fóra alebo besedy s manažérmi z personálnych oddelení.

Udržateľnosť. Niektoré aspekty programu, predovšetkým senzibilizácia a časť individuálnych rozpočtov pre zamestnancov/mentees môžu financovať samotní zamestnávatelia, zatiaľ čo iné si vyžadujú externé financovanie. Využívaním dobrovoľných mentorov vieme podstatne znížiť závislosť od externej finančnej podpory. Organizácia Bagázs v Maďarsku dokáže takto v celom programe naďalej pokračovať, zatiaľ čo na Slovensku sa niektoré aspekty tohto prístupu



premietnu do nového projektu na podporu sociálneho podnikania v znevýhodnených regiónoch.

Skvalitňovanie služieb. Šírenie informácií medzi mimovládnyimi organizáciami bude pokračovať, avšak šírenie informácií o projekte na vnútroštátnej úrovni si bude vyžadovať, aby sa doň zapojili aj poskytovatelia verejných služieb. V Maďarsku existuje určitý priestor na to, aby sa tento prístup alebo jeho časť mohla začleniť do miestnych paktov zamestnanosti alebo miestnych projektov na rozvoj vysoko znevýhodnených malých regiónov.



INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this internal evaluation report is to assess the achievements of the project against the initial plans in order to draw lessons for continuing the further development and dissemination of our approach.

The report is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a summary of the aims and core activities of the project. Section 3 assesses the relevance of the project, while section 4 reviews the outputs and outcomes. Section 5 compares the original plan to what was actually implemented and discusses the main challenges. Section 6 pulls together all the threads to draw some lessons for further developing and disseminating the method.

The report is based on internal project documents (monitoring information, activity reports and memos), mentors' logs, interviews, and an external evaluation report (see details in Appendix 1). In the text we reference interviews by their number provided in the Appendix. The report was prepared by Ágota Scharle and Eszter Szedlacsek and reviewed by project partners.

SUMMARY OF AIMS AND CORE ACTIVITIES

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

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 target group of the project was low educated (less than 12 years of completed formal education) Roma aged 16-30, living in a segregated settlement.

The project was coordinated by the Budapest Institute for Policy Analysis and built on the prior experience of mentoring developed by BAGázs, an NGO based in Hungary. The Slovak pilot was implemented by EPIC in Slovakia. The Salva Vita Foundation supported the development of training materials while the Hungarian Employers Forum on Equal Opportunities helped in contacting employers.

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 continues in the Hungarian locations.

In the first phase of the project, Bagázs and Salva vita co-developed the training materials for mentors and mentor coordinators and the script of a one-day sensitization workshop. In the next phase Bagázs and EPIC recruited mentors and mentees and trained them using (as a pilot of the training materials). In the third phase, Roma mentees received mentoring while the NGOs engaged prospective employers and offered them sensitization. In Hungary employers received group training for their HR unit and middle management and individual counselling to help integrate young Roma in the workplace.

Roma youth received continuous support from their mentors that continued after their employment. In the Hungarian pilot, mentors were involved on a voluntary basis and were



supported by paid mentor-coordinators. In Slovakia, these two roles were merged, mentors were professionals with prior experience (and/or training) in social work and were paid.

Outputs of the project included training materials, training sessions, mentoring. Outcomes included youths returning to school, getting hired and keeping their jobs. In more detail:

- training materials for (1) mentor training (2) mentor coordinator training (3) sensitising employers, in Hungarian and in Slovak.
- 37 mentors and 18 mentor coordinators 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.
- 43 young Roma participated in mentoring. In the Hungarian pilot, 33 participants received about 7 months of mentoring, in Slovakia, 10 participants received 4 months of mentoring on average.
- In Hungary nearly 70 % of participants 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.
- In Slovakia, only one participant 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.

RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT

This section explores whether the initial assumptions of the project concerning the possible obstacles of integrating Roma youth were correct, in the light of the field experience collected during the project.

The project was based on the assumption that there were both demand and supply side barriers hindering the labour market integration of low skilled Roma youth. On the supply side, low-educated Roma youth often lack even basic skills, and have little or no experience in formal employment. Also, they often have low self-esteem and weak job search skills.

On the demand side, lacking 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.

Further, some studies and the personal experience of the project team suggested that demand side measures to tackle discrimination are much less developed than supply side programmes, whether public or private ([RCM Report for Hungary](#), 2018). In both pilot countries, 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.

The field experiences collected during project implementation largely confirmed these initial assumptions.

On the supply side, we found that (1) even otherwise job-ready Roma may lack confidence, information and job-search skills that make it difficult for them to find a job. Roma youth living in segregated communities may often lack motivation and are easily influenced by family members. The perception of traditional gender roles may make it difficult for Roma women to take up paid work or to go to work on their own. Also, limited mobility (lack of suitable public transport, lack of driving license) in commuting to nearby jobs was confirmed as a strong constraint.¹

In the Slovak pilot, low motivation was also reported as a general constraint, however, it is difficult to disentangle that from the fact that EPIC mentors had very little time to build up trust in their target community.

In some cases, the employability or work motivation of Roma youth is affected by problems that are difficult to tackle by mentoring alone. In both pilots, some mentees used drugs, and suitable drug rehabilitation services were not readily available and accessible to them. In the Slovak case, the welfare system has some loopholes that (combined with the difficulties of getting a stable job), create an incentive for claiming disability or nursing allowance on fake or exaggerated health reasons. These allowances are relatively small, but provide a stable income, which, in the short run may seem a better choice than getting an unstable job. Moreover, these allowances cannot be combined with registered employment, which imposes a strong disincentive to taking up registered work.

Still on the supply side, we found that the existing capacity of NGOs to support Roma youth is very limited. This emerged in connection to measuring the impact of the method. When we started working with employers and tried to develop an experimental setup that would involve multiple units of the same employer dispersed across the country, we tried to engage NGOs outside the areas that Bagázs was able to serve. This effort was not successful, partly because the employer pulled out of the project, but also because we could not find suitable mentors in the locations designated by the employer. This suggests first that the choice of additional pilot areas should be based on the location of suitable service providers. Second, even when we extended our search to public service providers, we could not find sufficient interest and capacity to provide mentoring to Roma youth. This suggests that there is a need for capacity building and possibly a need for revising the conditions and contents of the Youth Guarantee programme (which, in principle, should provide such support to those in need).

On the demand side, we found that hiring of Roma youth may be hindered by a variety of factors. First, there seems to be a general lack of interest by employers, which may be due to a mixture of misinformation, lack of awareness and negative attitudes. We found that it was relatively difficult to engage employers to participate in dissemination events. In some companies, HR leaders were open to cooperation, but some members of their top

¹ Getting to work can be difficult, even if costs are reimbursed. Most mentees do not have a driving license or a car, so they must use public transport or find a mate who has a car. A 15 minute car ride may take an hour by public transport and often involves walking alone after dusk (which may be dangerous). To address this difficulty, some mentees became increasingly motivated to pursue their own driving license.



management blocked further cooperation. Also, several firms reported that they had no problem with recruiting Roma and already had some Roma employees – while they were not aware of potential obstacles in their hiring practices or the negative attitudes of their middle management (who had stakes in the hiring procedure).

Second, at the very practical level, we came across several critical elements in the hiring process and in work arrangements where barriers may emerge:

- skill requirements are defined in terms of school education rather than skills, excluding youth that did not completed primary school
- age limits that exclude youth aged below 18
- flexibility in working time arrangements (part time, shift work, paid leave, etc)
- flexibility in hiring two or more Roma youth (who often prefer to work together)
- support in commuting
- flexibility and support in obtaining the necessary documents such as identity card, national insurance, clearance certificate, health certificate, etc. which are required for formal work.

Third, in some cases, we met outright the objection of middle managers and staff against hiring Roma, based on prejudice or misinformation.

Importantly, the sensitization training for employers was designed and implemented in a way to allow trainers to adjust the contents flexibly. This proved important as attitudes towards hiring Roma varied widely, even across the units of the same employer. In some locations, the prospective employer was ready for discussing the practical aspects of how to adjust the hiring process or the work requirements to support, Roma candidates, or hiring, while in other locations the training focused on identifying and discussing fears and misinformation about the Roma.

In our judgement, the approach developed in the project provides a relevant, but incomplete answer to the above listed challenges. In broad terms, the approach can tackle both supply and demand side barriers. On the supply side, the approach includes the initial assessment and preparation of the mentee by an experienced case-worker, mentoring, and a small budget for any person-specific expenses that are considered indispensable for improving the employability of the mentee (such as course fees for getting a driving license). On the demand side, it includes contacting and sensitizing employers. However, the approach may need to be further developed in the following areas (to be described in more detail in section 6):

- (1) as the Slovak pilot suggests, mentoring can evoke and sustain motivation only if it builds on a trustful relationship, not only between the mentee and the mentor, but with the wider community. Building trust takes time and sustained presence in the community.
- (2) even at times of labour shortage, employers are difficult to engage, so the programme may need to be supplemented with more detailed guidelines on how to identify and engage potential employers.



- (3) it emerged from the Hungarian pilot that it is important to clearly distinguish the role of mentor coordinators from mentors, and the initial phase of preparing candidates for mentoring from the actual mentoring phase
- (4) as noted by the external evaluator, it may be useful to tackle discrimination more directly and provide tools to mentors and mentees in handling explicit or covert discriminatory behavior or prejudice at the workplace.

ACTIVITIES, OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

The main outputs and outcomes of the project are listed in the table below. Importantly, the primary focus of the project was to develop, document and test the combined approach of mentoring and sensitisation, which justified its small scale in terms of number of Roma youth involved.

Table 1. Overview of main outputs and outcomes as planned and implemented

Planned outputs and outcomes	Implementation	Details and issues
Course material for mentor training	✓	off-line and online versions
Course material for NGO experts	✓	coordinator training
Course material for sensitising HR professionals	✓	workshop script
Course material for sensitising co-workers and superiors	✓	consultation rather than course
Short videos for training	✓	4 videos, potential for multi-purpose use, but mainly in Hu
Mutual learning workshops	✓	limited transfer of experience bw Hu and Sk due to different timing and context and also language barriers and pandemic
Mentor training courses in SK	✓	
NGO/Coordinator training in SK	✓	
Sensitisation/HR training in SK		only one person was trained, online
Individualised sensitisation in SK		no participants were hired by a sensitised employer
Roma youth mentored and hired in SK		10 (of planned 20) mentees, noone was hired,
Mentor training courses in HU	✓	
NGO/Coordinator training in HU	✓	NGOs showed little interest in in-depth training, maybe due to pandemic
Sensitisation/HR training courses in HU	✓	
Individualised sensitisation in HU	✓	75% of those hired received individualised sensitisation of their employer
Roma youth mentored and hired in Hu	✓	33 (of planned 30) mentees, 5 of them aged 31-35* Of 33, 70% got a job interview, 61% got hired

**Bagázs reported 3 additional mentees aged 39-49, who we did not include in the official reports (ie. the total number was 36).*



First phase: developing training materials

The quality of the training materials was ensured by several reviews and testing. The first draft of the materials was prepared by Bagázs experts, in cooperation with Salva vita. Experts of the Budapest Institute and, in the case of the sensitization training, HR professionals invited by MEF commented on first drafts. These materials were then used by Bagázs trainers, and adjusted on the basis of their experience. The materials were then translated into Slovak for EPIC, who adjusted them for their needs. For mentors, EPIC needed slightly different materials as they hired trained social workers to work as paid mentors, i.e., in their case the role of paid caseworker and volunteer mentors was merged into one.²

As already noted in the previous section, the methodological materials did not contain detailed guidelines on identifying and engaging suitable employers. However, the project accumulated some useful experience in this areas, which may serve as the basis for developing such a guide.

As the training phase continued after the lockdown imposed during the COVID pandemic, online versions were developed for all the training materials, except for the group sensitization training. Though these are highly interactive materials that work much better in an in-person setup, the online versions also proved fairly effective, according to Bagázs experts.

Second phase: recruiting participants

In the second phase of the project, Bagázs and EPIC recruited mentees, mentors, and prospective employers as participants. These processes were quite different in the two pilot countries, reflecting differences in the initial setup.

In Hungary, Bagázs worked in two locations, Bag and Dány. In Bag, they could rely on several years of sustained presence in the Roma community and a host of supporting services (kids mentoring for school, debt management service, women's club etc) that helped them in several ways: ensured the initial level of trust, facilitated reaching out to prospective mentees, and supported caseworkers in working with prospective mentees (where they needed to improve skills or motivation before starting the mentoring process). In Dány, Bagázs had a much shorter prior experience and fewer supporting services were available at the time of starting this project, but the Roma community was somewhat less disadvantaged in terms of employability (i2). Still, they managed to engage mentees in the expected numbers.

The recruitment of volunteer mentees proved relatively difficult during the project, but Bagázs managed to solve this by repeating the calls and training and also by reorganizing mentor-mentee assortment. In particular, they changed the original setup of each mentor having only one mentee, and allocated 2-3 mentees to each mentor. This required somewhat more time to invest on the part of mentors but proved more effective as it meant that mentors could schedule meetings in a way to meet several mentees on one visit and thereby reduce overall travel time and unsuccessful visits. Besides, mentors can be more flexible in giving time to mentees when they need it. Mentees are in various life stages and may require a different intensity of mentoring, e.g. while some mentees are almost ready to work (needing more intense mentorship in a shorter period of time), others need more time to find motivation,

² The initial plan was to discuss the training materials in a joint workshop, so that EPIC may provide detailed feedback, but this did not happen, partly due to the constraints imposed by the pandemic.



overcome skills- and personal life-related matters (needing less intense mentorship in longer period of time). Thus, mentors' workload can be more evenly allocated if they have several mentees.

The recruitment of employers relied partly on the existing contacts of Bagázs (namely, with a local employer that had hired Roma beforehand) and the HR club of MEF, where the method was presented on several occasions. This proved relatively effective: Bagázs negotiated with implementing the method with 4 prospective employers and in all the four cases, first contact was made during an interactive workshop organized as part of the MEF conference of 2018. However, only one of these employers showed sustained commitment to cooperate with Bagázs, while the others stepped back during or shortly after the preparatory stage. This suggests that the method of engaging employers needs to be further developed.

In Slovakia, EPIC had considerable prior experience with mentoring and working with youth, but limited experience in working with Roma. It took them some time to find a suitable settlement and, in retrospect, their choice was probably not optimal, as the Roma community there was highly segregated and had little trust in outsiders. They managed to build good cooperation with the local community centre who helped them to find prospective mentees and allowed them to use their space for meetings. However, recruitment took more time than expected, especially when some mentees dropped out and recruitment had to be relaunched. In later stages, the mentor coordinator and the mentors took initiative and looked for potential mentees themselves. Also, as the Roma had limited trust in the community centre, EPIC mentors first needed to build trust, which again took much time. The community center was very helpful at the beginning, but less so after a change of their manager, which was later resolved by contacting the municipality (i.8).

The recruitment of mentors also proved difficult, partly due to the original concept of hiring paid mentors and using a one-to-one setup. This turned out impractical as it implied that each mentor would be paid only a few hours a week, which was only feasible for people with a part time job or a relatively less demanding full time job. This has been resolved by the need for more intense casework and mentoring (as compared to the Hungarian pilot). As mentioned formerly, EPIC mentors needed more time to build trust in the Orechov Dvor community and to develop the employability of mentees. To overcome initial challenges in the engagement of mentees, mentors increased mentoring time and met mentees more often than originally planned. Mentors received support from a professional coach in tackling the difficulties.

Finding interested employers proved especially difficult in Slovakia. EPIC approached Drogerie Markt, Nestlé, Tesco Stores and Billa, who were either not interested in the project or did not have open positions/had staff cuts. Though Epic invested considerable efforts, they managed to find only one employer that was open to cooperation. This was a foreign-owned car manufacturer (Jaguar Land Rover) that was in the course of expanding their production and was interested in hiring some additional workers. Also, they had already had some experience in hiring Roma.

Third phase: working with youth

As finding employers, working with Roma youth proved more challenging in the Slovak pilot than in the Hungarian one. This was likely due to the same reasons: the longer experience of



Bagázs with working with these communities and their broader services that engaged the whole community, and possibly also due to the different levels of expectations and openness of the Roma communities towards the non-Roma society.

In Hungary, Bagázs overcame the difficulties that incurred in the mentoring phase by adjusting their approach. Firstly, they widened the scope of mentoring to cover any personal difficulties that mentees faced in order to increase their employability later on. Secondly, they made efforts to include several members of mentees' family, as that proved helpful in keeping their motivation. Thirdly, their initial goal-oriented approach was transformed into a more person-oriented approach. In Hungary, the spring lockdown did not cause a major disruption: after a short break in March, mentoring continued during the pandemic as well.

The availability of having a small budget for financing any costs related to improving job-readiness proved useful, as expected. They typically used this budget for financing travel costs (e.g. for travel to job interviews or work), or paying course fees (in most cases for drivers' license or certified OKJ courses) and doctors' fees such as drug rehabilitation or Hepatitis/Covid19HEPA tests.

In Slovakia, this phase was challenging as mentors started from a low level of trust, limited knowledge of the local Roma community and no, or limited contacts with families and peers of their mentees. This proved an important constraint not only as they needed time to first build trust, but also as in many cases mentees dropped out or lost motivation due to pressure from their families (who themselves had no trust in the mentors). The pandemic posed further difficulties as during the spring lockdown the Roma community was practically abandoned by public service providers and uncertainty increased to such levels that undermined motivation for investing in training or employment. When mentors attempted to reconnect with their mentees after the lockdown, they found that it became increasingly difficult to communicate with mentees (they did not show up for pre-agreed meetings or could not be reached via phone or online), and finally the mentoring process ended as none of the mentees were willing to continue in the programme.

The fact that Slovakia employed paid mentors was itself a source of problems as it reduced the room for flexibly adjusting mentoring effort to the needs and circumstances of mentees. This may however be somewhat remedied by allocating more mentees to a mentor. However, it may be worthwhile to test the feasibility of voluntary mentoring in Slovakia as well.

Fourth phase: working with employers, continued support for youth

The sensitization of employers was limited to a few online meetings with one HR professional (of Jaguar) in the Slovak case. In Hungary, Bagázs managed to engage several employers and several training sessions were held, in total involving around 120 participants. Negotiations started with Tesco, Auchan and the Hungarian Post Office. In effect, sensitization took place at the Hungarian Post Office (7 HR professionals and 3 managers) and Tesco (3 training courses for HR professionals and co-workers). A fourth employer, Zöld Híd did not officially participate in sensitization trainings, however mentors and the mentor coordinator engaged in sensitization activities with the employer during regular communication.



The sensitization workshops were planned to include HR managers and middle management, occasionally also team leaders (the immediate superiors of prospective Roma employees.) Rather than changing attitudes (which was considered unrealistic or outright impossible), the aim of the workshops was to discuss any potential fears and misinformation, difficulties that may arise during or after hiring Roma workers and ways to tackle these.

Bagázs reported that the sensitization workshops were generally very useful and contributed to preparing participants. The specific benefits of the sensitization sessions varied depending on the specific location and team. Tesco reported that the sessions helped their HR managers uncover issues in their existing hiring practices. . On one occasion, where the training included co-workers as well, several participants were able to voice their concerns not only regarding potential Roma colleagues but also the general working environment. The workshops were held jointly by an HR trainer and Bagázs staff, which helped them in adjusting the content flexibly (in some cases on the spot) to the needs of the group.

In the case of Magyar Posta, the sensitization training was financed by the project. In the case of Tesco, the employer paid Bagázs approx. EUR 3235 (HUF 1 150 000) for the sensitization package covering training and consultation for HR professionals, managers and co-workers (buddies): 2 sensitization sessions for HR managers, 6 project management support sessions (regular communication between mentor coordinator/mentor and employer) and 2 co-worker sessions.

It was important that mentors continued their support even after mentees started working. In several cases, mentors were contacted by the employer to discuss problems and mentors were able to support both the employers and mentees in finding a solution. When mentees would fail to go to work for their scheduled shifts, mentors would contact the employer and discuss the difficulties with them. For example, when a mentee fell ill but could not see a doctor due to restrictions imposed due to the pandemic, the mentor informed the employer and the mentee could keep her job. In several other cases, when mentees found it difficult to communicate with the employer, mentors acted as intermediaries. Mentor coordinators were also in regular contact with the employers, which helped to tackle problems in time.

Monitoring progress and measuring outcomes and impact

Regarding monitoring and measurement, the project involved the following activities:

- brief quarterly activity reports
- development of baseline, progress and outcome questionnaires tested in both Hu and Sk
- development of skill measurement tool, tested in both Hu and Sk
- mentors' logs: discussion on the contents in Hu, Bagázs started using Airtable
- development of before/after questionnaire for sensitization workshop, testing in Hu
- detailed impact evaluation strategy (including choice of control group) discussed with employer but not implemented



Difficulties in data collection

In our original plans, we aimed to collect detailed information on the two pilots that we hoped to use in the quantitative evaluation. Thus, we prepared detailed questionnaires to measure change in the mentees position, as well as in employers who received sensitization.

We found it difficult to collect information that went beyond the basic project monitoring practices familiar to all participants, but we did manage to collect quite rich information on mentees and the mentoring process in the Hungarian pilot. We also managed to test the sensitization survey, collecting responses before and after one workshop and before another. Difficulties emerged due to a variety of factors:

- casework and mentoring is based on trust and relaxed communication, and mentors felt they risk this if they start asking fairly personal questions at the beginning
- often mentees are not competent in grasping questions or feel tense replying to questions regarding their competencies, which may lead them to give incorrect information
- caseworkers and mentors are often very busy and have limited time for documenting what they do even when they agree with the importance of data collection
- in some cases loss of contacts, dropout from the programme makes it difficult or impossible to collect follow-up information from mentees
- employers want practical and fast solutions to their problems, so it is difficult to engage them in data collection, which they perceive at best as a long term investment. Also, employers had no obligation to participate in data collection.
- mentors believed that the progress survey repeated every 3 months did not fully capture the actual progress of mentees and thus were reluctant to fill these in. In particular, though the survey records any employment spell within the past period, mentors may have thought that current employment is the most valued outcome.
- the sensitization survey was very short, but asked about attitudes, as well as knowledge about Roma jobseekers – this may have been perceived risky by employers (or respondents).
- in general terms, evidence based decision making is not wide-spread in either country, so that many people are unaware of or unused to the tools and methods needed for reliable measurement and evaluation, nor the benefits of using such methods. Thus tend to be less open to cooperating in such efforts.

Some of these difficulties may be eased, e.g. by signing a formal agreement with employers that included data collection, or by timing the baseline questionnaire to end of the preparatory phase, just before the start of the mentoring process, and to be filled in by the caseworker (who, in most cases had already established a trustful relationship with the candidate).

The project also recorded some positive development in data collection. Inspired by our discussions of the importance of regularly documenting the mentoring process, Bagázs found an electronic tool to support that, and started using it regularly. This greatly facilitated the collection of very detailed information on the content and achievements of mentoring in the Hungarian pilot.



Content, quality and timing of questionnaires

The content of the questionnaires and surveys was piloted in Hungary and then translated into Slovak for EPIC. The Budapest Institute designed the questionnaires, which were first tested by Bagázs and corrected according to their feedback. The baseline questionnaires to be filled in for mentees were considered useful and relevant in both pilots, especially for mentor coordinators who had less prior experience of the settlement/mentees. The questionnaire on progress by mentees proved less relevant at least in the Slovak pilot. In the Hungarian pilot, later analysis showed that these questionnaires captured some progress in the psychosocial dimensions, though the sample was too small to link these to other outcomes (such as job search or employment). However, even in the Hungarian case, it may be enough to repeat the progress-questionnaires in 4-6 months, rather than in 3 months, as we did. EPIC also proposed that we should add further dimensions to the progress questionnaires in order to capture small developments.³ This is worth exploring though the underlying problem was probably that EPIC started their work as a “green field” project, so progress was much slower.

We also developed simple assessment tools to measure the lack of basic reading and writing skills. In both pilots, we found that these can be potentially useful, allowing mentor-coordinators to make a more informed decision on the need for remedial skills training. At the same time, as some mentees lack basic reading and writing skills, the assessment needs to be postponed until the end of preparatory casework or embedded in casework in a way to avoid an exam-like situation, which potential mentees may feel stressful or humiliating.

Impact evaluation

The original plan was to use counterfactual quantitative methods to evaluate the impact of sensitization and/or the combined impact of mentoring and sensitization. This proved more difficult than originally hoped, for two reasons: we could not engage any employer to commit to a systematically developed experiment (and collect data on a treatment and control group) and we could not find mentors in the locations selected by employers as the place for a potential pilot.

The evaluation strategy that we developed required a fairly large employer that had a high number of local units, such as retailers or the Hungarian postal service. The main idea was to randomly select some units to receive sensitization on recruiting Roma and compare the change in their recruitment practices to other units that received no such treatment (see more detail in Appendix 2).

In the first attempt, we started discussions with a food store chain, whose deputy HR manager was very open to the project and committed to developing the company’s diversity strategy. Together with them, we developed a detailed plan of selecting control and treatment groups and identified shops in the chain that were suitably located to take mentees supported by Bagázs. Unfortunately, just as we were about to fix the dates for training sessions in November 2018, the company asked for a postponement due to their busy pre-Christmas schedule and then, in January, they decided to withdraw from the project. As we found out, this was

³ In fact, this was probably relevant in the Hungarian pilot as well. For example, 3 mentees completed the course for their driving license but failed to pass the examination. Their mentors stressed that the course itself was still a great opportunity to elicit change in mentees’ lives and also helped them to explore mentees’ motivation, strength and weaknesses.



because the HR manager we negotiated with could not get the final approval from their superiors.

In the second attempt, the Budapest Institute managed to engage Magyar Posta as a partner. With them we agreed to start with a pilot in one location and if successful, expand the project to other locations, in a way that would allow us to measure the impact of sensitization. Together with them, we chose a pilot location that seemed ideal as Posta faced labour shortage, there was a sizeable Roma community within an easily commutable distance, the local job centre had a Roma coordinator who was willing to cooperate with us and the municipality also had a track record of openness towards Roma integration. Following a long process of negotiations, in September 2019, Bagázs held the sensitization workshop involving central management and the managers of the pilot location, a logistical centre. In this case we ran into difficulties in recruiting Roma youth in the neighbourhood of the pilot location and also in finding mentors to support them.

Third, Bagázs engaged Tesco and started working with the regional leaders managing the stores in the vicinity of Bag and Dány (where Bagázs mentees live). In their case, the company was very open and took a very practical and flexible approach that focused on removing barriers to hiring suitable candidates, but showed no interest to systematic data collection and testing of the method. Also, while the regional managers were very open, we could not secure the support of their central management, which would have been necessary for achieving a meaningful sample size for a controlled experiment.

To conclude, the original evaluation plan proved infeasible. The main constraint seems to be that mentoring capacities are scarce or not necessarily available in the locations where employers have suitable local units. Removing this constraint would require considerable resources and support/commitment from the government. If that proves hard to obtain, there may be a second-best remedy, which is to measure the impact of sensitization only, without mentoring. As low skilled Roma and especially those living in segregated communities almost always need some preparation and mentoring before they are job-ready, this is only feasible if we focus on a less disadvantaged group, such as Roma youth with some vocational training, living in towns or cities. In their case, (inadvertent or intentional) discrimination is still a constraint to hiring, as well as job retention. In such a setup, sensitization may be supplemented by training buddies or peer mentors (to be employed by the company themselves), who may provide support to newly hired Roma in the first months of employment.



SUMMARY OF THE MAIN CHALLENGES

This chapter provides a brief summary of the main challenges encountered during the project and the main differences between the plan and the actual implementation.

(1) Lack of baseline level of trust and cooperation in the Slovak pilot location

As explained in Chapter 4, EPIC had no prior experience in the pilot location and started from scratch in working with Roma youth in the settlement. This meant that the progressed much slower than expected and also that the uncertainty induced by the Covid crisis wiped out most of the results of their work. As a result they could engage only 10 mentees instead of the planned 20 and could not place any of them.

(2) The Covid pandemic

Mentoring was still ongoing at the time of the first lockdown in March-May 2020, in both pilots. In both countries mentors attempted to stay in contact using mobile phones mainly. In the Hungarian case, this was more successful as mentees were open to resuming the mentoring process via regular video chats and phone calls, so mentors did not lose touch with them. Some mentors were able to visit during the summer as well, while others resumed personal visits to the settlement in the autumn. In the Slovak case, mentors found it increasingly difficult to find contact with mentees both virtually (e.g. on the phone) and personally during and after the spring lockdown, and mentoring practically ceased by August.

The pandemic and related restrictions also impacted on the organization of training courses and communication events. Training materials were converted into online formats and all such events moved to online channels. This may have reduced effectiveness, to some extent, but had some advantages as well. Namely, some dissemination events attracted an unexpectedly broad audience, some of whom would not have been able to travel to an in-person event held in Budapest or Bratislava.

(3) Difficulties in engaging employers

As anticipated in the project plan, it was difficult to engage employers. In the Hungarian case, the pre-existing network of MEF proved crucial, as it provided a forum for meeting potentially interested employers. The lack of support from such a network in Slovakia may explain why Epic could engage only one employer and also contributed to the difficulty of getting job offers for their mentees. This difficulty was also part of the reason why we could not implement a counterfactual evaluation.

(4) Difficulties in engaging NGOs

It was also difficult to engage NGOs (other than project partners) to participate in mentoring (in Hungary) or in transferring the method to other organisations and regions (in both countries). This difficulty was not anticipated. In retrospect, it may have been due partly to the general lack of stable funding for social NGOs, which implies that they have limited resources for learning or testing new methods, unless they get dedicated funding for such



activities. The pandemic may have also contributed to the limited interest of NGOs in participating in intensive courses on the method, in that it created a general uncertainty, making it difficult for NGOs to plan their future activities and start new projects.

LESSONS AND OPTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

This chapter reviews the main lessons that emerged from the project focusing on those that concern the potential further development and up-scaling of the method.

1.1. Mentoring. Using paid or volunteer mentors

The first lesson is that, when working with disadvantaged communities, there is a need for much preparatory work before job-focused mentoring can begin. This should involve general community development to gain the trust of the Roma community, and also individual specific casework to prepare potential mentees: assess and develop skills and tackle any other barriers to work and develop their commitment to participating in the programme.

The second lesson is about paying mentors. The Hungarian pilot used volunteer mentors, while the Slovak pilot hired paid mentors. Both worked well in terms of ensuring commitment and motivation on the part of mentors. The lack of tangible results in the Slovak pilot cannot be attributed to the fact that mentors were paid (but to other factors). As Slovak mentors worked in a location where EPIC had no prior contact with the community (as opposed to Bagázs), we cannot compare the achievements of paid versus volunteer mentors. However, the achievements of volunteer mentors in Hungary (they managed to support several mentees in getting and keeping a job, and also managed to stay in touch with them during and after the lockdown) suggests that, where feasible, unpaid mentoring can be effective.

Also, in a small scale programme, using paid mentors induces a constraint on adjusting mentoring flexibly to the needs of mentees. More concretely: paid mentors need a contract and receive a salary, which (at least partly) is their livelihood, so they expect to be paid regularly. So, when mentees drop out or need less attention in a period, mentors may have little to do, but will still be paid – which is demotivating for them, and also reduces the cost-effectiveness of the programme. (Note that this is much less of a problem if the programme involves a higher number of mentees.)

Lastly, also related to flexibility, it seems more efficient to have each mentor work with 2-3 mentees (rather than one-to-one).

1.2. Sensitisation

Sensitisation of employers proved useful. One important lesson there was that as that some employers or teams may be more and others may be less prepared to hire Roma workers. Less prepared teams need a more general training focusing on their fears and perceptions of potential problems, while more prepared teams can already start working on the practical issues of how to recruit and keep Roma colleagues. This highlights the usefulness of conducting a survey on existing attitudes before the training, and also of involving a professional trainer who can improvise and adjust the training content to the needs of the



group.

1.3. Strengthening the programme with further elements

During the project, through discussions with project partners and employers, we identified some elements that were not explicitly included in the programme at the planning stage, but later proved essential, or helpful in certain contexts. These include:

- casework (as separate from mentoring) to prepare potential mentees so that they are ready for job search and work when mentoring begins; caseworkers are also responsible for supporting and coordinating mentors
- identifying and engaging employers; this element was part of our initial plans but not identified as a separate task in the training modules. As this proved to be one of the most difficult tasks in the project, we now think the training for caseworkers should be supplemented with such a module.
- reviewing the recruitment process to find any elements that may hinder Roma applicants, and offering advice to employers on how to remove or adjust them. This requires HR expertise.
- training buddies, or peer mentors for a particular employer. Some large employers already have a system of buddies to support new recruits, but even in such a case they may need some additional training in supporting disadvantaged Roma youth.
- exploring any prior negative experience with hiring Roma in a particular employer and providing support in processing the experience. This requires expertise in collaborative problem-solving techniques.
- offering support in communicating the launch of a Roma hiring project within a firm. This may be especially necessary in a large employer that uses formalized HR diversity programmes and wishes to introduce such a programme for Roma.
- in the training of coordinators and mentors, discuss the situation when mentees meet prejudice in the workplace and develop tools that help both mentors and mentees in handling such situations

1.4. Engaging employers

We identified two effective routes for engaging employers. The first is based on proximity: employers that are based very near the Roma settlement and likely to have some information about the Roma community, may be approached successfully, especially if they are facing labour shortage. The second is based on professional networks. We found that dedicated events or email messages directly targeting HR managers generated very little attention, i.e. HR managers were not willing to invest much time in learning about how to hire Roma. However, when we participated in popular professional events that functioned as an important forum for HR professionals to meet, and had an opportunity to present the method, we achieved much higher attendance. This seems an important lesson for the further dissemination of the method, i.e. that we should use existing fora of HR professionals.

1.5. Sustainability and upscaling

Though the whole programme cannot be made self-sustainable, some of its elements can. Casework, mentor recruitment, training and mentor-coordination requires external funding,



while sensitisation and some part of the individual budgets for mentees may be financed by employers, either using their budget for Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives, or as an investment into tackling severe labour shortages. Hiring voluntary mentors can substantially reduce the need for external financial support.

In Hungary, Bagázs has already negotiated with one of the employers to finance their sensitisation training and intends to continue the programme using various grants to finance their paid coordinators. In Slovakia, EPIC has no funding to continue the programme especially as mentors were paid, this would require more resources. However, the trainer and the trained mentors themselves may continue to use the experience and skills they acquired during the programme. EPIC can use the experience and contacts gained through the project in a new initiative focusing on social enterprise in less developed regions through developing core skills and entrepreneurial competencies. This new project entitled “CERUSI”⁴ will support social economy initiatives in areas that face high unemployment and poor living conditions, such as the Nitra region and the Orechov Dvor settlement in the case of Slovakia. Contacts to stakeholders, mentors and mentees as well as methods acquired in the Hopes for Low project will be used to enhance social entrepreneurship in the area.

Bagázs plans to approach some NGOs that use similar methods and offer their support if they wish to adapt this programme. The training materials are published online and accessible to all. The national upscaling of the programme would require capacities that are not available in the NGO sector. In Hungary, there are two current initiatives that may usefully incorporate elements on this programme: a) local employment pacts that include mentoring and outreach for disadvantaged jobseekers and inactive people, and b) local development projects for highly disadvantaged small regions. In our dissemination efforts so far we targeted the first group, with little success. As for the second initiative, we first need to get some information on their methods to see if it is compatible with our approach.

⁴ For more information on this project see: <https://epic-org.eu/en/cerusi-2/>



APPENDIX 1 LIST OF DATA AND INFORMATION USED FOR THE INTERNAL EVALUATION

INTERVIEWS

- i1. Emőke Both, project coordinator in Bagázs (Ernő Kadét)
- i2. Anna Votisky, mentor coordinator in Bagázs (Ernő Kadét)
- i3. Ádám Balogh, project coordinator in Salva Vita (Ernő Kadét)
- i4. two mentees (Ernő Kadét)
- i5. five mentees (Emőke Both)
- i6. Tesco employee (Emőke Both)
- i7. Zuzana Vojtasova, coach in Slovak pilot (Veronika Vass-Vígh)
- i8. Arnold Ponesz, former project manager at EPIC (Veronika Vass-Vígh)

MEMOS OF RELEVANT PROJECT MEETINGS

ACTIVITY REPORTS

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT BY ERNŐ KADÉT

MONITORING DATA (SEE APPENDIX 2)

MENTORS' INTERNAL LOGS OF MENTORING PROCESS



APPENDIX 2 SUMMARY OF MONITORING DATA

Code name	Sex	Age	Residence	Education (grades)	Barriers (1=yes)			months of mentoring	Outcome:			Employer received	
					care responsibilities	addiction	debt		job interview	hired	retained job for 3 months	group sensitisation	individualised sensitisation
1TB	male	23	Bag	7	0	1	1*	13	0	0	0	0	0
2LA	female	25	Bag	12	1	0	1	15	1	0	0	0	0
6HB	female	27	Dány	8	1	0	1	6	0	0	0	0	0
7NA	female	29	Dány	6	1	0	n/a	3	0	0	0	0	0
8MA	female	19	Dány	7	1	0	0	9	1	0	0	0	1
10HA	female	32	Dány	8	1	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
14DB	male	27	Dány	8	0	0	1	9	0	0	0	0	0
16FM	female	16	Bag	8	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	1	1
19CJ	female	25	Dány	7	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0
21TA	female	26	Dány	8	1	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0
23AD	male	17	Bag	8	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
27BJ	female	19	Bag	10	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
34VP	female	18	Dány	9	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
4CL	male	30	Bag	12	0	1	0	15	1	1	1	0	1
5FL	male	35	Bag	7	0	1	1	15	1	1	1	0	0
11BS	female	31	Dány	3	0	0	0	6	1	1	1	0	1
12AS	female	25	Dány	11	0	0	0	6	1	1	1	0	0
13GF	female	27	Dány	8	1	0	1	9	1	1	1	0	1
20CA	male	23	Dány	9	0	0	n/a	9	1	1	0	0	1
25KJ	female	26	Bag	8	1	0	1	12	1	1	1	0	0
3KB	male	23	Bag	8	1	0	1	15	1	1	0	1	1
9KA	female	23	Dány	10	1	0	1	9	1	1	1	1	1
15JN	male	17	Bag	7	0	0	0	3	1	1	0	1	1
17BT	female	29	Bag	10	0	0	n/a	4	1	1	1	1	1
18DT	female	23	Bag	11	0	0	1	4	1	1	1	1	1
22EK	female	18	Bag	8	0	0	0	4	1	1	1	1	1
24MK	female	32	Bag	5	0	0	1	12	1	1	0	1	1
26ME	male	20	Bag	12	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	1
28CE	female	34	Bag	0	0	0	1	7	1	1	0	1	1
31AA	female	17	Dány	8	0	0	0	5	1	1	0	1	0
33TA	female	27	Dány	10	1	0	1	7	1	1	0	1	0
35MA	female	16	Dány	8	0	0	0	6	1	1	1	1	1
36KA	female	26	Dány	8	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
29RR	male	44	Kecskemét	8	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
30ZR	male	39		8	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
32BA	female	48	Dány	3	1	0	1	5	1	0	0	1	0
total Hungary		24.4		8.2	36%	9%	47%	7.3	69.7%	61%	39%	42%	52%
not hired		23.3		8.2	54%	8%	42%	6.9	23.1%				
all hired		28.1		8.3	29%	29%	50%	10.3	100%	100%	86%		75%
1	female	16	OD*	8	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
2	male	19	OD	8	0	0	0	9	1	1	1	0	0
3	female	20	OD	6	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
4	male	23	OD	6	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
5	female	32	OD	8	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
6	male	32	OD	7	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
7	male	24	OD	6	1	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0
8	male	24	OD	6	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
9	male	22	OD	8	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
10	female	18	OD	8	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
11	male	37	OD	7	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0
total Slovakia		23		7.1	30%	10%	0%	3.75	0.1	0.1	0.1	0	0

*also, a criminal record; OD=Orechový Dvůr (Slovakia). Note: participants aged over 35 were disregarded in outcome indicators.



APPENDIX 3 IMPACT EVALUATION PLAN FOR THE H4L PROJECT

This evaluation plan was drafted by the Budapest Institute in August 2018, after negotiations with a food store chain (with over 400 local units in Hungary) and Bagázs.

The intervention

The project will develop a method of employment services for Roma youth and training materials for professionals (case workers/coordinators and mentors), develop training materials for sensitising employers regarding hiring of Roma and pilot the use of these methods in Hungary and Slovakia.

The intervention consists of three related services (preparing for a job, person-specific sensitisation and group sensitisation), all aimed at supporting the labour market integration of Roma youth. The primary target group is *low skilled* (primary or lower secondary, i.e. no “érettségi”/”maturita”) Roma youth aged 18-24.

In the evaluation, the focus is on measuring the impact of sensitisation for employers.

Table 1. Overview of potential outputs, outcomes and impacts

target group	output1	output2	outcome1	outcome2	outcome3	impact
roma youth	No. of youth prepared for work by caseworker (and mentor) ready for work, motivated	No. of job applications made by mentored youth	called in for interview	receive offer, accept offer	retains job, gets promotion, wage rise, training, moves to better job	outcomes compared to control group
employer	local store managers (LUM) participate in group sensitisation	discrimination-free job ad, selection and interview process	openness to hiring Roma; understanding of risks / issues involved	select and interview Roma candidates	hire Roma youth, retain Roma employee	outcomes compared to control group

Sample size

The project will directly engage at least 50 young people in Hungary (30) and Slovakia (20) and get at least 17 of them into work. No indicators were set for the number of employers.

Impacts to assess (as promised in the proposal)

The impact assessment will measure the impact of the project in two dimensions. First, it will assess the impact of the pilot training for HR professionals on participants’ awareness of diversity issues by



comparing the results of a questionnaire completed by participants before and after the workshop.

Second, it will assess the impact on HR practices by measuring the proportion of Roma youths invited for an interview and hired subsequently by participating employers and comparing results to those obtained in a suitable control group. The data will be analysed using regression analysis to control for any observable differences between the treatment and control groups (by Stata software).

Secondary issues:

We'll aim to assess the added value of having paid vs voluntary mentors (setup not ideal as country will also vary). We'd like to assess impact on job retention as well, but this is outside the project timeline.

Provisional timing of intervention (T1=Jan 2018)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
WS1 develop approach	x	x	x	x	x																			
WS2.1 translate into Sk						x	x	x	x															
WS2/3 training of caseworkers, mentors					x				x															
group sensitisation										x	x													
WS2.2 mentoring and sensitisation in Slovakia										x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x						
WS3.2 mentoring and sensitisation in Hungary										x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x						
monitor and evaluate										x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

The evaluation approach

A. We have so far developed the approach for Hungary. There will be two strands A and B explained below. In A) we only focus on group sensitisation, while in B) we measure the impact of both group and individual sensitisation. In both strands employers in the control group are randomly selected from among local shops. The impact is calculated as the difference between outcomes in the control and treatment groups, if necessary, controlling for any significant difference in the composition of participants.

Impact of group sensitisation

What they receive

Treatment Group (T)	group sensitisation	(mentoring)	personal sensitisation
Control Group (C)	x	(mentoring)	personal sensitisation

Treated (mentored) youth are encouraged to apply to jobs by both t and c employers, no person-specific personalisation offered to either group. We can do this with partner-NGOs that can offer mentoring but no sensitisation. Control is „typical situation”, Treatment provides improvement over



“typical”. The quality of the mentoring may not be as good as with Bagázs.

Employers: food store outside Bag/Dány area

Mentors: partner-NGOs working in the above locations, should get case-worker training by Bagázs

Ideally, NGOs use online application system of local shop, company centre assigns applicants to both treated and non-treated employers in the relevant geographical area.

Important: when we select participants (local shops) for group sensitisation, need to make sure to have C and G in each labour market area.

Also note that some local shops can offer a broader range of jobs.

Target number of treated employers (shops): 30, treated youth: 50

B. Impact of sensitisation (group + personal)

	What they receive		
Treatment Group (T)	group sensitisation	mentoring	personal sensitisation
Control Group (C)	x	mentoring	personal x sensitisation

Treated youth are encouraged to apply to jobs by both T and C employers, but get person-specific personalisation only if employer is treated. Note, that while the group sensitisation is limited to one session for employers, the personal sensitisation is individual-specific, which means that each time a Roma youth is hired, their employer will be sensitised (in one session/ new hire).

B1 Bag, Dány area

Employers: food store in Bag/Dány area, other employers in Bag/Dány area

(note that so far only this company can ensure that participants to group sensitisation are randomly selected and that we get data on application process and results. pairs of T and C employers to be the same in terms of attitudes before sensitisation and work environment)

Mentors: Bagázs

Bagázs caseworkers send applicants to shop and other employers. For this shop, they use online system or the company's HR centre to apply for jobs. For other employers need to send application to pairs of T and C employer

Target number of treated employers (shops): 5 (and 2-5 in the control), treated youth: 12-20

B2 Outside Bag, Dány area

Employers: food shops outside Bag/Dány area

Mentors: partner NGOs who are able to offer sensitisation as well (or Bagázs to do sensitisation in Budapest area?)

Target number of treated employers (shops): 10 (and 15 in the control), treated youth: 12-20

local shops of food chain store where training is advertised

around 50 shops in Zala, Somogy, Baranya counties, and 50-60 in Heves, Pest (south-east only) county, Budapest 7-10 and 19-21 districts

Group sensitisation I.

5 groups, 10-11 participants each, 40-45 from food chain store, 5-10 from other employers (in Bag/Dány area)

Time:

October 2018

Locations:

2 groups in Kaposvár, Pécs or Balatonlelle (South West of Hu)

3 groups in Budapest (can be held in BI office)

**Duration:**

7 hours

Trainers:

Bagázs in Budapest, others in 2 South-West groups

Aims:

- participants should reflect on how their current recruitment process may (unintendedly) make it difficult for Roma to be hired;
- participants should reflect on how themselves and their colleagues may be open to working with Roma
- discuss related worries and questions
- prepare for potential conflicts

Group sensitisation II.

for “food store” control group, 3 groups, 10-11 participants each, all from food chain store

note that this training will be paid by the food chain store and can be outside the project period

Time:

October 2019 (or spring of 2020, as required by food chain store)

Locations:

1 group in Kaposvár, Pécs or Balatonlelle (South West of Hu)

2 groups in Budapest (can be held in BI office)

Trainers:

Bagázs (may be someone else in South-West group if Bagázs does not want to do it)

Aim:

- participants should reflect on how themselves and their colleagues may be open to working with a Roma person
- discuss related worries and questions
- sensitise participants to particular circumstances that may occur in the case of the Roma youth they will work with that may influence his/her performance (e.g. the bus they commute with has an infrequent schedule so, if they miss the first, they will be very late for work). The circumstances discussed should be relevant for the particular employee but should be discussed in general.
- prepare participants to resolve potential conflicts