

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

**ON HOW TO INCREASE
THE ENROLLMENT AND
COMPLETION OF UNIVERSITY DEGREE
OF ROMA PEOPLE IN THE REPUBLIC
OF NORTH MACEDONIA**



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FOR THE PUBLISHER:

Goce Bogoevski

AUTHORS:

Vesna Shapkoski, Association LET STATION

Hristina Zdraveska, Association LET STATION

Djengis Berisha, Association LET STATION

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INTRODUCTION



The state of play of Roma graduates is a very important topic concerning one of the most marginalized communities in North Macedonia in relation with the level of education and employment as key factors for inclusion and empowerment of this community. Throughout the years, many efforts had been aimed at increasing the education and employment level of the Roma community as one of the major factors to overcoming poverty and social exclusion. However, the situation in this field is constantly changing and we need relevant data and recommendations to aim further activities and improvements in this area.

The recommendations in this document are based on previously conducted *Research on the state of play of Roma graduates* where accurate and time-relevant data are provided of the demographic and cultural characteristic of Roma community in the Republic of North Macedonia, current measures and policies in the area of education and employment targeting the Roma, the rates of enrolling/completing tertiary education, reasons and motivations among Roma population to continue their education, as well as the rates of employment/ unemployment of Roma graduated and their professions and the relation between these categories. These recommendations are aimed at decision-makers for adaptation of current and introduction of new measures and policies in the area of education and employment of Roma in order to provide effective and efficient improvements.

EDUCATION OF YOUNG ROMA

• *Current condition and statistical data*

When it comes to education of marginalized communities, the state has introduced various affirmative measures to increase and support the access to education for all. Affirmative measures are applied in order to overcome discrimination and exclusion of children and adults. Affirmative measures include: the non-application of the rule of regionalization when enrolling students with disabilities, exemption from paying the costs of recognition and equivalence of certificates acquired abroad, free transportation for students with disabilities, educational mediators, monetary compensation for winning first place in a state competition and stimulation for participation and monetary compensation for winning a prize/medal at an international competition.

An additional affirmative measure in the area of education is the university enrollment quota. This is a general policy for all non-majority communities in the country. There is no official information about the number of students who used this affirmative measure, and its implementation is not precisely defined. In addition, as a risk during the implementation of this measure is the abuse of ethnicity when enrolling in universities.

Although the criteria for admission to universities are low, access to tertiary education for various vulnerable groups is limited, and there is not even enough information about the possibilities of enrolling them in universities. According to the data of the State Statistics Office, the number of Roma students enrolled in the first year is decreasing year by year.

Academic year	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	seniors
2016/17	95	51	47	26	4	24	/
2017/18	86	65	42	25	4	3	23
2018/19	75	51	47	16	5	1	29
2019/20	55	37	61	35	1	3	/

FIGURE 1: NUMBER OF ROMA STUDENTS ENROLLED IN TERTIARY EDUCATION
SOURCE: STRATEGY FOR ROMA INCLUSION 2022-2030

The strategy for the education for 2018-2025 is the basis for the activities of the institutions in the RNM in the field of education in the period until 2025. It starts from the existing conditions in the educational system and aims to gradually improve them, in accordance with the established priorities.

The Roma Inclusion Strategy 2022-2030 is the main strategic framework that should provide support for decision-making, including decisions related to each of the strategic areas for Roma integration, allocation of funds and creation of a framework that will enable the improvement of the situation of the Roma population.

According to the field research conducted among Roma from Prilep and Bitola (respondents aged 17-37, with completed minimum secondary education), regarding the *continuing of education to a tertiary degree (faculty/academy)*, a vast majority i.e. 84,8% of the Roma did not continue their education to a tertiary degree and only 15,2% continued their education to a tertiary degree.

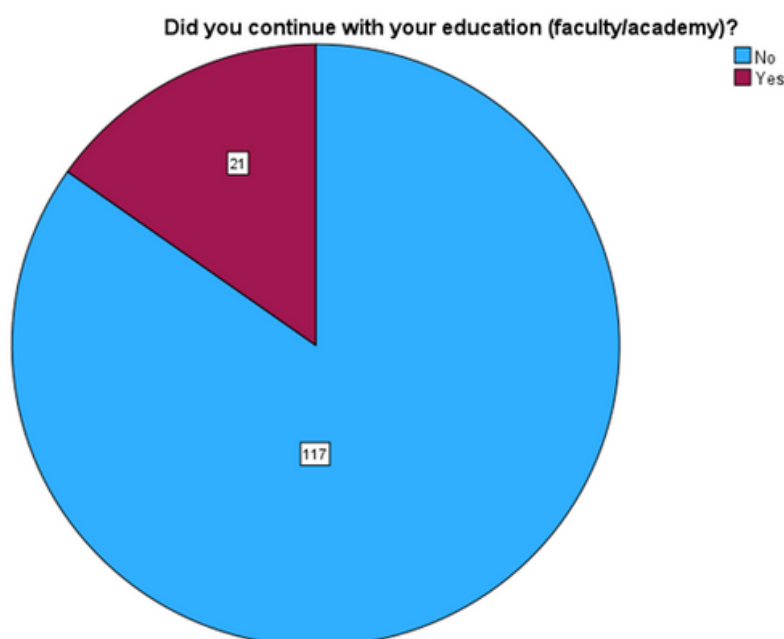


FIGURE 2: CONTINUING OF EDUCATION (DATA OBTAINED FROM 138 ROMA RESPONDENTS FROM PRILEP AND BITOLA, AGED 17-37 WITH MINIMUM SECONDARY EDUCATION)

The results about the relationship between gender and continuing of education to e tertiary degree, showed almost equal representation in both gender categories, with 54 female respondents not continuing their education and 63 male respondents who answered the same way, against 10 females who continued to a tertiary degree and 11 males who did so. The results show us that the issue of low levels of continuing education to e tertiary degree among Roma is not gender related.

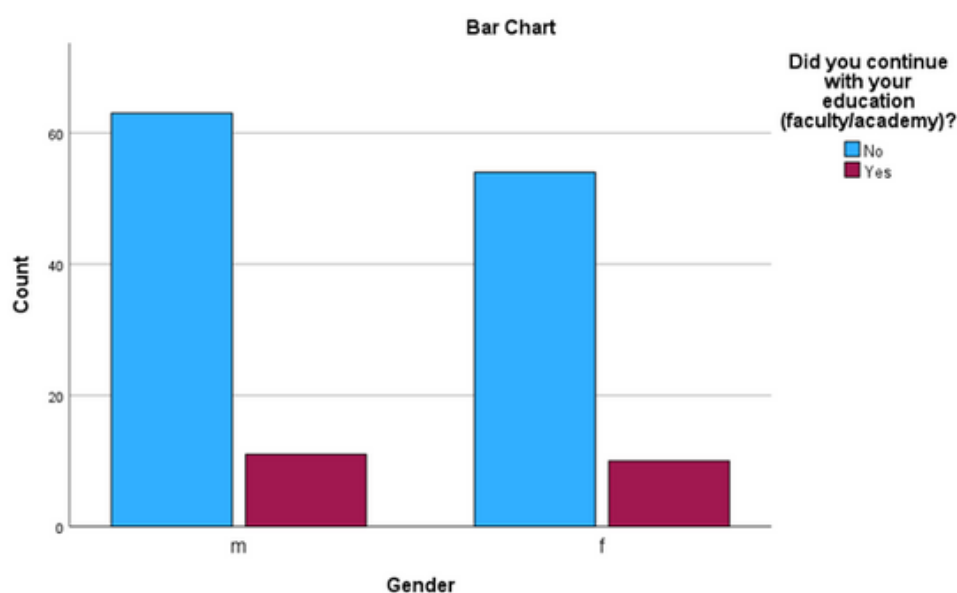


FIGURE 3: RELATION OF GENDER AND CONTINUING OF EDUCATION
(DATA OBTAINED FROM 138 ROMA RESPONDENTS FROM PRILEP AND BITOLA,
AGED 17-37 WITH MINIMUM SECONDARY EDUCATION)

The circumstances and factors that influence young Roma to continue/not continue their education to a tertiary degree are diverse. Two of the most common responses refer to lack of finances and lack of interest in further education. Marriage and other family related conditions are also reasons for significant number of respondents to stop the education process at secondary degree, particularly present among female respondents. Few of them referred to lack of motivation due to political parties' interference in employment and also their poor performance and low grades in secondary school. For those who continued their education to a tertiary degree, main reasons are the wish for personal advancement and progress, better employment, motivation to contribute to community empowerment and progress and also prove to themselves and other that Roma can also be highly educated and successful people.

According to the field research, 117 did not continue their education to tertiary education and only 21 continued. Out of these 21 respondents who continued their education, 3 respondents quitted (14,3%) and 18 of them either completed it or are still studying (85,7%). When it comes to reasons for quitting already started tertiary education, it is either lack of finances or inability to follow up with obligations and exams, or both. The reasons for further continuing and completing tertiary education are similar to those who led to enrolling in the first place: personal and professional prosperity and advancement, as well as empowerment of the community.

Regarding the most common profession of Roma who have completed secondary education, there is a wide variety of professional titles, where medical technician and furniture and interiors technician are two professions with highest number of respondents. Also, auto mechanic – mechatronic, cosmetics, care and beauty technician, economic technician, food technician, physiotherapist and textile technician are professions with five or more responses. An obvious conclusion from this data is that Roma prefer vocational rather than general or gymnasium education.

EMPLOYMENT OF ROMA GRADUATES

• *Current condition and statistical data*

The Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia continuously implements programs and projects with the aim of reducing long-term unemployment and dependence on a guaranteed minimum income, with the effective inclusion of vulnerable groups in the labor market. Roma are one of the vulnerable groups covered with this measures. The programs intended for vulnerable groups include:

- Counseling and motivational program
- Employment support program through trainings
- Youth Guarantee
- Second chance
- Training for occupations in demand on the labor market
- Subsidizing wages

Programs directly aimed at increasing employment among Roma

- National program for the transformation of undeclared work among Roma in the Republic of North Macedonia

The main focus of the measures to formalize the economy in this program is the reduction of undeclared work within existing enterprises, and to a much lesser extent the reduction of undeclared work outside enterprises. It does not take into account the social situation of workers who perform undeclared work, which is of great importance for rounding off the comprehensive approach in transforming undeclared work. In addition, employment relies to a large extent on active employment measures, which are planned on an annual level within the annual operational plans for active programs and measures for employment and services on the labor market.

Level	Level description	Unemployed	Other job seekers
2 (1,0)	primary education or less (no education, incomplete primary education)	2064	197
3	secondary vocational education	23	1
4	secondary education	50	9
VI B	first cycle of university studies	2	1
Total		2139	208

FIGURE 5: OVERVIEW OF ROMA UNEMPLOYED AND OTHER PERSONS WHO ARE LOOKING FOR JOB, REGISTERED IN EARNM - PRILEP AND BITOLA, 31.01.2023
(SOURCE: EMPLOYMENT AGENCY OF REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA)

From the obtained data, in the Employment Center in Prilep and Bitola, a total of 2347 persons were registered as unemployed Roma for all levels of education. Of this number, 2139 are registered as unemployed persons, and the remaining 208 are registered as other job seekers. The largest number of unemployed Roma have primary education degree or less, while 86 of all unemployed Roma have completed secondary or tertiary education.

Furthermore, the field research conducted among Roma in the same municipalities (Prilep and Bitola) showed 66 of the respondents (47,8%) to be employed, 46 of them (33,3%) to be unemployed, 8 respondents active as freelancers (5,8%), 12 respondents engaged in an informal economic activity (8,7%) and 6 respondents with no economic activity (Figure 6).

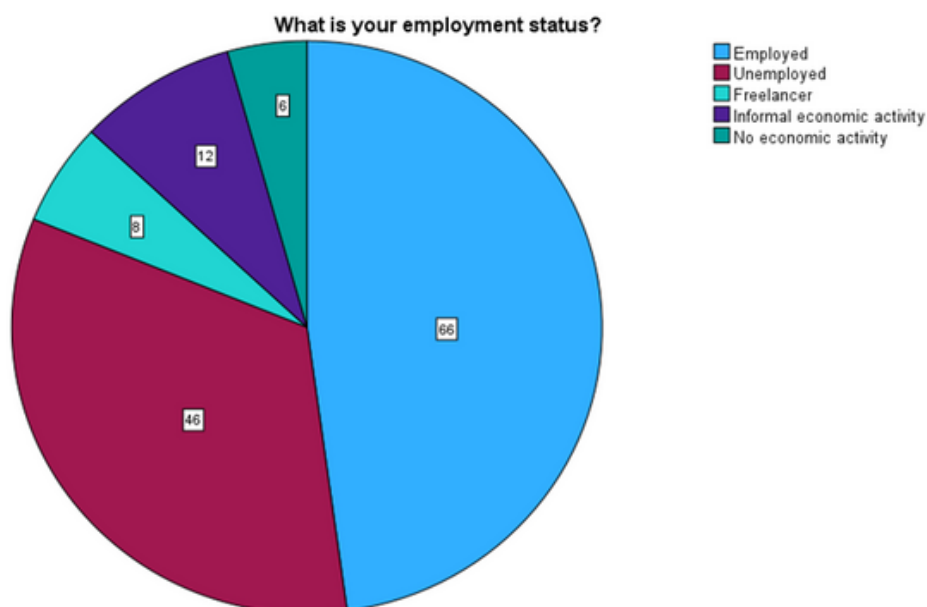


FIGURE 6: EMPLOYMENT STATUS (DATA OBTAINED FROM 138 ROMA RESPONDENTS FROM PRILEP AND BITOLA, AGED 17-37 WITH MINIMUM SECONDARY EDUCATION)

The graphic data presented in Figure 7 show that very small number of employed Roma, only 9 out of 66, have a job that is fully related to their profession. If we now go back to the variety of professions among Roma, it can be noted that most of those professions remain unrealized and the effort and investment in professional education remains unused, which is a huge loss for young people as well as for the state and its economy.

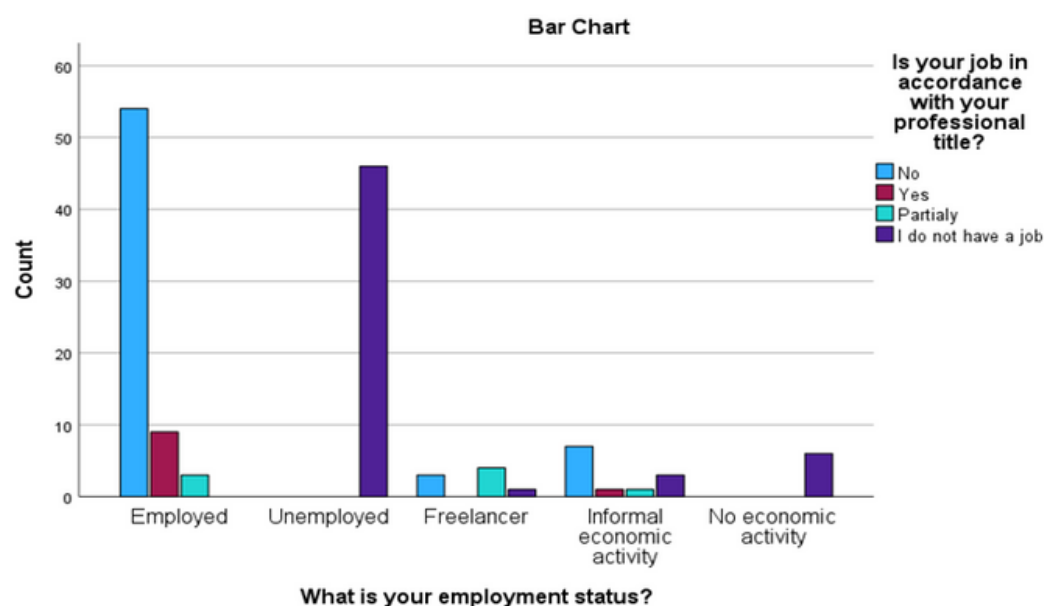


FIGURE 7: EMPLOYMENT STATUS IN RELATION TO PROFESSION
(DATA OBTAINED FROM 138 ROMA RESPONDENTS FROM PRILEP AND BITOLA,
AGED 17-37 WITH MINIMUM SECONDARY EDUCATION)

Next, Figure 8 shows that respondents with completed secondary education are present in all of the five categories of employment status, with the employed status reaching the highest percentage – 47,1%. Only one of the respondents with completed tertiary degree has a status of unemployed person, while three respondents that have their tertiary education ongoing are unemployed or have no economic activity. Important data of these analysis is that all of the respondents who declared to be engaged in informal economic activity have completed secondary education, meaning no respondent who has tertiary education completed or ongoing is engaged in such activity. This could be interpreted as a mark that the higher education people have, the less likely they are to engage in informal economic activities that although bring paid income, are leaving young people without pension insurance, no opportunity for regulated and protected labor, and are also harming the economy and tax system of the state.

Level of education * What is your employment status? Cross tabulation							
Count		What is your employment status?					Total
		Employed	Unemploy ed	Freelanc er	Informal economic activity	No economic activity	
Level of education	secondary	58	43	5	12	5	123
	tertiary	4	1	2	0	0	7
	ongoing (tertiary)	4	2	1	0	1	8
Total		66	46	8	12	6	138

FIGURE 8: LEVEL OF EDUCATION IN RELATION TO EMPLOYMENT STATUS
(DATA OBTAINED FROM 138 ROMA RESPONDENTS FROM PRILEP AND BITOLA,
AGED 17-37 WITH MINIMUM SECONDARY EDUCATION)

Furthermore, the data presented in Figure 9 showed significant inequalities of men and women when it comes to employment status. While 42 out of 74 male respondents are employed (57%), only 24 out of 64 female respondents are employed (38%). The share of unemployed male respondents is 19 out of 74 (26%) and in female respondents it is 27 (42%).

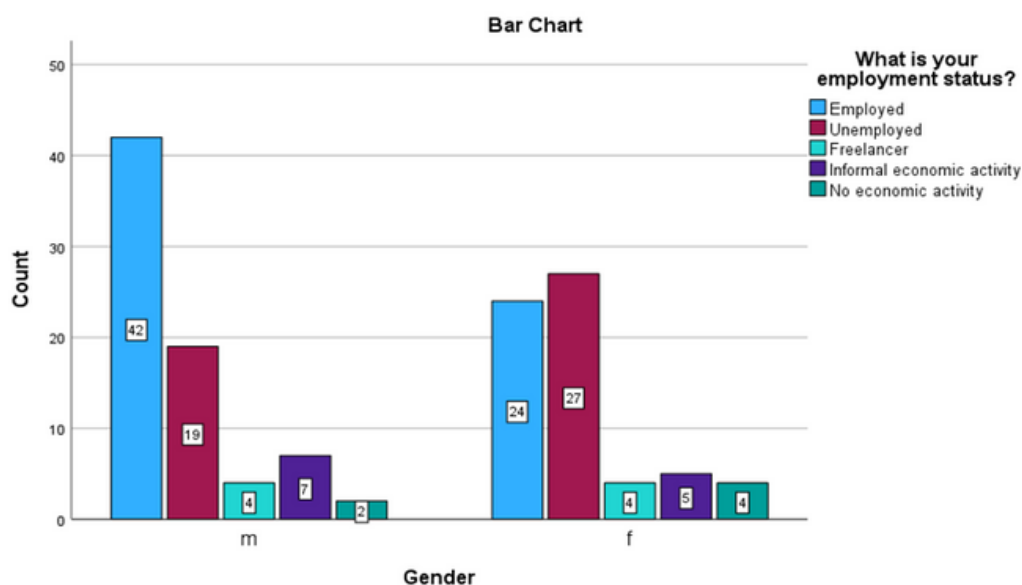
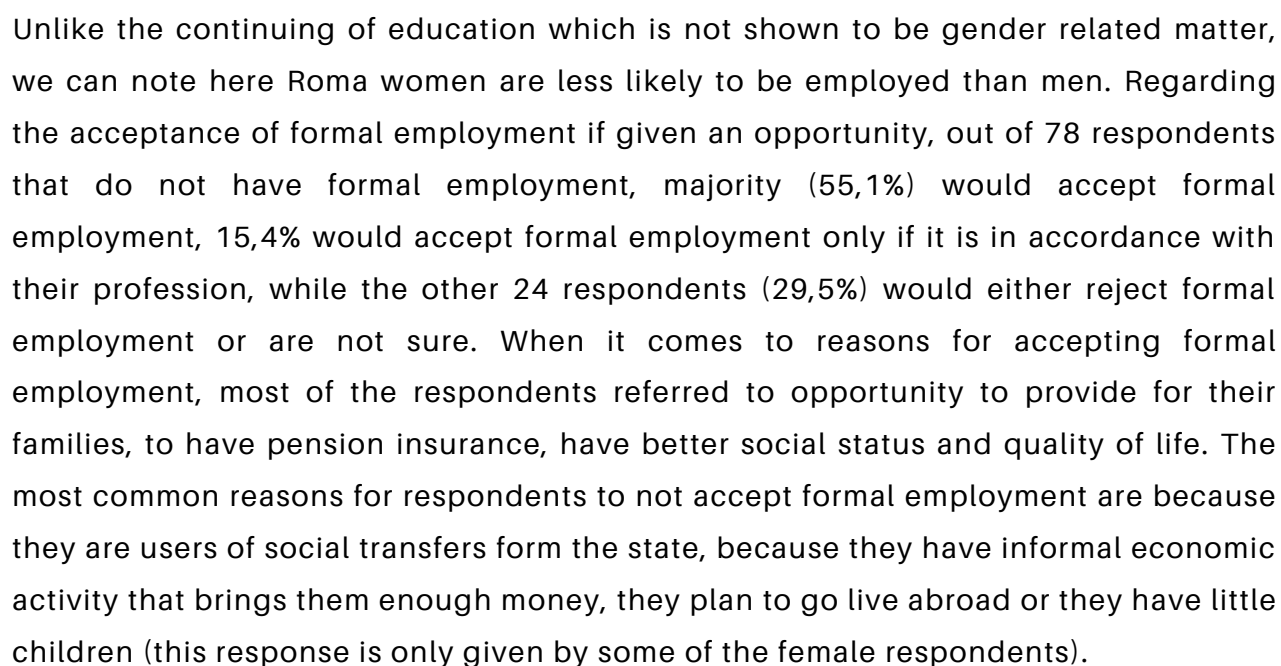


FIGURE 9: EMPLOYMENT STATUS IN RELATION TO GENDER
(DATA OBTAINED FROM 138 ROMA RESPONDENTS FROM PRILEP AND BITOLA,
AGED 17-37 WITH MINIMUM SECONDARY EDUCATION)



Unlike the continuing of education which is not shown to be gender related matter, we can note here Roma women are less likely to be employed than men. Regarding the acceptance of formal employment if given an opportunity, out of 78 respondents that do not have formal employment, majority (55,1%) would accept formal employment, 15,4% would accept formal employment only if it is in accordance with their profession, while the other 24 respondents (29,5%) would either reject formal employment or are not sure. When it comes to reasons for accepting formal employment, most of the respondents referred to opportunity to provide for their families, to have pension insurance, have better social status and quality of life. The most common reasons for respondents to not accept formal employment are because they are users of social transfers from the state, because they have informal economic activity that brings them enough money, they plan to go live abroad or they have little children (this response is only given by some of the female respondents).

Regarding the question *Do you find current measures and policies for encouragement and increasing of education/employment of Roma to be effective and sufficient?* results show equal division of opinion between

- respondents who find measures enough and effective and (almost 1/3 of the respondents)
- the ones who consider them neither enough nor effective (almost 1/3 of the respondents)
- don't know or have no opinion on this question (over 1/3 of the respondents)

This can be a sign that many of them are not fully aware or have knowledge on the current measures. Most of the respondents who answered negatively to the current measures and policies, explained they are referring to the policies and measures related to employment, that are either not implemented properly or not enough and lead to no improvements in the employment status of the Roma, particularly in the employment in public sector. Some of them mentioned that in the area of employment, discrimination is still a practice and Roma are not given equal opportunities. Most of the respondents who gave negative answers, actually explained that they find the measures and policies in the area of education to be positive and effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Even though there is notable progress in the area of education, namely: scholarships for Roma students, the measure to reduce the criteria for enrollment in secondary education in public secondary schools, as well as the introduction of educated mediators, tutors/mentors, according to the data obtained by Employment agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, the largest number of Roma people who are unemployed and registered job seekers are without primary education or with incomplete primary education. There are differences between data from primary and secondary education, which lies in the lack of a single mechanism for data collection by the State Statistics Office and the Ministry of Education. Therefore, it needs to be developed single mechanism for data collection between educational levels so that can be noted where the largest number of Roma students drop out.
- Even though there are affirmative measures targeting Roma, when it comes to continuing education to a tertiary degree, almost 85% of the Roma population aged 17-37 have not continued their education to a tertiary degree. As a most common reasons for not continuing education to a tertiary degree are the lack of finances and lack of interest in further education. It is necessary to organize trainings and informative sessions within the educational institutions as well as creating individual plans to presents the personal and professional benefits including prosperity and advancement, as well as empowerment of the community of continuing and completing tertiary education.
- Once they decide to continue their education to tertiary degree, most of the Roma will continue with it until completing. However, universities, both state as well as private, should consider introducing measures for financial relief for students from vulnerable communities, since lack of finances is one of the reasons for quitting already statrted tertiray education.
- The state education policies are highly supporting vocational education among young population in the last years. It has been confirmed that young Roma prefer vocational rather than general or gymnasium education but still, most of those professions remain unrealized and

RECOMMENDATIONS

the effort and investment in professional education remains unused, which is a huge loss for young people as well as for the state and its economy. Ministry of education in collaboration with Employment agency need to formally regulate and establish activities for carrier counseling in both primary as well as in secondary education in order to properly aim young graduates and connect them with available employment opportunities.

- The higher education people have, the less likely they are to engage in informal economic activities that although bring paid income, are leaving young people without pension insurance, no opportunity for regulated and protected labor, and are also harming the economy and tax system of the state. Therefore, the measures for promotion of tertiary education particularly among communities that have higher levels of informal economic activity, are directly affecting the transformation into registered economic.
- There are significant inequalities of Roma men and women when it comes to employment status. Unlike the continuing of education which is not shown to be gender related matter, we can conclude that unemployment rates are higher among Roma women. There is a need for particular gender-related policies for increasing employment among Roma-women.
- The most common reasons for not accepting formal employment among Roma are because some of them are users of social transfers from the state, because they have informal economic activity that brings them enough money, they plan to go live abroad or they have little children (this response is only given by some of the female respondents). In order to reduce this factors, Employment agency of RNM needs to better evaluate, adapt and thus increase implementation of the existing National program for the transformation of undeclared work among Roma in the Republic of North Macedonia. Furthermore, Ministry of labor and social policy in coordination with Local self-government units need to increase capacities in pre-school facilities, so that parents (particularly mothers) of young children have more opportunities for employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A significant number of young Roma are not fully aware or have knowledge on the current measures on education and employment. Most of the Roma who think negatively to the current measures and policies, explained they are referring to the policies and measures related to employment, that are either not implemented properly or not enough and lead to no improvements in the employment status of the Roma, particularly in the employment in public sector. Some of them mentioned that in the area of employment, discrimination is still a practice and Roma are not given equal opportunities. The Employment agency of RNM needs to systemically set a comprehensive approach on promotion of current employment measures among Roma population in order to increase outreach. The Ministry of administration and information society needs to introduce higher control on employment in public sector, particularly the employments through the use of the web tool “balancer” through which the distribution of the planned new employments is carried out electronically, according to the appropriate and fair representation of ethnic communities. Increased promotion on the reporting cases of discrimination in employment should be conducted among Roma communities as well as with private sector but the Commission for protection against discrimination, in order to educate and raise awareness on the still present discrimination practices in employment in private sector.



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