



LATVIJAS CILVĒKTIESĪBU UN ETNISKO STUDIJU CENTRS
LATVIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND ETHNIC STUDIES

THE SITUATION OF ROMA IN LATVIA

Riga 2003

This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Community and the Society Integration Foundation. The views expressed herein are those of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies and can therefore in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Community and the Society Integration Foundation.



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ISBN 9984-9707-0-1

Preface

Anti-Roma racism, just like anti-Semitism, has been recognized as an especially severe problem within the sphere of anti-discrimination in Europe and elsewhere, a problem which should receive priority attention. In Latvia, however, there has until now been no attempt to systematically collect information on the situation of Roma in the country. This could be explained with two basic reasons. First, the semi-official opinion that compared to the huge discrimination problems and open violence that Roma experience regularly in some other East European nations, the Roma in Latvia are relatively better off. Second, for the first decade of regained independence in Latvia focus within the area of minority rights was on the numerically large, Russian-speaking minorities – and as a consequence, the main issues concerned citizenship and language. Using only these criteria, the impression is that all is well with the Roma in Latvia: 92% are Latvian citizens, and 66% freely speak Latvian.

On the other hand, opinion polls and anecdotal evidence indicate that negative stereotyping of Roma is widespread in society at large. Occasionally media reports information on discrimination against Roma, as the refusal to admit Roma to cafes or bars or a suspect level of violence experienced by Roma from law enforcement officials. This seeming contradiction inspired the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies to collect information on the real situation of Roma in Latvia. The research project includes several different issue-areas, and therefore it was not possible to gain enough detailed analysis of each to allow making specific area-related recommendations. The information has been collected in order to gain an overview of the real situation and to provide a basis for further, more detailed analysis in each issue-area, with the aim to elaborate concrete recommendations and a national action plan for the elimination of racism and discrimination against Roma.

The project was designed and implemented by the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies. The researchers Dace Lukumiete and Signe Martišūne invested a huge amount of time, energy and emotions into the project. Maija Mauriņa served as the project assistant. We wish to express special gratitude to our project partner, the leader of "Ame Roma" Vanda Zamicka, who secured meetings and interviews with Romani individuals and Romani NGO leaders throughout Latvia.

The Latvian Centre for Human Rights thanks the Social Integration Foundation, which made the project possible by allotting European Union PHARE funding to it. We also would like to express our thanks to Soros Foundation-Latvia and Open Society Institute (Budapest), which provided the necessary co-financing.

Ilze Brands Kehris
Director of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies
August 2003

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary	7
2. Introduction	9
3. Discrimination and Public Attitudes	10
3.1. Discrimination Definition and Examples	10
3.2. Public Attitudes toward the Roma	11
4. History and Demography	14
4.1. History	14
4.2. Demography	15
5. Education	19
5.1. Education Level of the Roma	19
5.2. Illiteracy	20
5.3. Involvement in the Educational System	20
5.4. Why Romani Children Do Not Attend School	21
5.5. Special Schools or Integration of Romani Children into Regular Schools	23
5.6. Special Problems in the Educational Process	27
6. Employment	31
6.1. Unemployment Level	31
6.2. Economic Activities as Source of Living	33
6.3. Description of Unemployed Roma	35
6.4. Proposed Solutions and Their Effectiveness	36
6.5. Solutions Proposed by Romani Leaders	38
6.6. Testimonials of Discrimination against the Roma in the Field of Employment	38
7. Living Conditions	41
7.1. Sources of Income and Social Assistance	41
7.2. Housing	42
7.3. Health	44
8. Relations with the Law	49
8.1. Police	50
8.2. Courts	52
8.3. Prisons	54
9. Roma Participation in Political and Civic Activities	56
9.1. Political Participation	56
9.2. Civic Participation: NGOs	57
Bibliography and Sources	61
Appendix No. 1. – Methodology	65
Appendix No. 2. – Attitudes toward Roma by General Public	67
Appendix No. 3. – General Policy Recommendation No. 3 of the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance	77

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The especially severe problems that the Roma face in many societies, often based on racism and discrimination by members of other ethnic groups, are receiving special attention throughout Europe. The forms of discrimination vary, ranging from racist violence to the unequal opportunities for participation in society. Solutions to the negative situation of the Roma are sought in countries individually as well as on the international arena. The United Nations, Council of Europe and European Union are all continuously working on special initiatives for eliminating the discrimination of Roma. On 1 July 2003 the World Bank, the European Commission and the Open Society Institute proclaimed 2005 – 2015 the "Decade of Roma Inclusion" in Central and Southeastern Europe, with the goal to elaborate and implement special national action plans to eliminate the problem.

In Latvia, the population census in 2000 reported 8,204 Roma residents, which represents 0,3% of the population. The real number of Roma is more likely 13,000 – 15,000. Regardless of which figure is correct, it is a small minority with old roots in Latvia and the overwhelming majority of whom, in contrast to the numerically large Slav minorities in Latvia, are citizens and speak fluent Latvian. In contrast to other European countries, there has been no registered case of racially motivated violence. There have been very few complaints of Roma discrimination (as any other ethnic discrimination as well) to the National Human Rights Office or to human rights NGOs. Even though the new labor law entered into force in 2002, strengthening the anti-discrimination provisions, no legal case of ethnic discrimination has been initiated. Does that mean that Latvia has escaped this so common a phenomenon – anti-Roma racism and discrimination?

The opinion poll conducted during this project shows that 71% of the respondents consider that the Roma community is a closed one and most think that Roma are less integrated in society than Jews, Russian and Belorussians. That racism and prejudice are widespread is shown both by information in the media on cases of discrimination, occasional negative stereotyping of Roma by the media themselves, as well as opinion poll data on the attitude of residents toward the Roma.

This study deals with the situation in some of the main social spheres, within which Roma in the rest of the world face direct and indirect discrimination, perpetrated not only by individuals, but also by states and their institutions.

As elsewhere, education and employment are the two most important problems for the Roma in Latvia, and together they make for a dramatic picture. More than 40% of Roma have fourth grade or lower education, and many are illiterate. In several towns up to 30% of Roma children do not enroll in first grade. In all schools that Roma children attend, there are significant attendance problems. Until now, the only attempt to resolve the problem of Roma education is the formation of separate Roma classes, which mostly have the official status of pedagogical correction class. Roma children are isolated from other children in school. No school teaches Roma culture or history. No thought has been given to the raising of the education level of Roma adults.

The number of Roma who are involved in stable, official employment does not exceed 5% of those who are able to work. Despite the huge unemployment only 10% of work-able Roma are officially registered as unemployed. This in turn limits the possibilities for Roma to receive social assistance. The lack of an official work record not only makes it even more difficult to find employment, but also means that retirement age Roma generally receive only minimal pensions. As more than 95% do not have official employment, they do not have social and health insurance, which in turn hampers access to qualitative medical care.

The number of HIV-positive Roma is disproportionately high: 7% of all infected are Roma, and 2% of Roma have tested positive. This is linked to the high frequency of intravenous drug use among young Roma men. Poor housing conditions and overcrowding are objective risk factors for other contagious diseases as well.

Of all persons who have been facing criminal proceedings on drug charges 12% are Roma. Roma are involved in the sales of narcotics throughout Latvia. A majority of Roma facing criminal drug charges are women. Roma women represent a quarter of all incarcerated in women's prisons. Approximately 20% of Roma, who claim they have experienced discrimination, report discrimination by members of the police force.

All these facts confirm that there is both direct and indirect discrimination against Roma in Latvia, and in the same areas as it is elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe. As Latvia is increasingly taking an active part in common international processes, time has come for the state and individuals in Latvia to turn special attention to the elimination of anti-Roma policies and practice.

2. INTRODUCTION

Throughout European history the Roma have been amongst the most discriminated and isolated ethnic groups. International organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the World Bank and others devote particular attention to the problems of the Roma and provide support for programs which are aimed at the elimination of anti-Roma discrimination and at Roma equal rights in society.

Roma have been living in Latvia for six centuries. The Roma have good Latvian language skills, and many of them are citizens. This is often used as evidence to suggest that the Roma have become successfully integrated into Latvia's society. The survey "On the Road to a Civil Society," however, shows that only 5% of Latvia's residents would find acceptable close relationships with Roma, including being close relatives or spouses. A total of 27.2% would not want to have Romani neighbors, and 33% of Latvia's residents believe that the Roma must not be allowed to live in the country at all.¹ There are several countries where people who would not like to live alongside the Roma are even more numerous – in Eastern Europe the figure ranges from 38.7% in Poland to as high as 77.2% in Slovakia. The numbers are also higher in Latvia's neighboring countries – 63.3% in Lithuania and 49.8% in Estonia.² This shows that prejudice against the Roma is prevalent in Latvia as well as in many EU candidate countries.

Information provided by the Roma themselves about their situation in Latvia is dramatic: according to some, only 1% of the Roma are involved in official labor relations, and one-half of Romani children do not attend school. These numbers are clearly indicative of discrimination.

The goals of this study were the following:

- 1) To obtain objective and all-encompassing information about the real situation of the Roma;
- 2) To learn the views of the Roma;
- 3) To learn the attitudes of Latvia's residents towards the Roma;
- 4) To make a first evaluation of whether discrimination against the Roma in Latvia is a significant problem.

The target audience for this study is broad:

- 1) State and local government representatives who have direct contact with Roma in their work;
- 2) State, government and local government representatives, politicians and decision makers;
- 3) NGOs, researchers, human rights experts and policy analysts;
- 4) International organizations collecting information about the Roma and evidence of discrimination;
- 5) The mass media;
- 6) The public at large.

In order to provide the context to the study for the Latvian audience, we have also included a brief chapter on discrimination and related concepts. We also include some main conclusions from a survey of popular attitudes toward the Roma. The chapter on history and demography sets the starting point for the study of the contemporary situation of the Roma. The next chapters focus on major areas of life – education, employment, living conditions, relations with the law – in which the Roma have faced problems beyond those of other ethnic groups in Latvia. In the last chapter, we briefly present information about Roma participation in political life and civil society. The appendices include a statement on methodology, more complete information from the survey of residents, and General Policy Recommendation No. 3 of the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance intended for all Council of Europe member states.

¹ *Celā uz pilsonisku sabiedrību 2000.-2001.* (On the Road to a Civil Society: 2000-2001), pp. 75-77.

² European Values Study, <http://www.europeanvalues.nl>, last time visited on July 31, 2003.

3. DISCRIMINATION AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES

3.1. Discrimination Definition and Examples

Racism is “the belief that a ground such as race, skin color, language, religion, nationality or national or ethnic origin justifies contempt for a person or a group of persons, or the notion of superiority of a person or a group of persons.”³

Xenophobia in direct translation from its Greek origin means fear of strangers. Usually the word is used to describe hatred of people from other countries and/or a lack of respect for their traditions and culture.⁴

Prejudice relates to stereotypes. Stereotypes can be negative or positive, but prejudice, especially when based on race or ethnic belonging, is a negative phenomenon. The definition of prejudice offered by one of the founders of social psychology, Gordon W. Allport, is: “Ethnic prejudice is an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because he is a member of that group.”⁵

Discrimination can be manifested in various ways. Racial discrimination refers to any kind of separation, exclusion, limitation or awarding of privileges on the basis of race, skin color, origin, nationality or national or ethnic belonging with the goal or consequence being the elimination or diminishing the recognition, enjoyment or implementation of human rights and basic freedoms on the basis of equality in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other area of public life.⁶ Direct racial discrimination means “any differential treatment based on a ground such as race, colour, language, religion, nationality or national or ethnic origin, which has no objective and reasonable justification.” Discrimination, however, can also take an indirect form, when “an apparently neutral factor such as a provision, criterion or practice cannot be as easily complied with by, or disadvantages, persons belonging to a group designated by a ground such as race, colour, language, nationality or national or ethnic origin, unless this factor has an objective and reasonable justification.”⁷

The Roma face discrimination, as well as manifestations of racism, xenophobia and prejudice in many parts of the world. Discrimination has been part and parcel of life for the Roma for centuries and throughout the world. In Europe, and particularly in Eastern Europe, racism and discrimination against the Roma are very common. A list of the most common problems includes:⁸

- Violence by some individuals or groups of society (racist extremists such as skinheads, for instance) against the Roma because of their ethnic belonging;
- The inability to guarantee the security of the Roma or their ability to approach law enforcement institutions and enjoy the full protection of the law;
- Violence by police;
- Discrimination in the area of education – special classes are set up for Romani children, and in this they are isolated from other students;
- Discrimination in the area of employment – employers refuse to hire Romani persons, or the low level of education among the Roma prevents them from competing in the job market;
- Discrimination in housing and social guarantees – the Roma are subject to segregation, at times they are all housed in peripheral areas of cities or countries; most live in housing with no or few modern conveniences; government officials who are responsible for the distribution of social guarantees do not award such guarantees to the Roma, they are not interested in dealing with the lack of information among the Roma, including lack of knowledge of available social assistance;

³ ECRI general policy recommendation No. 7 on national legislation to combat racism and racial discrimination.

⁴ *Cilvēktiesību un tolerances rokasgrāmata* (Handbook on Human Rights and Tolerance).

⁵ Allport, G.W. *The Nature of Prejudice*, p. 9.

⁶ This definition is based on the 1965 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. See [Human Rights: Collection of International Agreements](#), Vol. 1, Section 1: Universal Agreements, p. 67.

⁷ Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000. Implementing the Principle of Equal Treatment Between Persons Irrespective of Racial or Ethnic Origin, <http://europa.eu.int/infonet/library/m/200043ce/en.htm>, last time visited on 31 July 2003.

⁸ This definition of the most common forms of discrimination against the Roma is based on materials from the OSCE, the European Roma Rights Centre, the Council of Europe and the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance.

Discrimination in health care and access to it – the Roma frequently do not have access to critically important health care services such as vaccination, health check-ups and emergency assistance; there are places in Eastern Europe where Romani women have undergone forced sterilization; the incidence of disorders such as tuberculosis and infantile paralysis is disproportionately high among the Roma; Discrimination in the access to public facilities and services – examples include Roma barred from cafes, bars and nightclubs; many Romani people cannot receive bank loans or lease items because of their ethnic belonging; Negative stereotypes about the Roma are frequent in the mass media.

3.2. Public Attitudes Toward the Roma⁹

In Latvia, a majority of survey respondents said that they have never had close contacts with any Romani people. Contacts largely are based on encounters in public places – at markets or on the street (75.5%), in shops (40%), bars and cafes (20%). Closer contacts with the Roma have involved being neighbors (20%), colleagues at work, friends, the schoolmates of children or fellow students in higher education (each less than 10%).

Education

Fewer than 10% of respondents said that they have encountered any Romani children as schoolmates of their own kids. Nearly one-half of respondents said that they would have a neutral view of a situation in which a Romani child joined the class of the respondent's child. Among those who have had contacts with the Roma, a larger share are more tolerant about the idea of a Romani child "as the classmate of my child" (63.3%).

Employment

Fewer than 10% of Latvia's residents have had Romani colleagues at work, and the percentage is lower in government institutions than in private enterprise. Of all respondents, 58% would be cautious or distinctly negative in relation to the hiring of a Romani person. Among those respondents who had encountered a Romani colleague, 57.2% were positive about the idea of hiring a Romani person.

Neighbors

Slightly fewer than 20% of Latvia's residents have had Romani neighbors or nearby residents. Among respondents, 56.2% express a negative attitude toward a Romani neighbor, but that percentage is significantly lower among those residents who have actually had such a neighbor (36%).

Places of Entertainment

One in five respondents have encountered a Romani person in a bar or cafe. A total of 58% of respondents expressed that they would either be more cautious or they would leave the location if "Romani people entered the cafe or bar." Of those who have come into contact with Romani people at such locations before, 47% would have a similar reaction.

On the Street or at the Market

Fully 71% of respondents would be cautious or openly negative toward Romani people on the street or at the market. Those who have had such encounters are more negative (75%) than those who have not.

Cautious attitudes, of course, do not always lead to discrimination as such, but the survey did show that if they encountered a Romani person "in a cafe" or "on the street or at the market," 9% and 19% of respondents respectively would try to leave the location. Asked to agree or disagree with the statement "I would avoid a Romani employee or would ignore that person" and "I would recommend that my child avoid a Romani classmate," 6% and 4.5% respectively responded in the affirmative. Between 1 and 3% of respondents would engage in open discrimination – taking steps to ensure that there are no Romani children at the school of their child, that no Romani person is hired at work or that the Romani person is expelled from the cafe.

⁹ This section is based on a study that was performed by the SKDS public research company. A more detailed treatment of it is found in Appendix No. 2.

Social Assistance

One-quarter of respondents think that the Roma are poor, but in response to the statement that “the Roma have fewer opportunities to receive social assistance than do persons of other ethnicity,” more than one-half of respondents (54%) disagreed. Only one-fifth felt that the Roma face limited access to social assistance. Asked whether there should be special assistance programs for the Roma, 45% of respondents said yes, while 41% said that there is no need for such programs.

Stereotypes about the Roma

Asked about their first associations when they hear the word “Roma”, most respondents listed negative properties such as “cheats,” “liars,” “frauds,” “with a tendency toward crime and theft” (17%).

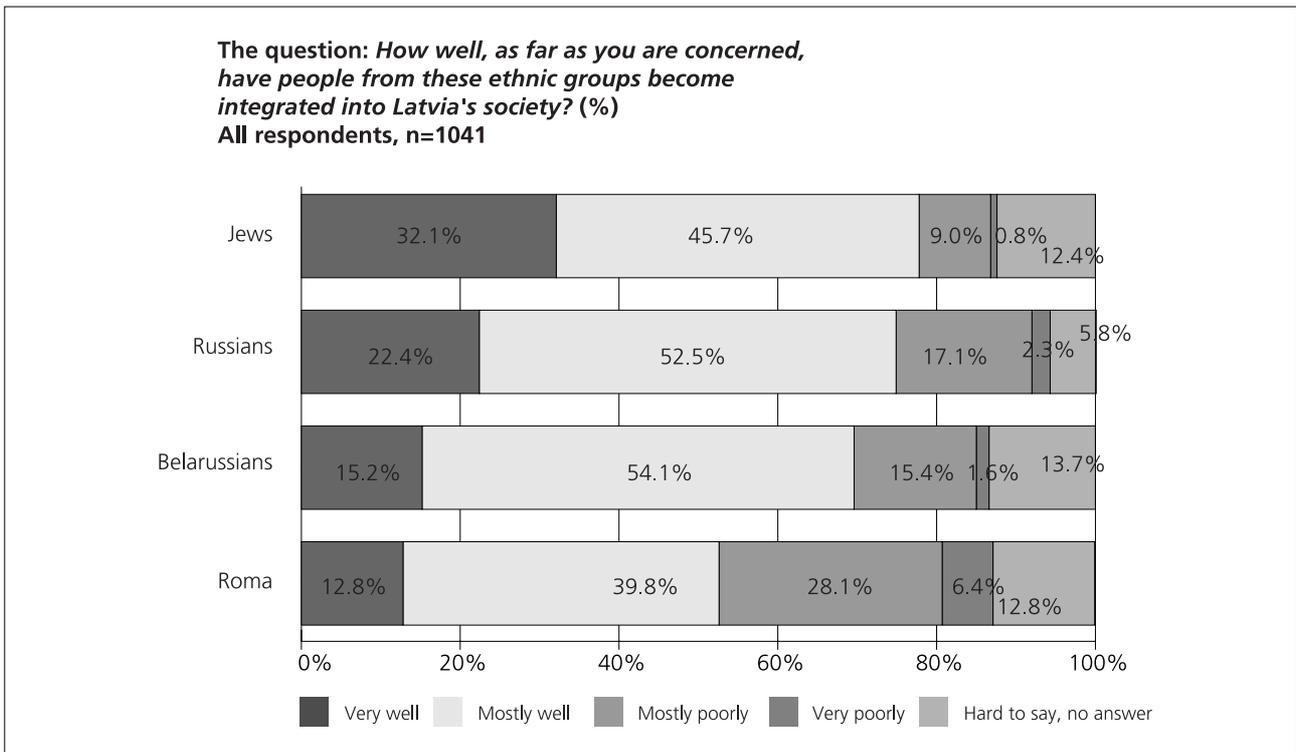
Among the properties which respondents attributed to the Roma, there are more negative than positive ones: “tricky” (71.6%), “liars” or “lazy” (~50%), “dirty” and “tended toward crime” (~40%). 58% thought that the Roma have “a vagrant lifestyle.” The most frequently mentioned positive association was Romani music and dancing (6.2%), and it is no surprise therefore that 65% of respondents consider them to be musical, while 33% of them think that the Roma are talented. 60% of respondents think that performer is the most appropriate profession for a Romani person. Street cleaner, however, is the second most appropriate job for Romani people as far as the survey respondents are concerned. Respondents who have had contacts with Romani people as friends, colleagues or neighbors were more likely to describe the Roma in a positive or neutral way.

Public Order

Although only 20% of respondents have had Romani neighbors, more than one-half of respondents (52.7%) said that there must be a greater presence of law enforcement personnel in places where Roma live, while one-third do not feel that this would be necessary. People in the Latvian capital city of Riga were more likely to call for such a presence (62%) than were people in other towns (51%) and in rural areas (46%).

Integration or Isolation?

Most respondents think that the Roma are less integrated into society than are Jews, Russians or Belarusians. Nearly three-quarters of respondents think that the Jews and the Russians are, generally speaking, well integrated into society, and somewhat fewer (around 70%) said the same about the Belarusians. Only 53%, however, made the same claim about the Roma. Respondents who are neither Latvian nor Russian were more likely to say that Belarusians (78%) and the Roma (62%) are integrated into society.



Although, when asked about the integration of Roma into Latvian society approximately half of respondents said that the Roma are well or very well integrated into society, fully 71% of responded that "the Roma in Latvia form their own, secluded community." Latvians agreed with this claim more often (76%) than did Russians (65%) and people from other ethnic groups (66%).

Conclusions

The survey confirms that many people in Latvia base their attitudes toward the Roma on stereotypes and prejudice, which, in turn, are based on a lack of contacts with and information about this minority group. The results show that the larger the social distance toward the Roma, the more cautious or intolerant one's attitudes toward the Roma will be. On the contrary, the closer the contacts, the greater the tolerance toward them.

Among respondents, the most tolerant attitudes with respect to the Roma were expressed "as my child's classmate" (51%), "as my colleague at work" (43.8%) and "as my neighbor" (36.1%). Of those residents who have had closer contacts with Romani persons, the responses were 63.3% for the classmate, 57.2% for the colleague and 50% for the neighbor. The most intolerant attitudes were found in response to tolerance "on the street or at the market" (71%) and "in cafes or bars" (58%).

Despite the fact that the Roma in Latvia have a good level of Latvian language skills, and the percentage of Romani people who are citizens of the country is high, the survey dispels the popular views of the Roma as one of the most integrated minority groups in Latvia. A significant share of the surveyed residents said that the Roma are less integrated than are Jews, Russians or Belarussians, and 71% agreed with the statement that "the Roma in Latvia have their own, secluded community."

4. HISTORY AND DEMOGRAPHY

In Latvia, the word that is used to denote the Roma by members of the Romani community as well as by the general public is "čigāns." There are some Romani NGO leaders who say that the more correct word in Latvian would be "romi," which would be equivalent to the word Roma and its derivatives in other parts of Europe. The argument is that the word "čigāns" has taken on negative connotations. However, Romani people in Latvia themselves use the word in official and unofficial conversations. The non-governmental organizations of the Roma contain the word, too – "Latvijas Nacionālā čigānu kultūras biedrība" (The Latvian National Roma Cultural Association), "čigānu biedrība 'Gloss'" (the Romani association "Gloss"), etc. In the interviews conducted by LCESC researchers with Romani persons, hardly anyone said that he or she should be called a "romis." That is why this study, in its Latvian version, uses the word "čigāns," while the English language translation uses "Roma."

Although the word "Roma" is widely used, the Roma are in fact only one of the subgroups in the larger ethnic group. They originated in Asia, and by the 15th century they were populating a territory from what is now Greece to what is now the former Yugoslavia. From the 13th to the 15th century, the Roma split up into three big groups. The Sinti migrated to Central and Western Europe, the Cale ended up in Southern France, Spain and Portugal, and the Roma settled in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. The "čigāni" in Latvia are from the Roma group. Of all of the world's members of this ethnos, some 90% belong to the Roma group.¹⁰

4.1. History

It is believed that the Roma have been living in Latvia for more than 500 years. For a long time there was no clear sense of the origin of this ethnic group. European ethnicity researchers long held that the Roma originated in Egypt, while others argued that they came from Northwestern India. Between the 8th and the 12th century, the Roma, divided up into groups, headed West so as to avoid Arab conquerors.¹¹

One of the greatest sources of information about the ancient history of the Roma is the language which they speak, Romani, because the language reflects contacts with other ethnic groups through borrowed vocabulary. The language shows that the Roma were present for greater or shorter periods of time in Persia (Iran), Syria, Palestine, Armenia, Byzantium and Spain. The Romani language is an Indo-European language, and various elements of its phonetics and lexicology are very old.

The foundation for Romani is a Central Indian dialect of the Paisachi language. The Roma, who live all over the world, do not today have a common literary language. They speak various dialects, borrowing a great deal from the indigenous language of the areas in which they live. In the Middle Ages, the Roma arrived in such European countries as Hungary, Germany, Poland and the Scandinavian nations. They appeared in the Baltic region between the 11th and the 16th century.¹² The ethnos arrived in Latvia from Germany and Poland, which is evidenced by the many adaptations of German or Polish surnames (Kleins, Leimanis, Neilands, Eberhards in the former case, Putraškēvičs, Marcinkēvičs, Kozlovskis, Dombrovskis in the latter).¹³

In an 1897 census in what was then the Russian Empire, 1,942 Romani people, or 0.1% of the total population of the Latvian region, were registered. Most of them were horse traders – 53.2% of them in the western Latvian region of Kurzeme and 62.4% in the eastern region of Latgale. Some 8% of the Roma in Kurzeme were farmers.¹⁴ Until 1894, most of the Roma lived in the countryside, or rather, in the forests, where they set up camp.

¹⁰ See <http://www.sinti-und-roma-informationen.de/begriffe.htm#Manusch> or <http://www.gfbv.de/voelker/europa/roma.htm>, last time visited on 21 July 2003.

¹¹ Klemens, L. *Ethnische Minderheiten in Europe*, p. 95.

¹² Apine, I. "Čigāni" (The Roma) *Mazākumtautību vēsture Latvijā* (The history of minority groups in Latvia), in Dribins, L. (ed.), p. 201.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

¹⁴ Bērziņš, V. and I. Stašulāne (ed.) *20. gs. Latvijas senvēsture: Latvija no gadsimta sākuma līdz neatkarības pasludināšanai* (The early history of 20th century Latvia: From the start of the century to the proclamation of independence), p. 869.

The first registered public activities among the Roma took place during Latvia's period of independence (1918–1940). In 1931, a society called "Čigāņu draugs" (Friend of the Roma) was established, headed by Jānis Leimanis. There was a Roma choir, and the New Testament was translated into Romani.

The 1935 census in Latvia registered 3,839 Romani persons, or 0.2% of the total population. The largest number were found in the Jelgava District – 401 Roma, even though statistics at that time told us that "the Roma have been distributed across the whole land quite evenly, but in the summer months their territorial distribution is different."¹⁵ Very few – 7.3% of all Roma – lived in urban areas.

During the German occupation of Latvia in the early 1940s, the Roma in Latvia, like the Jews, were subject to severe repression.¹⁶ The terror began in the winter of 1941, when some 2,000 Romani people, or one-half of the country's Romani population, were killed.¹⁷ In the winter of 1942, the German regime issued an order that "all of the Romani people in the relevant district are to be arrested and placed into the nearest prison. (...) The exception are Romani people with a permanent place of residence and with proper employment, provided that they are not dangerous to the public in a political or criminal sense." The regime documents mostly focused on claims that the Roma were travellers and that they were criminal and dangerous.¹⁸ It has been calculated that half a million Romani people or so died in labor and concentration camps in Europe during World War II.¹⁹

After the war, the number of Romani people in what was now the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic began to recover. The fact that the Roma were nomadic was always seen as undesirable by the various governments, which made efforts to stop this mobility. In 1956, the Supreme Council of the USSR issued a decree on the registration and employment of the Roma, the aim being to ensure that the Roma settle in cities or villages.²⁰ The Roma themselves, however, say that their fellow Romani people really began to settle in towns and cities only in the 1970s in Latvia.

Romani people live in a great many countries in the world today, except Japan. The number of Romani people is in dispute. In 2002, World Bank data showed that there were between seven and nine million Romani residents in Europe, some 80% of them in Eastern Europe. The largest Roma share of the population – between 9 and 11% – can be found in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia.²¹ The European Roma Rights Center, for its part, has established that in all countries there is a big difference between official and unofficial data. According to official data, there are 409,700 Romani people in Romania, or 9% of the country's total population. Unofficial data, however, suggest that there are between 1.8 and 2.5 million Romani people in that country. In Bulgaria the numbers are 313,396 (9%) and 700,000 to 800,000; in Hungary – 143,000 (6%) and 550,000 to 600,000; in the Czech Republic – 33,489 (2.5%) and 250,000 to 300,000.²² This great difference between official and unofficial data can be attributed to the fear of discrimination, as well as to the fact that many Roma do not hold any official documents such as passports, registration certificates, birth certificates and the like.

4.2. Demography

Numbers

The 2000 census in Latvia reports 8,205 Romani persons, or 0.3% of the entire population. Romani leaders believe that the real number is somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000. Even in that case, however, the number would not be greater than 1% of the population. In Latvia, too, Romani leaders say that many Romani persons are afraid of discrimination, and so they have cited a different ethnic group when asked by census takers.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Vestermanis, M. "Čigāņu genocīds vācu okupētajā Latvijā (1941.-1945.)" (Genocide against the Roma in German-occupied Latvia (1941-1945)), *Tukuma Ziņotājs*, 12 April 2001.

¹⁷ Apine, I. "Čigāni" (The Roma) *Mazākumtautību vēsture Latvijā* (The history of minority groups in Latvia), in Dribins, L. (ed.), p. 201.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, quoted in Dribins, op. cit., p. 228.

¹⁹ Vestermanis, M., op. cit.

²⁰ This decree has been cited in a number of documents, but the full text is available only in part. See Президиума Берёховного Совета СССР "О приобщении к труду цыган, занимающихся бродяжничеством." <http://www.nevskoevremya.spb.ru/cgi-bin/pl/nv.pl?searchform&art=143676946>, last time visited on 28 July 2003.

²¹ See <http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/eca/ecshd.nsf/roma/the+roma>, the homepage of the World Bank, last time visited on 20 July 2003.

²² See www.errc.org/publications/factsheets/number.shtml, the homepage of the European Roma Rights Center, last time visited on 13 August 2003.

Information gained during field trips and interviews with the Roma and their leaders suggests that there might be some 13,000 to 15,000 Romani people in Latvia. If we add up data provided by NGO leaders regarding the number of Roma in the towns with the largest number of Roma, the number is 12,400. Another 3,000 are reported to live in rural areas and small towns. Migration also has to be taken into account, however. As the socioeconomic situation in Latvia has changed, some Romani people have moved to Western Europe or to the former Soviet Union. Out of practical concerns, however, this study when making reference to the number of Romani residents in Latvia will use the 2000 national census, except where stated otherwise.

Populated Areas

The Official and Unofficial Number of Roma and their Share of the Population

	Official number	Unofficial number	Proportion (%) ²³
Rīga	1,160	3,480	0.15 – 0.45
Daugavpils	366	400	0.30 – 0.32
Jelgava	1,010	3,000	1.5 – 4.72
Ventspils	1,031	3,000	2.35 – 6.8
Jūrmala	439	700	0.80 – 1.3
Jēkabpils	301	210	1 – 0.9
Kuldīga	255	300	1.8 – 1.9
Talsi	586	700	4.7 – 5.6
Sabīle	91	120	5.6 – 7.3
Tukums	541	300	2.35 – 1.6
Valmiera	237	200	0.6 – 0.5
Other towns, rural areas	2,188	3,000	

The lion's share of Roma today live in towns – Daugavpils, Dobele, Jelgava, Jēkabpils, Kuldīga, Rīga, Sabīle, Talsi, Tukums, Valmiera, Ventspils. In most towns, the Roma live compactly in specific neighborhoods or streets.²⁴

In only a few towns in Latvia do the Roma exceed 1% of the total population – 4.7% in Talsi, 2.35% in Ventspils, 1.2% in Krāslava, 5.6% in Sabīle and 1% of the total population in Jēkabpils. There are municipalities and villages, however, in which the share of the Roma represents nearly 5% – Jērcēni municipality in the Valka District (4.3%), Izvalta municipality in the Krāslava District (3.8%), the village of Kalupe in the Daugavpils District (3.5%), the town of Viļaka in the Balvi District (3.2%), Upmale Parish in the Preiļi District (3.2%) and Lode Parish in the Valmiera District (3.2%). Most of the Roma in Latvia, however, live in larger cities as well as in the smaller towns of the region of Kurzeme. Only 16% of Romani people live in the countryside.

Communities

There are two Romani communities in Latvia – the Latvian Roma and the Russian Roma. The Russian Roma live in the eastern region of Latgale, mostly in the city of Daugavpils. There are differences in dialect, traditions and culture. The two communities are not closely linked. There are quite a few Romani people in Daugavpils (some 400 in the city and another 200 in the surrounding district), but none of Latvia's major Romani organizations is represented in the city, there are no activities in terms of Romani culture, education, etc. It was not possible within the framework of this study to make any conclusive observations about the situation of the Russian Roma in Daugavpils, because very few from that group were interviewed. The researchers from the LCHRES found that it was more difficult to make direct contact with the Roma in Daugavpils than was the case in other towns and areas.²⁵

²³ The official number comes from the 2000 census, the unofficial number comes from estimates from NGOs and local governments.

²⁴ In Daugavpils, for instance, they live in areas of private homes that are known as Grīva, Vecā Forštate and Judovka. In Rīga, the Roma live along Lubānas Street in the Latgale District of the City. The corresponding areas are Gāliņciems in Ventspils and Kalna Street in Tukums.

²⁵ People in the local government denoted only territories in their city, but not specific streets where the Roma might be found. When the researchers went to the designated areas, residents of other nationalities said that they did not know of any Roma, while others declined to answer the question. The Roma who were found did not lead the researchers to the residences of any other Roma in Daugavpils. The director of "Ame Roma", who successfully ensured interviews in all other areas of Roma population, could make no contacts with the Roma community in Daugavpils. It must be added that none of the interviewed Latvian Roma indicated having relatives in Daugavpils.

Daugavpils has a distinct ethnic situation – just 16% of the city's residents are Latvians – which is also reflected in the Roma population. Most do not speak the Latvian language, and their children usually attend schools where classes are taught in Russian. The Latvian Roma, when asked about the Russian Roma, tend to say that people in the latter group are more likely to follow traditions – early marriage, the dominant role of the father and the brothers in the family.

Settled Life and Contemporary Migration

Since World War II, many of Latvia's Romani residents have changed their traditional, nomadic way of life. In interviews it was found that Roma people today often live in the same place where their parents or even grandparents lived before them.

Along with changes in the post-Soviet economy, however, some Romani people moved to other parts of Latvia, while others emigrated to other countries. The shift to the market economy meant the dismantling of large Soviet-era farms and major industries, and this led to internal migration among the Roma – from rural areas to towns and from small towns to cities. For instance, according to representatives of the community, some 200 Romani people moved from Tukums to Talsi around 2000. At the Second Congress of the Roma, the leader of the "Gloss" organization, Leons Gindra, said that 20% of the Roma had left Latvia.²⁶

Interestingly, Romani people from specific towns have also tended to move to specific other locations – from Daugavpils to Moscow, for instance. Romani people from other towns such as Ventspils and Jelgava have also gone to Moscow to work, but they have not stayed there permanently. It has been reported that a number of Romani people from Jelgava have moved permanently to the United Kingdom. The Estonian capital city of Tallinn has been mentioned as a place where Romani people from Jūrmala and Kuldīga do business. There are other places, including Sabile and Talsi, where there has been virtually no reported emigration abroad.²⁷

The Family

Families in Privately Owned Housing by Type and by Number of Children

Family type	Families with this number of children								Number of families	Number of residents in these families	Average family size
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 or more			
All families	138	424	344	183	76	33	19	10	1,227	5,153	4.2
Married couple with or without children	99	112	147	89	38	19	8	7	519	2,208	4.3
Unregistered couple living together, with or without children	39	51	45	17	9	1	4		166	574	3.5
Father with one or more children	X	37	22	8	2	1			70	230	3.3
Mother with one or more children	X	224	130	69	27	12	7	3	472	2141	4.5

Source: Latvian Central Statistical Bureau, 2000 national census.

²⁶ LETA news agency. "Čigānu II kongress" (The Second Roma Congress), [²⁷ *Ibid.*](http://www.leta2000.com/latvian/arhivs/arhiveitem.asp?ItemID={8D0C020C-6715-11D, last time visited on 20 May 2003.</p>
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A total of 44.1% of Romani people who are raising children are single parents, while the proportion among all of Latvia's residents is 32.4%. The average family size among Romani families is 4.2 people, while among all residents in Latvia it is 2.8 people.²⁸

There are some indications that the number of marriages between Roma and non-Romani people is on the rise. According to the Central Statistical Board, there were 105 registered marriages between 2000 and 2002 in which at least one of the partners in marriage was a Romani person. Of these, 54% were mixed marriages. It is possible that this number actually indicates that those Romani people who marry non-Romani people are more likely to undergo official registration. However, in focus group discussions it was also mentioned by some participants that mixed marriages are increasingly supported. At the Third Congress of the Roma, Leons Gindra claimed that some 1,000 Roma are married to non-Romani people.²⁹

Birth Rates and Mortality

According to the Central Statistical Board, the Roma are the only ethnic group in Latvia with a positive natural growth rate. In 2000, there were 179 Romani births, while 61 Romani people died.

Birth Rates, Mortality and Natural Growth among Certain Ethnic Groups in Latvia in 2000 (per 1,000 residents)

Nationality	Birth Rates	Mortality	Natural growth
Roma	22.4	7.6	14.8
Latvians	9.3	12.9	-3.5
Russians	7.6	14	-6.4

Source: *Latvijas Demogrāfijas gadagrāmata 2001* (Latvian Demographic Annual 2001). Latvian Central Statistical Board, Rīga, 2001.

Birth rates among Romani women are far above those of Latvians and Russians, while mortality rates among the Roma are considerably lower. Given the general situation in Latvia, the natural growth rate among Roma is quite impressive.

²⁸ [Latvijas 2000. gada tautas skaitīšanas rezultāti, Statistikas datu krājums](#) (The results of the 2000 national census in Latvia: Collection of statistical data), p. 205.

²⁹ The Third Congress of the Roma was held in Mežaparks on 21 June 2003.

5. EDUCATION

Lack of education is one of the most serious problems for the social integration of the Roma in all of Eastern Europe. Although there is longer and broader experience with the search for solutions to the Roma education problem, there is nevertheless no unified conclusions regarding the best way to ensure long-term involvement of Romani children in the school system. Before Latvia regained independence, the education of Roma specifically did not receive attention. As indicated by the school teachers interviewed during this project, only those Romani children who have been signed up by the teachers, started attending school, but most of them quit after just a couple of classes. At the end of the Awakening period and during the first years of independence the first special classes were established for those who were illiterate – who were mostly Roma. Even today there is a high rate of illiteracy among the Roma. The number of children who do not initiate schooling or attend school is still high. The low level of education creates additional problems for Romani persons to get employment, to receive social assistance and to ensure the enjoyment of their legal rights.

5.1. Education Level of the Roma

According to the 2000 national census, we can conclude that most of the country's Romani residents have not completed their elementary education.

Level of education	Number	%
All Romani people aged 15 and above:	5,985	100
Primary school (grade 1–4)	1,092	18.2
Elementary school (5–9)	1,432	23.9
General secondary	401	6.7
Specialized secondary	72	1.2
Less than grade 4	1,453	24.3
University	26	0.4
No information	1,509	25.2

Source: The 2000 Latvian National Census, LCSP, 2002.

The numbers regarding the lowest education levels are dramatic. Among the 5,985 Romani people who were 15 years old or older at the time of the census, nearly one-quarter (24.3%) have not completed the 4th grade. This indicator differs radically from the situation in the country as a whole – 2.1% of the population (1.6% among Latvians and 2.4% among Russians). Another 18.2% of the Roma have primary school education (i.e., 4th grade). The numbers for all residents equal to 23.9% (27.1% of Latvians and 19.3% of Russians). In other words, more than 40% of the Roma have a 4 grades of education or less. What is more, one-quarter of the respondents (25.2%) did not state their level of education, which suggests that the number of the Roma with a level of education of a few grades might be as high as 60%.³⁰

A secondary education (general or specialized), which is often a basic demand in the labor market and a prerequisite for courses that are offered by the country's National Employment Service, has been completed by only 7.9% of the Roma, as compared to 46.2% of all of Latvia's residents (46.4% of Latvians and 46.5% among Russians). A total of 12.54% of Latvia's residents have completed a higher education (12.3% for Latvians and 13.6% for Russians), but this is true of only 26 Romani persons – just 0.4%.

³⁰ *Latvijas 2000. gada tautas skaitīšanas rezultāti, Statistikas datu krājums* (The results of the 2000 national census in Latvia: Collection of statistical data), p. 202.

5.2. Illiteracy

It is known that illiteracy is a serious problem among the Roma, but precise data are impossible to obtain. The fact that it is a widespread problem was confirmed in interviews with teachers, National Employment Agency officials and social assistance staff. According to the NEA, there were 46 illiterates among registered unemployed on February 1, 2003, and of them 39 (85%) were Romani. There were 5,361 people above the age of seven in Latvia in 2000 who could not read or write.³¹ It was suggested in interviews that the by far single largest ethnic group among these were the Roma. During a focus group study that was run by the Jelgava City Council, it was found that 60% of the 30 Roma who were present were illiterate. These indicators correspond to the data about the low level of education among the Roma – a total of 1,453 Romani people have spent less than four years in school, while another 1,509 have declined to state their level of education. This suggests that a great many of Latvia's illiterates – perhaps one-half – are Romani. In other words, the proportion of illiterates among the Roma may be 150 times higher than the Roma share of the population!

According to the NEA, 72% of Romani illiterates are women, but that doesn't mean that the number of illiterate women among the Roma is higher than the number of illiterate men. Instead it reflects the fact that 80% of the Roma who have registered with the NEA as being unemployed are women. The average age of all illiterates in Latvia is 40, while among the Roma it is 32. If the share of the Roma is so high, that suggests that illiterates in other ethnic groups are much older.³²

The largest number of illiterates who have registered as unemployed people is found in Jelgava, Jēkabpils, Daugavpils and Rīga. It is in these cities that no attention or insufficient attention has been devoted to the issue of Roma education. In Tukums, where a local Romani leader has been very active in helping children and adolescents to enter the education system, and in Ventspils, where there has been a school for the Roma for several years now, not a single illiterate Romani person has registered as unemployed.

5.3. Involvement in the Educational System

The level of education is equally low among all age groups of the Roma. Their inclusion in the educational system was not successful in Soviet times, nor was it successful during the first years of Latvia's restored independence. In the last several years, however, increasing numbers of Romani children have been going to school. The first years of independence, in the early 1990s, were a particularly critical time in terms of the attendance of all children, including Romani children, in school, because the Population Register had not yet been established, and local governments lacked data about the number of children of school age in their territories. This was a particularly rife problem in larger towns and cities. Today there are Cabinet of Ministers regulations to govern the registration of children who are of school age. There are reciprocal information links among the Population Register, the Ministry of Education and Science, local governments and schools.

The Number of Romani Children in General Education Schools in Latvia

School year	Number of students*	Studying in the Latvian language	Studying in the Russian language
2002/2003	1,591	945	640
2001/2002	1,317	907	405
2000/2001	1,187	780	401
1999/2000	1,067	717	346

Source: Ministry of Education and Science, "The distribution of children attending general education schools in the Republic of Latvia by nationality", <http://www.izm.lv> last time visited on June 3, 2003.

* The total number of students differs from the sum of students who attend Latvian language and Russian language schools because some Romani children attend schools where classes are taught in Polish.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

³² This also speaks to the data about education which show that among other ethnic groups, it is primarily elderly people who have a very poor education. See *Latvijas 2000. gada tautas skaitišana*, (The results of the 2000 national center in Latvia), p. 202.

Although it is still true that a majority of Romani children are attending Latvian schools, the percentage of those who study in the Russian language increased significantly – by nearly 60% – in the 2002/2003 school year. In previous school years, approximately 30% of Romani children had been studying in schools where classes are taught in Russian, but in the 2002/2003 school year that percentage had risen to around 40%.

In addition to the general education schools there are also evening schools, but there were only 48 Romani youth attending such schools in the 2002/2003 school year. Of them, six were attending Russian language schools, while the others were attending schools where classes are taught in Latvian.³³

The Distribution of Romani School Children by Town in the 2002/2003 School Year

Town	Number of Romani children in general education schools	Official number of Romani residents (according to the national census)
Rīga	196	1,160
Daugavpils	78	366
Jelgava	115	1,010
Ventspils	187	1,031
Jūrmala	85	439
Jēkabpils	35	301
Kuldīga	55	255
Talsi	115	586
Tukums	67	541
Valmiera	35	237

There has been a positive trend in recent times: people in a number of cities and towns have been devoting more attention to the need for Romani children to attend school. In Kuldīga, Jelgava, Talsi, Tukums and Ventspils, special measures have been taken in this regard. In the country's two largest cities – Rīga and Daugavpils, however, there have been no initiatives to deal with the problem. The same is true for Jūrmala.

School Attendance

Census data indicate that many Romani people never did go to school, while an even greater number have attended only a few classes. Many of those who are registered in school are often absent from class. According to the Education Board in the Talsi District, there were 12 school-age Romani children in the 2002/2003 school year who were not going to school. The number in Valmiera was 19. In Jūrmala it has been calculated that approximately one-third of Romani children have not started their schooling. There are 87 Romani children in Jelgava who don't go to school. In Daugavpils, school officials claimed in interviews that approximately one-quarter of the students have problems with attendance.

Class attendance problems are typical both among Romani children in special classes for the Roma and among Romani children in ordinary schools. In Kuldīga, Tukums and Ventspils, researchers were told that all children go to the first grade, and considerable efforts are devoted toward ensuring that they stay in school. In Tukums this job is reportedly done by a representative of a Romani NGO. He visits Romani parents at their homes to convince them of the need for education. In Ventspils, this role has been undertaken by teachers. They also pay visits to the parents of Romani children who have been missing from school.

5.4. Why Romani Children Do Not Attend School

The views of the Roma

The Roma themselves report that a lack of funds is the main reason why their children do not go to school. Discrimination or unfavorable attitudes at school, as well as the behavior of teachers and other children, are also

³³ Ministry of Education and Science, "The distribution of children attending general education schools in the Republic of Latvia by nationality", <http://www.izm.lv>, last time visited on June 3, 2003.

often mentioned as reasons. Some Romani people also argue that they do not believe that Romani children will be able to find work even if they complete their education. This is an example of pessimism among socially marginalized groups, which corresponds to the reports by teachers who say that they have a difficult time in persuading Romani parents to become involved in their children's education. In interviews and focus group discussions, several Romani parents stressed that their views about education were changing in a more positive direction and that people do need an education. Others, however, spoke of negative attitudes, albeit most often in relation to other Romani people – neighbors or acquaintances who supposedly do not want to go to school.

Reasons Why People Did Not Go to School in the Past and Changes in Attitudes toward Education (from focus group discussions)

"I wanted to ask about education among those people who are older. During German rule, we were taken out of school, we were expelled. They shot at us. We were destroyed just like the Jews. We weren't allowed to go to school at all. I was taken out of school when I was in the third grade, and I was thrown out of school because I am a Romani person. Our ethnic group was destroyed just like the Jews. Where could we have received a better education? The Germans came in 1945. I was a big boy, but I had to go to work after the war. How else could I survive?"

"I had to earn a living. My father was always sick, I had to put bread on the table. My parents had three children."

"I haven't completed hardly any class. My mother didn't let me go to school back then. There were four of us, it was a harsh life."

"If you lived in the countryside, then all that you did was get married, you already had children. We were all out in the forest, we picked berries, that's how we survived. Those were different times, these are different times again. Now you can't make do without schools, but back then we made do. It was different then, you can't do the same thing today."

"Let me explain, let me be frank. We Romani people had our own activities. In Soviet times that was known as speculation, right? Today it's called business. The gates to Russia were open to us, that's where we did our business. We risked, but we earned money. Today there's competition in Moscow, in Russia. I've graduated secondary school. Why didn't I continue my education? In the Soviet Union an engineer earned 150 rubles per month, while I earned the same amount in one day. That says it all, I have nothing to add."

"Education is very necessary today. Our people have not yet recognized the fact that education is the main thing today. I don't hope that this will continue to be the case, but our Romani culture has not moved in that direction. School is the most important thing today, but our ethnic culture does not hold the school to be the most important thing."

"They don't want to study. They have lots of children, large families. We don't have anything to eat. We'll buy something, we'll steal something, we'll sell something so as to have something to put on the table. They start engaging in business from an early age. Someone who engages in business engages in business. If the family is a good one, then the children are sent to school."

"It also depends on parents. If the parents are educated, then they want to educate their children. They may not be rich people, but they'll always send their children to school. If the parents don't like school, though, then their children won't go either."

The Views of Local Government Representatives and Teachers

Government officials and some teachers describe the situation in a different way than the Roma do. Most interviewees said that the low level of school attendance has to do with traditions and ways of life. Some respondents feel that in Soviet times many Romani people earned a very good living by selling products of which there was a shortage, they saw no reason to become educated. Government officials also spoke of a lack of motivation, adding that many Romani people get married between the ages of 12 and 15, when children are between the 4th and the 7th grade. Sometimes that is reportedly still the reason why Romani girls don't continue their education. Romani boys in this age group are said to have to undertake adult responsibilities, they have to earn money; there is no time left over for school.

Teachers also talked about the fact that Romani parents often travel to other cities or countries to earn money. Children are often left in the care of grandparents or distant relatives – people who don't pay attention to whether or not the child is going to school. Sometimes the children are taken along to other cities, and either they do not study at all, or they have a difficult time in adjusting to the new circumstances in the middle of a school year. Only one school representative said that the reason why Romani children don't go to school is that the Romani society – children as well as parents – holds negative attitudes toward education.

Most officials and schoolteachers did not think that schools, local governments or the state should shoulder the responsibility for this situation. They expressed the view that the Roma themselves must deal with it.

5.5. Special Schools or the Integration of Romani Children into General Schools

A contentious and unresolved issue is the question of whether Romani children are more likely to attend school and continue their education if they attend special schools or classrooms for Romani children, or if they attend regular schools together with children of other ethnic groups. It has frequently been argued that special classes are better in terms of attracting Romani children, because that means that they don't have to face discriminatory or denigrating attitudes from other children and teachers, that they don't have to face a situation in which they do more poorly than their classmates on their schoolwork, they don't have to feel pressured to assimilate, and that they might feel better in an environment where they are amongst their own people. It should be noted, however, that historically and in practice separate schools have been organized for very different reasons.

In most Eastern European countries, these schools or classrooms are not minority schools or programs that are aimed at the integration of the Roma into society while allowing them to preserve their identity, culture and language. Rather, they are usually special schools for socially problematic groups or even for children with mental disabilities. In Latvia, these classes are informally known as "Romani classes," but none of them has the official status of a minority education program. In none of these classes do children learn about Romani culture or history. Most of the Romani classes – except only for those in Ventspils and Rīga – are officially classified as classes where children undergo educational adjustment. Article 1 of Latvia's general education law says that "educational adjustment is an educational program which has been adapted in methodological and organizational terms to the needs of an individual who is of the age group which requires mandatory education and who requires additional learning under the auspices of the basic education program." The law also says that educational adjustment is organized by educational institutions through "remedial education programs which ensure an education or which improve the quality of obtaining the education, engaging in pedagogical activities with children from unfavorable families and with juvenile lawbreakers." In nearly all of the Romani classes that were visited, all of the students were Romani children.

There are two main arguments in opposition to separate programs and schools. First, that this is really a form of discrimination, and it helps to ensure that Romani children are never competitive with other young people in ongoing education and in the search for employment. The quality of teaching in these schools tends to be lower than the norm. Second, that separate schools are simply a form of segregation which keeps Romani children away from others, which perpetuates mutual suspicion between the Roma and others, and which places real obstacles in the way of the successful integration of Romani people into the society of a country. The European Roma Rights Center and the Council of Europe have, therefore, included strict anti-segregation clauses in their recommendations in the area of education.³⁴

There have also been attempts to deal with this problem using mixed arguments and methods from both positions. Thus, for example, there are now preschool institutions for Romani children where specially trained teachers prepare the children so that they can successfully join regular classes at the first grade level or as soon as possible thereafter.

³⁴ The recommendations of the European Roma Rights Center can be found at <http://www.errc.org/publications/position/education.shtml>, last time visited on August 4, 2003. Recommendation No. R(2000)4 from the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe can be found at <http://cm.coe.int/ta/rec/2000/2000r4.htm>, last time visited on August 4, 2003.

Romani Classes

Education experts and school representatives who were interviewed argued that Romani children need separate classrooms, but they also stressed that the goal of these classes is to ensure that the children can then become integrated into ordinary schools. One reason which was mentioned by teachers in relation to the need for special classes is that Romani children face a language barrier in Latvian schools – they supposedly have fairly primitive Latvian language skills. Other teachers, however, argued that Romani children who attend regular schools do better in their studies and stay in school for a longer period of time.

There is no unanimity of opinion about the most effective way to include Romani children into the education system – not among the Roma themselves, nor among teachers. In the towns of Kuldīga, Jelgava, Talsi, Tukums, Sabile and Ventspils, there are special classes for Romani children. Schools and teachers have often been the first to attempt to deal with the matter. The work has also involved Romani NGOs or informal community leaders, as well as local governments.

Information about Romani Classes in Latvia

Town/School	Year of establishment	Classes	Language of learning	No. of students, 2002/2003	Age of students
Sabile Elementary School	1998	Remedial class (Grades 1–5)	Latvian	14	5–22
Talsi Elementary School	2001	Remedial class (Grades 1–2)	Latvian	15	No data
Tukums No. 3 High School (minority school with classes taught in Russian)	2001	Two remedial classes – Grades 1 and 2	Latvian	10 in Grade 1, 8 in Grade 2	No data
Rīga National Technicum	2002	A commerce class in the second year	Latvian	8	No data
The Kuldīga No. 2 High School	2002/2003	Remedial classes in 3 groups – Grade 1; Grades 2–4; Grades 5–6	Latvian	33	7–20
Ventspils Evening High School	1987	Grades 1–4	Latvian	116	6–19
Jelgava Evening High School	2000	Remedial class, Grades 2–5	Latvian	21	15–21

There are classes for Romani children in seven towns in all. Except for the Romani classes at the Ventspils Evening High School and the Rīga National Technicum, all of these have the status of remedial classes. The Ventspils Evening High School has gained the greatest experience in this work, but most of the special classes are very recent phenomena. Before then those Romani children who did go to school attended regular classes.

A Description of the Romani Classes³⁵

Ventspils

The Romani class was set up at the Ventspils Evening High School in 1987. The stated reason was that there was a need to teach young Romani men who were being drafted into the Soviet army to read and write. Initially most of the students were far older than ordinary schoolchildren, but over the course of time younger and younger children began to attend. Initially the students were only taught to read and write, but now the school uses the country's general curriculum and related standards for Grades 1–6. There are ethnic Romani classes in which all

³⁵ The information came from school representatives during interviews and from observations during visits.

of the students are Romani between Grades 1 and 4. In later years, other children from social risk families or impoverished families are included in the process. From Grade 7 on, the Romani children start to attend evening classes at the secondary school level, and there the educational process is based on the evening school curriculum.

In the 2000/2001 school year, there were children and adolescents aged 6 to 17 in the first grade of the school. Textbooks are provided by the local government, and a free lunch is available for children from poor families or families with many children. One-half of the Romani children receive the free lunch.

There are six teachers who work in the Romani classrooms. They speak the Romani language and are able to explain things such as the alphabet, the use of ordinal and cardinal numbers, the declension of nouns, etc., in the Romani language. Most classes are taught in the Latvian language, however. The teachers also work with the children on an individual basis. In 2003, two teachers from the Ventspils school, Gunita Grinvalde and Dace Voldemāre, published a primer for Romani children that is called "I'm going to school: I want to learn to read and write." Teacher Grinvalde said that this primer has made it much easier for Romani children to learn to read and write.

Factors which hinder the operation of Romani classes in Ventspils include the poor preparedness of many children for school. This is a result of the fact that there are no preparatory classes for five- or six-year-old children. In 2003, the Romani NGO "Ame Roma" was planning to establish such preparatory classes for pre-school age children. The classes will be taught by teachers who speak Romani, as one of the reported reasons why Romani children have problems in attending ordinary schools is that they have insufficient Latvian language skills. At this writing, the NGO had identified 27 children at the age of five or six who will begin attending the preparatory classes.

The teaching process is also encumbered by the fact that there are great age differences among the various children and adolescents who study in a single classroom. Parents are often not very interested in their children's education or in their achievements at school. There are shortages of school supplies, such as colored pencils, water colors or modeling clay, because parents do not have the means to buy these. Extracurricular activities such as visits to theaters, museums or concerts are also very difficult because of limited financial resources.

There have reportedly been cases in Ventspils when Romani children who have begun to attend other schools have eventually returned to the Romani classes, saying that other children scorned them and that teachers did not pay sufficient attention to them.

Talsi

The way the Romani classes were established in Talsi is quite similar to the way in which it happened in Ventspils. In the late 1980s, the Talsi Elementary School organized a class for illiterate children, and almost all of the students were Romani. The school's administrators were the ones who came up with this initiative. A class for Romani children was re-established at the school in 2001, with 15 children of various ages. Classes were taught in the second shift and only until April 1, because later in the spring, said the school leadership, many children have to go to work and do not attend school any longer. Older students are often absent, reportedly because of various opportunities to do random kinds of work. Preschool teachers are the ones who work with the students in the Romani classroom. Once students complete their remedial studies, they join other classes at the elementary school, move to the Talsi No. 2 Secondary School or continue their education at the Talsi Evening Secondary School.

Tukums

A class for Romani children was organized in Tukums with the help of A. Berezovskis, who is the chairman of the Tukums branch of the Romani organization "Gloss." According to him, there were 70 Romani children in Tukums between the ages of 7 and 18 when the class was established, and more than one-half of them (46) were not going to school. At the Tukums No. 3 High School, all of the children in the remedial class for the Roma receive a free lunch, and their school supplies are provided by the school. In the 2002/2003 school year, there were 18 Romani children in the remedial class. At the beginning of the year there were more students, but the number declined over the course of time as several families moved away from the town. The Tukums No. 3 Secondary School is considered a minority school, and classes there are taught in Russian. Lessons in the Romani classroom, however, are taught in Latvian. For most of the Roma in the western Latvian region of Kurzeme, Latvian is the

first language other than Romani which they learn. The Romani class was established at a Russian school only because there were supposedly no available facilities elsewhere. In 2001, a teacher from the Bēne School, Savīne Kolomenska, worked with the Romani children using the Romani language. Initially the local government paid for her transportation costs, but the money ran out. The principal of the school in Tukums claims that the aim of the remedial class for Romani children is to allow the children to become integrated into the ordinary school. The school is, however, considering seeking a license that would allow it to organize Romani classes through the 9th grade level.

Kuldīga

Romani children in the town of Kuldīga initially attended a social adjustment class at the Kuldīga Evening School, with classes being taught twice a week. In the 2002/2003 school year, the process was moved to the Kuldīga Primary School. The remedial classes were set up at the initiative of the local government. The principal of the school is also said to have played a significant role, while teachers tried to monitor attendance and truancy. The director of the local branch of the Latvian National Romani Cultural Association, B. Agamedova, helped in identifying those children who were not going to school. In the 2002/2003 school year, there were 33 students between the ages of 7 and 20 in the elementary school classes. The students were divided up into three groups – one which involved the first grade, a second which involved the 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades, and a third which brought together the 5th and the 6th grade. Classes were taught in the second shift, school supplies were provided by the school. Graduates of the remedial program are expected to join the ordinary educational process.

Sabile

The educational adjustment class for Romani children at the Sabile Elementary School (Grades 1–5) was established in 1998 at the school's own initiative. Romani children who were not attending school were identified by the principal of the school and by a teacher. Classes are taught in the first shift – from 8:30 or 9:00 AM to 1:00 or 2:00 PM. In the 2002/2003 school year, there were 14 students, aged 7 to 22. When the LCHRES researchers visited the classroom, there were eight children in attendance, which suggested a truancy problem. All of the Romani students in the first grade receive a free lunch. The Romani class at the Sabile school is presently the only one where music lessons are taught in the Romani language. A Romani teacher, Kaspars Arhipovs, is the music instructor.

Jelgava

The initiative in setting up a remedial class for Romani children at the Jelgava Evening School came from the Romani society in Jelgava. The class was opened in 2000. In the 2002/2003 school year, there were 21 registered students, but only 15 of them attended regularly. Subjects from the 2nd to the 5th grade are taught. Children who do not go to school have been identified by the teacher. Most of the students receive a free lunch. The class and the local Romani organization no longer work together, and that is perhaps why so few children have been brought into the system.

Rīga

According to official data, there are 1,160 Romani residents in the Latvian capital city, and in the 2002/2003 school year, there were 196 Romani children in the city's education system. Despite this, there are no special classes for Romani children in the city. According to the Education Board of the Rīga City Council, there were 186 Romani students in the city's general education schools in the 2001/2002 school year. The largest number studied in the Latgale District of the city – 85 students in all. Most of these, in turn, attended the social adjustment classes at the Rīga No. 44 High School. There were 14 Romani students among some 130 children in all. According to L. Daktiņš, the director of the remedial program at the No. 44 Secondary School, only nine Romani students were still attending in 2002/2003, because some students were expelled for failing to do their work, while others moved away from the city with their families. Romani children are sent to the No. 44 Secondary School if they have had problems in other schools or, sometimes, they are sent there by the Rīga School Board.

The only school with a Romani class where a secondary education can be pursued is the Rīga National Technicum. The class was set up at the suggestion of the chairman of the Latvian National Romani Cultural Association, Normunds Rudevičs. A total of 18 students were signed up for the class in the 2002/2003 school year, and 14 of them stuck with their studies. The technicum teaches commerce, office work organization, small business, secretarial specialization, computer skills and the jobs of a cobbler or a seamstress. Altogether there are 20

Romani students at the school, six of them in the regular classes. The study process is financed from the national budget. Students receive a monthly stipend of Ls 8.50 (14 Euro), compensation for 50% of their travel costs and accommodations in a dormitory. Only three Romani students live in the dormitory, however, even though there are Romani students at the technicum from all over the country.

In **Jūrmala** there was a separate Romani class at the Mežmale School in 1998, but that is no longer the case because there are not enough children to justify the class.

In **Daugavpils** there has never been any discussion about the establishment of a special class for Romani children. According to the director of the Daugavpils Education Board, J. Dukšinskis, nobody has ever proposed that such a class be established. He added that there are too few Roma in the city to justify such a class. Most Romani children in Daugavpils attend such schools where classes are taught in Russian. This was true of 75 of 78 Romani students in the 2002/2003 school year.

Special Schools

Romani children also attend schools with specialized education programs for children with special needs (e.g., developmental disorders) and/or children with health problems. In Daugavpils, Jelgava and Jūrmala, approximately 1% of Romani students attend schools, while in Jēkabpils and Valmiera the figure is 40% of Romani children. All costs related to attendance and accommodations at these schools are covered by the state.

5.6. Special Problems in the Educational Process

Language

Nowhere in the Latvian education system are classes taught in the Romani language, the sole exception being the aforementioned music class in Sabile. There are some teachers who have learned the Romani language to a certain extent while working with the children. They can understand what the youngsters are saying, and they can provide rudimentary explanations in Romani. Experience at the school in Ventspils makes it clear that Romani language skills are critically important for teachers when working with the Roma at the early stages of the educational process – a time when the Latvian language skills of the children are not yet well-developed and many things have to be explained in Romani. Interviews with parents tell us that one of the problems in the education process is that children often don't understand what the teacher is saying. In Ventspils, parents said that this is also a reason why some children stop attending school.

During recess, Romani children speak Romani to one another, to which teachers respond very differently. There are places where students are not allowed to speak the Romani language even during recess (Tukums). Elsewhere, interview respondents displayed a clearly negative attitude: "Sure, they get together in a bunch and say things in Romani. No, now they are going to be speaking Latvian!" (Talsi). In other places (Ventspils), teachers have taken steps to learn the Romani language themselves.

Only a few teachers said in the interviews that it is important for teachers to know the Romani language. There are very few teachers of Romani extraction in Latvia – the music teacher in Sabile is one. Romani teachers in Jūrmala and Bēne no longer are specifically involved in work in a Romani class.

Work with Parents

As is often the case in socially vulnerable groups of people, parents of Romani children are not very active when it comes to their children's education. Hardly any of the interviewed Romani children said that their parents were helping them with schoolwork. Most work which teachers do with Romani parents takes place on an individual basis. There are teachers who visit parents at their homes when necessary. Nearly all teachers said that it is impossible to arrange a meeting of parents in Romani classes. At the school in Tukums it was said that parents are represented by the local Romani leader. It must also be noted that teachers who were asked to talk about the attitudes of parents invariably said that many parents attend cultural events where their children are performing.

Teachers

At none of the surveyed schools had any teacher been given specific training in work in a Romani class or with minority students in general. Teachers and school administrators indicated that some teachers were hesitant

about working with the Romani children but agreed to take on the job for financial reasons. In other schools, teachers did the work with enthusiasm. Some teachers reported that colleagues who worked with Romani children sometimes faced scorn on the part of other teachers.

Isolation among the Children

A lack of contact with children of other ethnic groups does not promote integration, but leads to separation and segregation. Attitudes which Romani children experience on the part of other members of society – first and foremost in schools – is of key importance, because these attitudes are discovered during the children's formative years.

In one-half of the surveyed schools, Romani classes were organized in the second shift. Reasons which were stated for this were less than convincing. One interviewee said that the Romani children "love to get their sleep." Another spoke of a lack of facilities. Roma classes are often the only classes that are taught in the second shift, which suggests that schools are purposefully limiting contacts between Romani children and other children. This also suggests discrimination in relation to facilities and resources.

Things which the Roma themselves say about negative attitudes on the part of other children or teachers also reflect a certain process of self-isolation. Visits to schools confirmed a lack of contacts between Romani children and other students. At only one school did Romani children say that they were developing friendships with Latvian children. Elsewhere, Romani children tend to form contacts amongst themselves. Most surveyed children said that they would not like to go to an ordinary school: "Your own people remains your own people," said one.

Evaluation of Romani Classes

Most of the Romani classes were established over the last few years, which makes it difficult to draw definite conclusions about the effectiveness of these classes in terms of the educational process as such and of the extent to which children who complete these studies are able to move on to the regular educational process. Most of the surveyed school representatives claimed that the quality of education in the Romani classes conforms to existing standards and that graduates have had no problem in joining the normal educational process at the appropriate grade level. There were some teachers, however, who admitted that the attitudes of school administrators and educational institutions are different when it comes to Romani children. Children from Romani classes, for instance, have never been invited to participate in various educational competitions. It is too early to tell how extensively Romani children have become integrated into ordinary classes after they complete their remedial or otherwise segregated studies. The only Romani class that has been in operation for a significant period of time is the one in Ventspils, and teachers there said that Romani children do not become integrated into the city's ordinary schools.

The initiators for these classes have, in most cases, been school principals and teachers, although one class was set up at the initiative of the local government. The Roma themselves are active participants in this work in a few towns. The number of Romani children who attend school is several times higher in those towns where the Roma are involved in the process (Ventspils, Tukums) than it is in other places. In Ventspils and Tukums, all Romani children in the relevant area have reportedly been identified. School and local government officials, too, say that Romani activists must participate in the process if children are successfully to be identified and brought to schools.

The views of the Roma themselves with respect to the need for special Romani classes are very varied in Latvia and elsewhere in the world. Many Romani people send their children to Romani schools, but nearly as large a segment of the Romani population believe that children in such classes do not get the same level of education as they would in ordinary schools. Consequently, Romani children are not given the same subsequent opportunities to continue with their education.

Views among the Roma Regarding Roma Classes and General Schools (from focus group discussions)

"The students in the first grade at the Romani school are the ones who are not prepared for the Latvian language, they don't speak the Latvian language cleanly. The teacher speaks Romani herself, yes, herself. That's why the kids are sent to that little Romani class in the first, second and third grade, so that they really learn the language."

"Let me tell you, my daughter speaks Latvian very well, and for that reason alone I allowed her to attend the evening school, so that she would not be offended – the Latvian school."

"If we had the money, we would also send the kids to a Romani school so that it would be easier for them. They won't be able to speak perfect Latvian after the first or second grade anyway."

"I wouldn't allow my children to go to a Romani school, because the education is different there, it's worse."

"No, that's not necessary. If they finish a Romani school, he won't have any prospects. Literally no prospects at all. He'll graduate, and he won't move forward. That's the first thing. And that's the reason why I don't believe that a Romani school is necessary."

"No, not a Romani school. It's better at the Latvian school. What kind of education do they get at this Romani school?"

"A Romani school, as far as possible – until elementary school. No knowledge, no books."

"Let them go there, to the Latvian or Russian school, but the special one – no. As long as they get an education."

Negative Attitudes Toward Romani Children at General Schools (from focus group discussions)

"I can tell you about my granddaughter. There are times when she tells me that she has had it up to here. I don't understand what they want from me – I learn just like everyone else, I wear the same clothes, very few people can tell that she is a Romani girl. But they come up to me and pinch me – oh, you little Romani girl, you!"

"I have a granddaughter of school age, and the teacher used to yell at her for no reason, just because she is Romani. That's why she doesn't want to go to that school. The same was true for my daughters."

"Back in the Russian times it wasn't that terrible. There weren't the same attitudes, people didn't poke you and yell that you're a Romani person. It didn't used to be the case, but now, in independent Latvia, that is what happens."

"They really suffer because they're mocked and pushed aside. The teachers, too – they push the children aside the most. But they don't complain much. When she's in the hallway, when the children try to run her over, the bigger boys, I tell her – let them pass, turn aside so that they don't run into you. They just keep running at her. Such terrible children, so spoiled, so spoiled. You must understand – Romani children are never as spoiled as Russian and Latvian children are."

Conclusions

Although 40% of Latvia's Romani residents have completed no more than a 4th-grade education and many of the Roma are illiterate, the national government and local governments have not devoted sufficient attention to the issue of education of the Roma. The extent to which Romani children attend school depends on the good will of a very few individuals. No thought has been given to adult education at all. At no school are classes taught on Romani culture or history.

This disastrous lack of education is one of the main factors in the marginalization of the Roma. There are two distinct problems: 1) raising the level of education among Romani people who are no longer of school age, and 2) ensuring that school-age Romani children become involved in the educational process for the duration. There are places in Latvia where as many as 30% of Romani children never even go to the first grade. In all schools there are serious truancy problems among Romani students.

There have been some positive developments in the last few years, more attention has been focused on bringing Romani children to school. This is seen in data from the Ministry of Education and Science.

Nearly all of the Romani classes that have been established in Latvia have special status as pedagogical or social adjustment classes. The education in these classes can be compared to the education that is obtained at ordinary schools, and theoretically it allows graduates to move on to ordinary schools, but in reality the special status and name of the classes might have negatively influence on the ability of graduates to continue their education elsewhere.

In most cases it is only the specific schools and a few individuals who focus their attention on the education of Romani children. Some of them make very successful use of the assistance of Romani NGOs and individuals. In these areas, according to schools and NGOs, all school age Romani children have been identified.

Among interviewed Romani respondents who said that they have faced discrimination, 10% reported discrimination at school, both on the part of other students and on the part of teachers. There were also suggestions of discrimination at a few specific schools. Teacher attitudes are not always favorable, and Romani children tend to be isolated from other kids even at those schools where their classes are taught in parallel. Elsewhere, Romani classes are organized in the second shift, and this only exacerbates the problems of isolation and segregation.

6. EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment is one of the most serious problems for the Roma in Latvia and elsewhere in Europe. The unemployment level reflects not just official unemployment, but also the absence of official job relations of any kind and unofficial unemployment. Employment levels among the Roma are extremely low, especially in terms of official and lasting job relations. The basic obstacles to employment are the low level of education and training among the Roma, as well as widespread prejudice and discrimination.

A brief look into recent history will help to understand the current employment situation among the Roma. In Soviet times, according to interviewed Roma, there were also few Romani people who were involved in legal job relationships. Most of those who worked held jobs which did not require much education or training – at large industrial factories, on collective farms or in fish processing plants. Many other Roma, however, earned a living by engaging in discreet trade with products that were in short supply elsewhere on the market. All of this had negative consequences which are still felt today by the Roma in Latvia. For one thing, the Romani community abandoned its traditional lines of work as artisans and livestock breeders. There are virtually no Romani people left in Latvia who make their living that way.

Another negative consequence to the situation is that the Roma lack work experience or official job history, and this makes it more difficult for them to compete in the labor market.³⁶ Once Latvia regained its independence and made the transition to a market economy, the Roma could no longer earn money by selling scarce goods. The restructuring of the economy led to the dismantling of collective farms and the bankruptcy of many factories and fish processing plants. Many of those Roma who had had official jobs ended up losing them.

6.1. Unemployment Rate

According to the National Employment Agency (Latvian acronym NVA), the official unemployment rate in Latvia on 1 March 2003 was 8.9%, although there are extensive regional differences in unemployment. In the capital city of Riga, the official unemployment rate was only 4.7%,³⁷ while in Daugavpils the figure was 11.6%.³⁸ The unofficial unemployment rate (i.e., including those unemployed who are not officially registered as unemployed) is far higher than the official rate – by a factor of two or even three in some parts of the country. Comparatively few Romani people have registered as being unemployed, which means that in this community it is particularly important to consider both the official and the unofficial unemployment rate.

6.1.1. The Official Unemployment Rate among the Roma

At this writing, there were 500 Romani people of working age who were registered with the National Employment Agency. According to information that was provided by the Central Statistical Board, there are 5,178 Romani people in Latvia who are of working age. Among them, of course, there are people who are disabled, who are students or who are in the army (according to available information, this is a fairly negligible number of people). This indicates that only 10–12% of these people have registered with the agency as being unemployed. That is a higher indicator than the national average (8.9%), but it should be remembered that unofficial data about the number of Romani people in Latvia tell us that there might be 15,000 of them in the country. In that case the percentage of Romani people who are officially registered as being unemployed is lower than the national average – around 6%. At the same time, very few Roma hold official, long-term jobs. There are also very few who are involved in unofficial job relations.³⁹

³⁶ It is also true that an absence of a history of lawful employment has had a deleterious effect on the income of Romani pensioners. As pensions are based on the length of one's work history, many Romani pensioners receive only the minimum guaranteed pension.

³⁷ The data are from the Riga branch of the National Employment Agency, interviews with employees of the agency, 4 April 2003.

³⁸ The data are from the Daugavpils branch of the National Employment Agency, interviews with employees of the agency, 9 April 2003.

³⁹ This information comes from interviews with Romani people that were conducted under the auspices of this project between January and May 2003.

The Number of Officially Registered Unemployed Persons (including Romani persons) in Latvia⁴⁰

City	Total number of unemployed (unemployment rate%)	Romani persons who are registered as unemployed (% of all unemployed people in the city)	Percentage of the Roma among the local population, %
Rīga	17,059 (4.7)	42 (0.24)	0.15
Ventspils	1,622 (8.0)	48 (2.3)	1.6
Jelgava	2,493 (9.2)	110 (4.4)	1.6
Jūrmala	2,293 (8.9)	100 (4.36)	0.8
Tukums	1,611 (6.3)	33 (2.04)	2.9
Talsi	2,128 (9.1)	33 (1.55)	4.7
Valmiera	2,064 (7.5)	25 (1.21)	0.9
Jēkabpils	2,901 (12.6)	10 (0.34)	1.1
Daugavpils	5,715 (11.4)	12–15 (0.22)	0.3
Kuldīga	1,530 (9.7)	21 (1.37)	1.9
The rest of Latvia		60	
Total		504–507	

The number of officially registered unemployed Romani persons ranges from between 12 and 15 in Daugavpils to 110 in Jelgava. The highest percentages are found in Jelgava (4.4%) and Jūrmala (4.34%) – in both cases the percentage is several times higher than the proportion of the Roma amongst the population at large. These are also the places where the largest number of registered Romani people is found – 110 in Jelgava and 100 in Jūrmala. This indicates that Roma in Jūrmala are the most active in registering as unemployed – nearly one-quarter (23%) of the 439 Romani persons who are officially shown as living in the town. In Jelgava, where there are more than 1,000 Romani residents, approximately 10% are officially registered with the employment agency.

In Rīga and Ventspils, where the number of Roma is similar to that in Jelgava, there are far fewer people who have registered as unemployed – 42 in Rīga and 48 in Ventspils (less than 5% in Ventspils and less than 4% in Rīga, in other words). Rīga has the lowest overall unemployment rate in the country, but this does not allow us to conclude that Romani people in Rīga are more likely to have official job relations than do Romani people in other parts of the country. Rather it might signify that many Romani people engage in unofficial economic activities in the country's major towns and cities – only 4% or so of all Romani people are registered with the NVA in Daugavpils, while the smallest percentage of Romani people who are registered as unemployed is found in Jēkabpils (3%) – the town in which the official unemployment rate is the highest.

In Talsi, Tukums, Daugavpils and Jēkabpils, the share of registered Romani unemployed of all registered unemployed is lower than is the proportion of Romani people in the population at large, which might suggest that there are fewer officially unemployed among the Romani population than among other residents. In other towns, however, official unemployment among the Roma is higher than it is among the population at large – in some cases, many times greater. Differences among the number of officially registered Romani people in various towns, however, do not provide us with anything close to an adequate idea of the true level of unemployment. Rather, we are looking at the various level of activity among the Roma when it comes to undergoing the registration procedure. If we know the very high level of unemployment among the Roma, then we must conclude that a very small percentage of them are officially registered as being unemployed.

⁴⁰ For the first quarter of 2003, from spoken and written data from the National Employment Agency and from interviews that were conducted under the auspices of the project between January and May 2003. It is not, in fact, possible to come up with a precise number of unemployed Romani people in Latvia. The lists of unemployed people which are kept by the National Employment Agency do state each registered person's ethnicity, but smaller minority groups, including the Roma, are bunched together under the heading "Other." This also makes it very difficult to determine the number of Romani people who are officially registered as being unemployed in Latvia. The number of registered unemployed Romani people was calculated on the basis of a coefficient related to the number of registered Romani people and the number of unemployed people in Latvia in total, separating this out for cities, small towns and the countryside.

6.1.2. The Level of Employment and the Unofficial Unemployment

If we are to get a true sense of the level of unemployment among the Roma, we must look at factors that are related to employment. Very few Romani persons hold official, long-term jobs. The European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance has surmised that only 2% of the Roma in Latvia are working.⁴¹ It is not easy to come up with a precise number here – figures that have been received from the leaders of various Romani NGOs differ widely. Everyone agrees, however, that very few Romani persons are officially employed. According to various data, NGO leaders feel that the number might be 10%,⁴² 5%,⁴³ 3%⁴⁴ or even just 1%.⁴⁵

Other sources, too, speak to the possibility of regional differences. Among the 127 working-age Romani people who live in Jēkabpils, for instance, only six (4.7%) have official jobs.⁴⁶ A study that was conducted by teachers in Ventspils with respect to the parents of their students found that of some 220 individuals, 27 (12%) had jobs. We must remember, however, that this study focused on families whose children were attending school, which means that those Romani people in Ventspils who are at the very bottom of the socioeconomic ladder might have been excluded from the process, even though unemployment among them is certainly very high. Therefore, 12% of employed Romani people, albeit a low indicator, might still be overly optimistic.

These data about employment among the Roma may be dramatic, but they are by no means unique when it comes to the Roma employment situation in Eastern Europe. According to the European Roma Rights Center, Romani people in the Czech Republic face massive discrimination in the field of employment. The overall unemployment rate in the Czech Republic in 2001 was around 5%, while among the Roma it was between 70% and 90%, depending on the region of the country. In Romania, unemployment among the Roma is at a level of between 80% and 90%, while the overall unemployment rate has been 12.2%. Against an overall unemployment rate of 11% in Hungary, unemployment among Romani men has ranged from 60% to 80%, while unemployment among Romani women has ranged from 35% to 40%, according to Romani NGOs. There are places in Hungary where 90% of the Roma have no job.⁴⁷

6.2. Economic Activities as a Source of Livelihood

Data about sources of income among Romani people also provide an indirect confirmation of the claim that very few Romani people have official jobs. The 2000 national census in Latvia showed that only 491 (6%) of Romani residents reported economic activities as their primary source of income. This did not make it clear, however, whether the economic activities in question referred to official, long-term jobs, seasonal work, work on individual farms or unofficial work. Among all residents of Latvia, 32.2%, or a five times greater number, reported “economic activities” as a source of livelihood. Among other ethnic groups, such activities were cited as the primary source of income by 32% of Latvians, 32% of Russians and 35% of Ukrainians. These indicators certainly suggest that very few Romani people have official jobs.

According to the 2000 census, 1,167 Romani persons (14.2%) indicated “Other” when asked about their primary source of income. Another 2051 (25%) did not answer the question at all. In comparison, “Other” was indicated by 4.1% of Latvians, 4.6% of Russians and 4.9% of Ukrainians. Another 5% of Latvians, 10% of Russians and 11% of Ukrainians did not answer the question.

⁴¹ European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance, second report on Latvia, adopted on 14 December 2001, http://www.coe.int/T/E/human_rights/Ecri/1-ECRI/2-Country-by-country_approach/Latvia/Latvia_CBC_2.asp#TopOfPage, last time visited on June 2, 2003.

⁴² At the first congress of the Roma, the president of the Latvian Roma association “Gloss”, Leons Gindra, said that of every 100 Romani people, only 10 are working. See “Latvijas čigāni uztraucas par savu eksistenci” (Latvia’s Romani residents are worried about their existence), an interview with Leons Gindra, LETA News Agency, 24 May 2001.

⁴³ A study by “Gloss” found that of approximately 9,000 Romani people in Latvia, only 5% had work. See “Čigāni dzērveņu un rūpju purvā” (The Roma in the swamps of cranberries and worries), *Diena*, 27 September 2001.

⁴⁴ Normunds Rudevičs has said that 97% of Romani people in Latvia do not hold paid jobs. See “Mēs – Latvijas pilsoņi. Mēs – čigāni, romi. Cilvēki. Šeit Latvijā” (We are citizens of Latvia, we are Gypsies or Romani, we are people here in Latvia), an interview with Normunds Rudevičs, *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 20 May 1998.

⁴⁵ An interview with the director of the Romani NGO “Ame Roma”, Vanda Zamicka, 16 June 2003.

⁴⁶ Data provided by the deputy director of the Jēkabpils City Council on integration issues, 8 April 2003.

⁴⁷ See <http://www.errc.org/publications/factsheets>, last time visited on May 25, 2003.

Primary Sources of Income⁴⁸

	Total	Men	Women
All Romani persons	8,205	4,056	4,149
The primary source of income:			
Economic activities	491	286	205
Pensions	922	328	594
Benefits or other financial assistance	711	172	539
Income from property or investments	20	10	10
Borrowed money, reduced savings	20	13	7
Under the care of other people or institutions	2,823	1,430	1,393
Other	1,167	738	429
No answer	2,051	1,079	972

Information from a focus group discussion also illustrates the way in which the Roma earn a living. People spoke of temporary, unofficial work, of retail activities, of leasing accommodations and of "speculation." The leaders of Romani NGOs, when asked about the most common sources of income for Romani people, spoke of social benefits, berry-picking, mushroom-picking and temporary work on farms. Some admitted that the sale of narcotics is a source of income. They feel that the state is to blame for the situation.

Forms of Activity to Earn Money (from focus group discussions with Romani people)

"They work there on ships, help them to put fish in the boxes. They get a fish or two over there."

"Temporary work for a month or so, somehow they make ends meet. Sometimes there are days where they cannot give their children even a piece of bread."

"Why did I stress that I sell potatoes? I'm not ashamed. I'm the chairman here, I sell potatoes, I have no other option. I have no other source of income. I don't want to steal. I buy potatoes in the countryside, I drive myself. I have a Ls 30 pension, I have to pay Ls 60 for my apartment. Where, how am I to get the money? I don't steal, I don't know how to rob."

"I speculate. (...) I'll tell you this under our own four eyes. They'll also want to speculate with the same things."

"They bring fish out to the countryside and sell the fish somewhere."

"We have a permit. We pay for the space and sell things. Sweaters, lingerie. We earn two lats per day, that's fine. (...) At the market there are lower prices. There are places where things are sold. I take it, 50 or 40 santims."

"We lease out rooms right now, that's the only source of income. Somehow – it's called (somehow)."

⁴⁸ Data from the 2000 national census, Central Statistical Board, released in 2003.

6.3. Description of Unemployed Roma

6.3.1. Low Level of Education among Unemployed

The education level of unemployed Romani people who are registered with the National Employment Agency in selected cities⁴⁹

City	Illiterate/no education	Below elementary	Elementary	Secondary
Riga (total)	5	20	13	4
Riga, Latgale District	3	17	4	2
Jūrmala	–	78	15	7
Kuldīga	3	8	7	3
Ventspils	–	39	8	1

The lack of a proper education is the main problem for Romani people who look for work. Illiteracy, which is encountered throughout Latvia, is a particular problem. There are no illiterate Romani people in Ventspils or in Jūrmala (where the percentage of those unemployed Romani people who are officially registered is comparatively high). Of all illiterate persons registered with the agency, 85% are Romani.

Approximately 70% of the registered Roma have not completed their elementary education, 20% have done so, and only 6% have completed a secondary education. The agency has not registered a single Romani person with a higher education. Among all registered unemployed people in Latvia, the average level of education is considerably higher – 49.6% of the people have a general secondary education, 41.3% have a professional secondary education, and 7.1% have a higher education.

The education level of registered unemployed Romani people is higher in Riga, on average, than it is in the country at large, but in the Latgale District, where many Roma live, the level of education does not differ from the national average. In Ventspils, the level is lower than the average, even though no illiterates have been registered there. Unemployed Roma who have registered in Kuldīga have the highest average education level – 33.3% have an elementary education, while 14.21% have a professional or general secondary education.

6.3.2. Lack of Other Qualifications and Work Experience

Compared to other job-seekers in Latvia, unemployed Romani people tend to have little or no work experience. Approximately 70% of those who are registered with the National Employment Agency have no previous work experience at all, 20% report work experience that ranges between two months and two years, and only 10% have work experience that can be measured in years.

Among those Romani people who do have work experience, that work has almost always been work which requires no qualifications. Among the 80 or so professions which the Roma have listed on work experience lists, 90% are low-qualification professions (worker, assistant worker, janitor, cleaning woman). Only five registered Romani persons report experience in the service sector or in a job with material responsibility (fortune teller, cashier, sales lady, trolley bus conductor, guard).

6.3.3. State Language Skills and Proficiency Certificate

Compared to other ethnic groups, the Roma have better Latvian language skills – 66.4% of them speak the state language. In contrast, poor state language skills are often mentioned as a major obstacle to the social integration of other minority groups – the Russians, the Belarussians and the Ukrainians – in Latvia, which also hampers job searches. Only in the eastern region Latgale (especially in Daugavpils and partly in Jēkabpils) do the Roma, as a large part of the rest of the population, have a low level of state language proficiency. The situation is different in Latvia's larger cities – Riga, Jūrmala and Ventspils – and elsewhere in Latgale. There the problem is not that the Roma don't speak Latvian, it is that they are very poorly educated. Some Romani children in the towns of Latgale attend schools where classes are

⁴⁹ Data about the education level of unemployed Romani people were provided in writing by several branches of the National Employment Agency, these are indicated in this table.

taught in Russian, which means that they must obtain a state language proficiency certificate before they can accept even menial jobs such as that of a janitor. The low level of education, however, means that many people are unable to take the written Latvian language examination necessary for the proficiency certificate. Among the registered unemployed Roma in Riga's Latgale city district, 15.4% do not have the language certificate. The figure in Jūrmala is 45%.

6.3.4. Demographic Indicators among the Unemployed

Among those people in Latvia who have registered themselves as unemployed, the Roma also differ from the norm in the sense that fewer elderly people and a greater number of young people are registered. Nearly 30% of the Roma who have registered as unemployed are younger than 26, while this is true among only 14% of all of Latvia's residents. There are also fewer Romani people above the age of 50 who are registered than is the case in the national average – just 5% among the Roma, as opposed to 22% among the population at large. The middle-level age groups (26–35 and 36–50) are roughly equally represented among the unemployed Roma and among all unemployed Latvian residents – around 30%.

6.4. Proposed Solutions and Their Effectiveness

6.4.1. The National Employment Agency

6.4.1.1. The National Employment Agency Services and Their Effectiveness

The Latvian law on supporting unemployed and those looking for employment specifies the duties and obligations of the National Employment Agency (NVA). It registers unemployed people, but it is also responsible for various initiatives aimed at promoting employment.

Professional training

The NVA offers professional training, retraining and qualification-raising courses to all registered unemployed people in theory. In practice, however, these courses are open only to those who have completed an elementary education while in most cases, a secondary education is required, which seriously hinders the ability of the Roma to attend these courses. As a result, there are very few Romani persons, who have attended the courses – none in Tukums or Daugavpils, one apiece in Talsi, Valmiera and Jēkabpils, two in Kuldīga, six in Jelgava and around 10 in Jūrmala. The effectiveness of these courses among the Roma, accordingly, is minimal.

The courses which unemployed Romani people have attended over the last few years include courses on meat processing, sales, sewing, boiler room maintenance, guard services, cooking, baking and carpentry. A total of 50% of those Romani persons who attended courses subsequently found a job.⁵⁰

Public work

Temporary public jobs are also organized by the NVA for people who are unemployed. This work requires little in the way of qualifications, and it is often quite difficult in terms of the physical workload – social care, street and park cleaning, forest work, etc. In Talsi, Kuldīga and Jēkabpils, the local NVA offices report that the number of Romani people who apply for such jobs is several times higher than the number of jobs that are available. Of all the Roma who take part in temporary public work, between 70% and 80% are women. This is a partly effective form of employment, and it is one of the most common ways for Romani people in Latvia to get a job (albeit a short-term one). Even so, if we compare the number of Romani people who hold such jobs with the number of Romani people who are registered as being unemployed, then we find that only a few are involved in public work.

Job Seeker Clubs

The NVA also allows unemployed people to join job seeker clubs for free. Lectures and consultations are offered at these clubs by lawyers, psychologists, stylists, etc. Reportedly, hardly any Romani people attend such activities.

6.4.1.2. The Attitude of NVA Staff and the Lack of a Special Program

Several employees of the National Employment Agency admitted that the positions of the Roma in the labor market are particularly unfavorable. Some regional branches said that opportunities to help the Roma to become involved in the job market are very limited or nearly non-existent. Reasons include the low level of education

⁵⁰ Information about the involvement of Romani people in NVA courses came from oral interviews with NVA employees between January and May 2003.

among the Roma, a lack of work experience, as well as widespread stereotypes and discrimination against the Roma. The number of jobs which require very little in the way of qualifications – which correspond to the qualifications of the registered Roma – is insignificant. It is important, however, to determine the attitudes of NVA employees when it comes to Romani job seekers, as well as to the role and responsibility of these staffers when it comes to helping Romani people to become involved in the job market.

Positive and Negative Generalizations about the Roma

Among NVA employees, there were highly varied attitudes toward the Roma. Nearly all branches of the NVA tried to cite specific positive examples of the work or abilities of Romani people, but by saying that all Romani people have collective properties or forms of behavior, none of the respondents suggested that each person must be evaluated individually and not on the basis of ethnicity. This confirmed that a Romani person who enters the door at an NVA branch is already received with a pre-determined attitude. Some NVA respondents cited positive properties, as well as the idea that the Roma have low demands when it comes to work and working conditions, and are concerned about their future. Most NVA employees, however, characterized the Roma in a negative way, saying that Romani people don't want to do physically hard work, that they don't want to work in the first place or that they are irresponsible.

NVA Doubts about the Desire of the Roma to Find Work

Several respondents from the National Employment Agency believe that the Roma want to use the agency's services primarily so that they can get a document which says that they are officially registered as being unemployed. This is necessary to receive unemployment benefits and to be given temporary public work. The motivation of actually finding work was not mentioned in any interview at the NVA.⁵¹

Lack of Social Skills, Inability to Deal with Documents

Although the NVA interviewees were well aware of the fact that many Romani people have not registered their status of unemployment, only one NVA branch staffer admitted that a lack of understanding when it comes to handling documents may hinder the ability of Romani people to register as being unemployed. At approximately one-half of the NVA branches staff expressed the idea that the Roma can, but simply do not want to deal with documents and that this is why they do not register.

NVA Views on the Adequacy of Information

Hardly any of the surveyed National Employment Agency representatives said that the tiny number of registered unemployed people might be impacted by the availability or non-availability of information. NVA employees believe that the Roma know about the opportunities which the agency affords, but they speak of informal channels for information, not the way in which the NVA itself disseminates news: "We are a small town, after all," "They have their 'internal telephone,'" etc. Only one of the interview respondents admitted that the level of information activities might be insufficient, but she didn't think that the NVA should change anything specific in this area.

Views about a National Assistance Program and the Role of the NVA in Decreasing Roma Unemployment

Not a single interviewed NVA employee said that the NVA should do something specific to change the situation, and there were differing views on the question of whether any kind of assistance program is necessary to bring the Roma into the job market. One-half of NVA employees in Latvia's various regions (more in small towns and Latgale) do not think that there is a need for any special solution, arguing that the Roma themselves must undertake responsibility for their situation. Among those respondents who said that a program of this kind is necessary, the view was heard that responsibility for the implementation of such a program should rest not with the NVA, but with central government institutions and/or Romani NGOs.

6.4.1.3 Cooperation between the NVA and Romani NGOs

There have been some attempts by members of the Romani community to work with the NVA in dealing with the weighty problem of unemployment in the community. There were two specific attempts at cooperation which did not turn into successful or long-standing collaboration. In Tukums, NVA employees promised to inform a

⁵¹ An incident which took place in the Talsi District suggests quite the opposite. When a local fish canning factory in the town of Roja was closed down the number of Romani unemployed people nearly doubled. Those who had been working registered as being unemployed, and there is no reason to think that they do not want to find new jobs.

Romani representative of job vacancies, while in Jēkabpils a Romani woman reached agreement with the NVA that she and other Romani people who might want to be involved would meet to discuss solutions to the problems which the Roma face in the job market.

6.5. Solutions Proposed by Romani Leaders

6.5.1. General Programs to Improve the Situation of the Roma

Since 2000, Normunds Rudevičs has claimed in various sources of information that the Latvian National Romani Culture Association is elaborating a program which is aimed at helping the Roma to improve their economic situation – one that would be implemented by the Roma themselves with financial support from the state. Rudevičs has said that this economic program must involve a reestablishment of the traditional professions of the Roma – livestock breeding, horse farming and trading.⁵²

The president of the NGO “Gloss” also reports having designed a project for his organization which would help in promoting small and medium businesses, farms and a network of retail operations. He has said that a loan of USD 3 million would be necessary from the state for this project.

6.5.2. Support for Romani Small Business

Other Romani leaders made similar claims – support is needed for Romani people so that they can develop small businesses, i.e., retail operations. The director of the Jelgava Romani Association, Haralds Didžus, has also spoken of the need to provide the Roma with certain advantages so that they can engage in business: “My plan is to open a Romani restaurant, but the status of my public organization does not allow me to engage in business.” The director of the Tukums branch of “Gloss,” Anatolijs Berezovskis, feels that the Roma need to be awarded advantages when it comes to launching business operations: “They should give us a certain niche. If we join the EU, the niche will be taken by the Kurds.”⁵³

6.5.3. Education

The Romani NGO “Am Roma” was established relatively recently, and its director, Vanda Zamicka, feels that the solution to the problem of Romani unemployment must be found in the field of education. Romani children must go to school, adult education programs must be improved, the public must be educated so as to reverse stereotypes and prejudice.⁵⁴

6.6. Evidence of Discrimination against the Roma in the Area of Employment

Information about direct examples of discrimination – cases when employers refuse to hire the Roma because of their ethnicity – was provided by NVA employees and by the Roma themselves.

The NVA

Approximately one-third of the interviewed NVA employees admitted that there is actual discrimination against the Roma, but they did not provide specific examples. Only a few NVA employees named concrete employers who have refused to hire the Roma. In Riga and Jūrmala, interviews with NVA employees included statements that there are employers who say without any compunction that they will never hire a Romani person. Biases are often heard when it comes to Romani people as potential employees: “Employers believe that all Romani people steal,” “You can’t entrust the Roma with serious, responsible work, after all,” “The public thinks that they don’t work,” “You have to watch them,” “If there is a choice, the Romani person won’t be hired,” etc.

Discrimination was not admitted by NVA employees in small towns and in Latgale, even though the problem of Romani unemployment is no lesser there than in other parts of the country.

⁵² Kalve, A. “Čigāni sev vieglas dienas nezilē” (The Roma do not predict easy days for themselves), *Diena*, 18 October 2000.

⁵³ An interview with the director of the Tukums branch of “Gloss”, A. Berezovskis, 10 March 2003.

⁵⁴ An interview with the director of the Romani NGO “Ame Roma”, Vanda Zamicka, 16 June 2003.

The Roma

A total of 90% of Romani respondents who claim that they have encountered discrimination report that it was in the sphere of employment.⁵⁵ This is, in fact, the issue in which there was the greatest unanimity among interviewees, and in no interview or focus group did we find Roma who felt that discrimination in the job market is not a problem.

All of the interviewed Romani leaders agree that discrimination against the Roma is the greatest in the job market. A Romani leader in Jelgava: "There are unwritten laws in job exchanges that if a Romani person shows up, he must immediately be refused." A Romani representative in Kuldīga cited specific companies at which Romani people are never hired.

In-depth interviews with Romani people in various cities in Latvia allowed us to find that the only reason why work cannot be found is discrimination: "They won't hire a Romani person anywhere," "They tell you on the phone that they need a worker, but when you get there and they see you, you're told that they just hired someone else," etc. Asked to name specific employers, however, most Romani respondents demurred.

Roma on Their Experience in Looking for Work (from focus group discussions)

"There are problems, too. As soon as they see our faces, the door is slammed. Maybe there are some of us who don't have any schooling, but there are some of us who do have schooling, and the problem is the same whether you have schooling or don't."

"No university education would help, nothing would help – they don't hire the Roma in any case."

"Latvians are not shown the door when they go to look for work, but we are shown the door. We go to those places where we sense that they need workers, where we know that they need workers, but we go in and are refused. Latvians are educated people, they've all gone to school, they've at least completed elementary school, but the Roma haven't, have they?"

"The guy talked on the phone, on the phone you can't see whether you're a Romani person or a Latvian, and if you can speak the language normally, there's no difference at all. One of our girls went to study to be a florist. She went to a new shop and told the owner, 'We agreed to meet!' The owner answered, 'No, we didn't talk to you.' 'What do you mean? I called you, we agreed!' 'You mean to tell me that was you?' My girl said, 'Yes'. 'Well, you know – I already hired someone, I don't need any one any longer.'

"I had this situation. We were sent to a sawmill in Rīga from the labor exchange – three Romani women we were, our documents were all ready, there were also four Latvian and Russian women there. Two days in a row we went out there to arrange for the job officially. The boss came out, saw us Romani women and told us that we should go back home on the same bus, but that the Latvian women should stay. We went at five o'clock in the morning, and we were told – not by the boss, but by those who deal with the documents – that we wouldn't be hired because we are Romani. Those who were Latvian and Russian were told to stay."

"You can't get a spot at the market, either, the spots are all given to the Latvians and Russians, but not to a Romani person. You pay the money, they don't give you the spot. The spots are empty, but you're told that the Romani steal, that's what they say."

"They didn't want to hire me, either, because in my passport it says that I'm a Romani woman. I sent in my CV, they called me for an interview, they said that I could start work the very next day, but they needed copies of my documents. I sent the copies, and then they told me, 'You know what? We had another candidate here, we hired her.'"

"I went to the City Council about my daughter, I called Jēkabsons. They called over there where they need workers at the meat processing plant, my daughter used to work at the meat processing plant during the Russian times. Yes, they said, they needed workers, come on over. They needed workers. He didn't say the nationality of the girl, though. The girls went over there, they saw that there were Romani women, and that was it. She said – "They just called you, just called, and you needed people.""

⁵⁵ The project involved interviews with Romani respondents between January and May 2003.

*“They don’t tell you to your face that your ethnicity is the problem.”
“You see it right away. It’s visible right away. He sees your face when you come in, and that’s all it takes. You’re black, that’s it.”*

Conclusions

It is enormously difficult to determine just how many Romani people are involved in long-term job relationships, but it is certainly no more than 5% of working age Romani residents in Latvia. This is an indicator exceeded by the average employment level in the country by a factor of approximately 10.⁵⁶ The two major reasons for the huge level of unemployment among the Roma is their low level of education, as well as the distinct presence of discrimination against the Roma.

Although there is extensive unemployment, between 6% and 12.5% of working age Romani people have officially registered as being unemployed (these percentages are based on official and unofficial data about the number of Romani residents in Latvia). The fact that this percentage is quite low is explained by the limited abilities of the Roma to access information, by the passive approach that is taken by National Employment Agency officials, as well as by the belief among the Roma that the NVA can’t help them in any event. Romani people are also convinced that nothing other than bigotry and discrimination will face them when they try to enter the job market.

Among unemployed Romani people, unlike among unemployed people of other ethnic groups, the largest proportion is made up of people who are under 26 years old – nearly 30% of the total.

A total of 70% of the Romani people who are registered as unemployed have no official work experience, and that has much to do with their inability to find jobs. The Roma themselves are fairly passive when it comes to looking for work,⁵⁷ mostly focusing on their own social network, which has been recognized as the most popular way of looking for a job. According to a “Baltic Barometer” survey of local residents in the spring of 2000, most people in the country find jobs through informal contacts. 58% of minority representatives and 48% of Latvians have found work through friends, family members or relatives. The services of the state in terms of helping people to find a job have been used only by 3% of Latvians and 1% of minority representatives.⁵⁸

Some 90% of the jobs at which Romani people have worked require little in the way of qualifications. Survey data shows that the largest share of Latvia’s residents believe that the most appropriate jobs for Romani people are stage performer and janitor. Most surveyed Romani people expressed a readiness to work at any job that does not require much in the way of qualifications. The same was said by many surveyed NVA employees.

The fact that the Romani people have a hard time in proving their state language skills is also a negative factor. Because they cannot read or write, many Romani people cannot take the written language examination. This means that they cannot work at various jobs, including janitorial jobs, as a result of the national language law. Government support is necessary to solve with this problem.

A new labor law in Latvia allows NVA employees to deal with discrimination in a more determined manner, but the provisions of the law are not put to use, and the Roma are not informed about the law’s provisions. Most NVA employees feel that their role is fairly limited, and they want the Roma to take all responsibility for their situation. Not a single interviewed NVA employee would be ready to help Romani people in fighting against instances of discrimination. Only in the larger cities and towns did NVA representatives admit that there is any discrimination at all in the job market. The Roma themselves do not have information on what to do when they are faced with bigotry, and NVA employees cannot offer them any mechanisms that would help in dealing with the problem. There has been no lawsuit on anti-Roma discrimination in the job market in Latvia.

NGOs and a few local government or NVA representatives have tried to implement specific projects to help the Roma to enter the job market, but the national government has done nothing about the issue. There has been no attempt to analyze unemployment among the Roma. No special projects have been launched, no programs have been developed which would help in improving the situation of the Roma in the job market or in preventing discrimination.

⁵⁶ In 2001, 56.6% of Latvia’s residents were economically active. [Latvijas statistikas gadagrāmata](#) (Latvian statistical annual), Riga, 2002.

⁵⁷ Interviews with Romani people under the auspices of the project, January-May 2003.

⁵⁸ Rose, R. [New Baltic Barometer IV: A Survey Study](#), p. 8.

7. LIVING CONDITIONS

7.1. Sources of Income and Social Assistance

Because very few Romani people hold a job, most of them report income sources that do not involve economic activity. A convincing majority of Romani men and women alike say that their source of survival is care by other people or institutions. The next largest number of Romani people failed to tell census takers in 2000 what their source of income is. Next in the rankings are pensions and social benefits.

The Primary Source of Income for Romani People, by Gender

	Total	Men	Women
All Romani people	8,205	4,056	4,149
The primary source of income:			
Economic activities	491	286	205
Pensions	922	328	594
Social benefits or other financial assistance	711	172	539
Income from property or investments	20	10	10
Borrowed money, reduced savings	20	13	7
Under the care of other people or institutions	2,823	1,430	1,393
Other	1,167	738	429
No answer	2,051	1,079	972

Source: 2000 national census, Central Statistical Board, Department of Residential Statistics.

A total of 2,823 Romani people (34.4% of all respondents) said that their primary source for survival is the care of other people or institutions. Among all of Latvia's residents, this was reported by 669,553 individuals, or 28.1% of the population. According to the 2000 census, slightly fewer than 500 of the Roma (6.1%) earned most of their living from economic activity (which refers to official jobs, seasonal work, temporary public work, unofficial sales activities, work for farmers, etc.) or from properties and investments. Among all of Latvia's residents, these two indicators add up to a figure that is five times higher – 32.2%. The difference between the Roma and all of Latvia's residents when it comes to "No answer" is also significant – 25% for the Roma, 7.2% for everyone. For "Other sources," there is also a difference – 14.2% for the Roma, 4.3% for everyone.

There are, however, categories in which the differences are much smaller. Pensions are the primary source of income for every tenth Romani person (11.2%), while a slightly lower percentage (8.7%) report subsidies and other types of financial aid as the primary source of income. A total of 3,218 Romani people (39.2%) listed "Other" or did not state their primary source of income. The same was true among 11.6% of the national population.

There are significant gender-based differences in sources of income. Benefits and other types of financial aid were listed as a primary source of income by three times more women than men. There are two times more women than men who receive a pension, while nearly two times more men than women indicated "Other." There are virtually no differences between the two genders when it comes to the two most common answers to the question of income – the care of other persons or institutions and no answer.

Within the project interviews and focus groups it was quite difficult to obtain information from the Roma themselves when it came to sources of income and benefits. Romani people avoided answering these questions or offered contradictory information. When asked whether they received aid from their local town council, they often answered "no," but when asked specifically whether they received social assistance to purchase medications or heating fuel, they answered "yes."

All 70 of the surveyed Romani people, irrespective of their employment status, said that their income level is low or very low. Asked to specify sources of income, Romani respondents most often mentioned child support payments (50%) and pensions (minimal pensions, children's subsidies – 20%). Approximately 10% of the surveyed Roma spoke of benefits that are received by grandparents who take over the care of their grandchildren. According to the Roma themselves, some 10% of respondents have received assistance for the purchase of heating fuel, while 20% have received aid in purchasing medications. A few Romani people said that income was earned through seasonal work and temporary public work. The Roma usually did not mention the free lunches which most of their children receive. Men were more likely than women to avoid talking about their sources of income.

Social Assistance and the Procedure for Receiving It

The kinds of social assistance which exist, the procedure for receiving the assistance and the procedure for appealing benefit-related decisions are all regulated by local governments. There are slight differences in the systems that are implemented by the various local governments. Regulations are also implemented through the national law on local governments. No subsidy exceeds the sum of Ls 40 (65 Euro) per month, while a pension for someone who has not had any work experience is just Ls 30 (50 Euro). According to the Welfare Ministry, subsidies are paid out so as to secure the guaranteed minimum income level for people who:

- 1) Have been identified as impoverished;
- 2) Have income that is below the guaranteed minimum income level that has been specified by the Cabinet of Ministers (Ls 15 (25 Euro) per month, but Cabinet of Ministers regulations also say that local governments can raise the minimum);
- 3) Participate in qualifying initiatives determined by the local government.

There are also other requirements for receiving benefits and social assistance. Almost all local governments require proof of residency in their territory before subsidies are paid out. Officials in some local governments said that this proof is not always demanded in writing, but in other local governments the requirement is strictly observed. For working age people, another requirement is that they be registered with the National Employment Agency, but as was noted previously, this is true only with respect to approximately 10% of working age Romani persons in Latvia. One recently introduced requirement for social assistance is that those who receive them must participate in required local government initiatives. One method of participation is temporary public work.

The Situation in Local Governments

It was not possible to find precise information about the number of Romani people who receive social assistance, because when social services are provided, the ethnicity of recipients is not registered. According to subjective evaluations on the part of local government officials, between 70% and 85% of local Romani people receive aid of one kind or another.⁵⁹

Employees of local government agencies reported that most Romani persons are happy to become involved in temporary public work, and only a few local governments reported instances when a Romani person refused to take part. In such cases local government staff said that they still try to help the relevant families. Then full benefits are not provided, but children in those families can receive a free lunch every day, for instance. In larger cities and towns, the demand among Romani people for public work exceeds the supply of such work. In the Latgale city district of Rīga, 5% of those who do the public work are Romani people, even though the share of the Roma in the city's overall population is no more than 0.45%. It is also true, however, that the proportion of Romani people in the Latgale city district is several times higher than that.

7.2. Housing

Latvia's Romani residents live in privately owned homes, large apartment buildings, social aid facilities, partially furnished apartments or even rooms which are not at all appropriate for accommodation.

The Central Statistical Board's Department of Residential Statistics surveyed 1,571 households in which Romani people live, and the resulting data indicate that the living conditions of many of those people are pitiful. 97% of

⁵⁹ Interviews with social workers during the project in January – May 2003.

the households have electricity, but only 24% have centralized heating. Only 44% have running water, 37% have sewage services, 17% have hot water, 63% have a gas stove, only 29% have a bathtub, shower or sauna. Data about the entire Latvian population show that two times more people have sewage and water services – 77% and 83.2% respectively.

Most Romani people live in apartments or houses with wood-burning heating systems. Most of these are individual homes, which belong to the state, a local government or a private individual.

Fewer Romani people live in major apartment buildings – these are not typical places of residence for the Roma. Some Romani people were given apartments in blocks of flats during the Soviet period or later, between 1992 and 1994, when the Soviet Union's military facilities were dismantled. Some of the former military accommodations were turned over to Romani people.

It is only in three towns that a small number of Romani people live in social aid homes or shelters.

The Housing of Roma

No. of residents in the household	No. of rooms in the household						Total no. of rooms	Total no. of individuals
	1	2	3	4	5	6 or more		
1	121	72	23	8	5	2	403	231
2	92	103	49	16	5	3	552	527
3	68	95	62	20	9	5	607	721
4	62	107	87	29	16	6	765	1075
5	45	62	48	27	8	1	467	878
6	19	47	32	10	6	5	310	657
7 or more	18	62	65	33	13	5	582	1724
Total no. of households	425	548	366	143	62	27	X	X
Total no. of individuals	1,222	2,017	1,542	642	273	117	X	5813

Source: 2000 national census, Central Statistical Board, Department of Residential Statistics.

According to the 2000 national census, the average number of rooms for each resident of Latvia was 0.9, while among the Roma it was just 0.6. This means that in most cases, two people live in each room in Romani households. In households with two or three rooms, 8% of 5,813 Romani people live in groups of seven or more people. Among all residents of the country, the proportion is 10 times lower – just 0.8%. Nearly 30% of Romani people live in households with seven or more residents, while the same is true only of 5% of all of Latvia's residents.

Local governments often have to deal with apartments in which a great many people are registered – as many as 10 or even 15 people in some cases in Jēkabpils, for instance. This overcrowding is the cause of domestic migration or seasonal migration. Romani people from other towns often arrive at the homes of relatives when they are looking for work. Children are sent to live with grandparents or other relatives if parents go to work somewhere else.

The Roma have good reason to register their place of residence, because the registration is required to receive most forms of social assistance, but in all of Latvia's towns there are Romani people who are not registered. Their number is difficult to determine – local government officials claim that the number is not particularly high, but unofficial data about the total number of Romani people in the country suggest quite the opposite.

Social services staff members – like the NVA staff in the employment field – do not consider it necessary to use special information channels in order to inform the socially vulnerable groups about services available.

Conclusions

Approximately 20% of the Roma in Latvia depend on assistance that is provided by the state or local governments – children's benefits, maternity benefits, various individual subsidies for firewood or medications, as well as pensions. Most of these social benefits, including minimal pensions, are no more than Ls 40 (65 Euro) per month. The biggest obstacle against subsidies for the Roma is the fact that many Romani residents do not have a registered place of residence, and fully 90% of working age Romani people who are unemployed have not registered with the National Employment Agency.

Most Romani people live in individual homes, which do not belong to them. The accommodations are poor, and many Romani households are overcrowded.

7.3. Health

Data are not available in Latvia about the incidence of various illnesses or disorders in specific ethnic groups, nor are there data about life spans⁶⁰ and disability from this perspective. There is, however, reason to believe that because of relatively low levels of education, high levels of unemployment and poor living conditions (overpopulation, unhealthy nutrition, etc.), the Roma are probably one of the leading risk groups for infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and for chronic diseases of various kinds.⁶¹ Most Romani people live in homes with few modern conveniences. Some live in houses that are almost completely dilapidated and have been declared unfit for human habitation. Overcrowding is also typical, and this can promote the spread of contagious diseases.

According to unofficial information, the proportion of disabled Romani people might be higher than the proportion of disabled people in Latvia as such. The director of the Tukums branch of the "Gloss" NGO, Anatolijs Berezovskis, claims that between 20% and 25% of the Roma are disabled.⁶² Surveys that were conducted under the auspices of this project found that 10% of interviewed Roma receive a disability pension.

7.3.1. Women's Health

In other countries in Eastern and Central Europe, the health problems of Romani women mostly have to do with childbirth. Infant mortality rates are high, and there are instances when women undergo forced sterilization after childbirth. Latvia's hospitals do not keep statistics on the ethnicity of their patients, and so data and information in this study came entirely from information that was provided through in-depth interviews with medical personnel, including midwives.⁶³

The Number of Live Births and the Number of Children

According to data concerning the number of live births per 1,000 residents in Latvia, Romani women give birth to two or three times more children than Latvian or Russian women do.⁶⁴ According to the Central Statistical Board, five Romani infants died in 2002, while three died in 2001 and another three in 2000. The total number of infant deaths in Latvia in those three years was 197, 217 and 210 respectively. Infant mortality among 1,000 newborns was higher than average for the Roma – 16.8, against a national average of 11.0. Infant mortality among the Roma is higher than the national average, but because of the small actual numbers, it is difficult to determine the significance of the difference.⁶⁵

In Kuldīga, six of 311 live births (2%) involved Romani mothers. In Talsi, 15 of more than 400 births (3.75%) were of Romani children. In Valmiera the number was six of 700 (0.85%), while in Ventspils it was 24–30 of some 500 (4.8%)⁶⁶

⁶⁰ The Central Statistical Board does not keep life span data on ethnic groups with fewer than 10,000 members.

⁶¹ According to the Latvian health care statistical annual in 2001, "Tuberculosis and STDs affect social groups such as unemployed people, alcoholics, homeless people, narcotics addicts and incarcerated people". Riga, 2002, p. 42.

⁶² This statement was made during a presentation which Berezovskis delivered at the 3rd congress of the Roma, 21 June 2003.

⁶³ Senior midwives were interviewed at hospitals in Valmiera, Tukums, Talsi, Jelgava, Ventspils and Kuldīga, January-May 2003.

⁶⁴ *Latvijas statistikas gadagrāmata 2002* (Latvian statistical annual 2002), p. 65.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49. Also oral information from the Central Statistical Board.

⁶⁶ It is difficult to find data about Romani women who register their pregnancy and who give birth at hospitals, because the relevant documents do not indicate the ethnicity of the woman who is giving birth. Analysis of these documents was conducted at some hospitals to review surnames, and personal contacts were undertaken to obtain data about specific hospitals in Valmiera, Talsi, Kuldīga and Ventspils.

The surveyed midwives said that Romani women continue to have many children in comparison to women of other nationalities – most Romani women have at least three children, while many have five or even seven.

The surveyed midwives do not think that the age of Romani women who give birth is much different from the national average. In one-third of the towns which were visited as part of this project, researchers were told that women below the age of 18 are no longer giving birth to children, but in other places it is said that Romani girls who give birth at the age of 15 to 17 is still a common occurrence.

The Health of Women and Newborns

Most of the surveyed midwives said that newborn Romani babies are born healthy, but some midwives also said that Romani children tend to be smaller at birth than are the offspring of women of other ethnic groups. No other differences were mentioned by the midwives. Some suggested that Romani women themselves tend to be smaller than women of other ethnic groups. Other midwives said that the weight and height of newborns might be affected by smoking, which is very prevalent among Romani women – many reportedly do not quit smoking even when they are pregnant. Medical personnel did not, however, indicate that they should play any great role in reversing this situation. “We do not fight against smoking,” said one. “If someone has been smoking, then she will not stop smoking in the maternity ward.”

Information about the number of Romani women who have registered their pregnancy was highly contradictory. At one hospital researchers were told that “most of them don’t register, they just show up for childbirth.” Elsewhere, it was reported that nearly all Romani women registered in a timely way (before the 12th week of pregnancy).

Interviewed doctors don’t think in most cases that registration of pregnancy helps in improving a pregnant woman’s health in any major way, nor do they believe that it serves to increase knowledge about pregnancy and child care. An important issue, however, is the fact that many Romani people are infected with the HIV virus which leads to AIDS, and non-registration means that many of these infections are not discovered. This threatens the health of mother and child alike.

Medical personnel reported to researchers that Romani women don’t think that they need to stay at the hospital after they give birth. At several hospitals researchers were told that Romani women leave right after childbirth and then come back four or five days later to collect their children. They refuse to go to the hospital if there have been complications during childbirth which require inpatient care. This is particularly true among older Romani women. In Ventspils, such actions by a mother are considered to be a violation, and a record is made on the childbirth card. The result is a reduction in the childbirth subsidy which the mother receives.⁶⁷

7.3.2. The Spread of HIV and AIDS among the Roma

The only health condition with respect to which data are collected on the ethnicity of patients is HIV/AIDS. Data which have been found are of great concern, because relevant documents tell us that the incidence of HIV infection among the Roma is hugely disproportionate to their number.

⁶⁷ This was reported in an interview by the senior midwife at a hospital in Ventspils, Gunta Cērpa, 8 May 2003.

The Incidence of HIV/AIDS in Latvia

Ethnicity	1987–1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total (%)
Russian	4	26	50	228	446	283	1,037 (44,95%)
Latvian	8	15	23	114	163	127	450 (19,5%)
Romani	0	8	12	39	71	44	174 (7,5%)
Other	0	5	5	29	26	29	94 (4%)
Unknown	76	109	151	56	101	59	552 (24%)
Total	88	163	241	466	807	542	2,307

Source: Data from the AIDS Prevention Center.

As of December 31, 2002, the national register of HIV/AIDS infection had registered 174 incidences of HIV infection among Roma, which means that between 1% and 2% of Latvia's Romani residents are infected with HIV. Eight have developed full-blown AIDS, five have died. The proportion of the Roma among all residents of Latvia with a diagnosed incidence of HIV or AIDS is 7.5%, as compared to the overall proportion of the Roma in the Latvian population – 0.3% to 1%.

The number of HIV-infected people differs greatly by age group.

HIV-infections among Roma According to Age

0–1	1
15–19	20
20–24	67
25–29	42
30–34	28
35–39	8
40–44	3
45–49	3
>50	2
Total	174

Source: Data from the AIDS Prevention Center.

The largest number of HIV infections has been identified in people aged 20–24, and 157 of the 174 people who have been diagnosed with HIV infection are between 15 and 34.

Huge differences in HIV-occurrence are seen on the basis of gender – three times more men than women (130 of 174 infected people).

HIV–infected Roma, by Gender and Route of Infection

Gender	IV drugs use	Heterosexual Intercourse	Mother–to–child	Unknown	Total
Women	29	9	1	5	44
Men	119	4		7	130
Total	148	13	1	12	174

Source: Data from the AIDS Prevention Center.

The main route of infection among Romani people with HIV is the use of intravenous drugs – something that Romani men are far more likely to do than women are.⁶⁸

Neither health care experts nor Romani NGOs have organized any special programs to help Romani people avoid HIV and AIDS. The Roma don't trust existing projects that are aimed at preventing HIV/AIDS, including a needle exchange program that is run by the Center for AIDS Prevention in conjunction with the United Nations. No Romani person has ever come in for a clean needle in Tukums, even though the organizers of the needle exchange are aware of the fact that a great many Romani people use IV drugs in that town. In Jūrmala, too, researchers were told that Romani people don't come in to exchange their needles. "The Roma are afraid that they'll be arrested," one worker explained.

Over the course of a year, only three Romani persons came in for an HIV antibody test in Tukums. In Jēkabpils a Romani woman considered initiating a project, which would include providing information to Romani persons about AIDS and people with HIV infection could receive consultations. After consulting with fellow Romani persons she found that no one would dream of revealing his or her HIV status, and the project was never initiated. In an article in the media, Dr. Pauls Aldiņš has said that the spread of HIV/AIDS among the Roma has much to do with the low level of education in the community, as well as to a sense of hesitancy when it comes to medical institutions. This is a critical situation, says Dr. Aldiņš: "This is a community which might simply die out."⁶⁹

7.3.3. Special Projects in the Field of Health

There has been just one project so far that has been specifically aimed at a Romani audience, with the aim to educate Romani people about public health. This was set up by the Social Affairs Board of the town of Jelgava. Employees analyzed a group of Romani clients and found that 60% were illiterate, 11% hold the official status of impoverished people, and fully 90% receive monthly subsidies of Ls 50 (85 Euro) to purchase medications. A total of 40% were suffering from upper respiratory problems.

On the basis of these facts, as well as the idea that no other group in society has less information about health care than do the Roma, a project was set up to provide information to the Roma about various health–related issues. The project was run for two months and involved 15 women, among whom 11 were smokers. All of the women were poorly educated and unemployed. There were eight lectures on various health–related subjects. Topics were proposed by the Romani women themselves, and they included skin diseases, HIV/AIDS, drug addiction, gynecology, the harm that is caused by smoking, tuberculosis, as well as forms of social aid and methods for receiving it. The organizers of the project reported to researchers that one of the women quit smoking in the wake of the discussions. The project has been continued.

7.3.4. Lack of Social Insurance and Low Income Levels

Given that only between 1% and 5% of Romani people in Latvia have proper jobs, it goes without saying that more than 90% of the Roma don't have social insurance – something that would help cover their costs during sickness or disability, as well as hospitalization costs. Low income means that Romani people find it all but impossible to pay for more than the most elementary forms of health care.

⁶⁸ This is true despite the fact that Romani women more often than Romani men are found guilty of drugs sales. See Chapter 8.

⁶⁹ Goba, K. "Nogalini un izdzivo" (Kill and survive), an article about the spread of HIV/AIDS in Latvia, *Rīgas Laiks*, June 2003.

Lack of Money Hampers Treatment (from focus group discussions)

"There are problems. You have to pay a fee of two lats, and I don't have the two lats."

"My granddaughter was sick again the day before yesterday, but I couldn't call a doctor to come on a house call. You have to pay for that. Medicine costs money, too. There are problems – big problems."

"Just to get a doctor to come on a house call – you have to a lot more, and you can't do it. The thing is that sometimes you don't have the money to pay."

"The two sons are sick – they have a 41-degree fever, but he can't call a doctor, he doesn't have the money, he just can't. I tell him to call the ambulance, that won't cost anything at least. The boys are 15 years old, and such a fever – it's crazy!"

Conclusions

The Roma earn little money, and there is a lack of social security as a result of their lack of official job relationships. This means that Romani people cannot access quality health care, while poor living conditions create ever new health risks. It must also be noted, however, that medical care is one area – unlike employment, education and relations with law enforcement – in which the Roma themselves have reported no instances of discrimination. In other countries in Eastern Europe Romani women have sometimes faced gross discrimination in the area of health care. The only difference to which health care workers in Latvia pointed was the fact that Romani babies tend to be born with a lower birth weight – something that may have to do with the fact that many Romani women continue to smoke even during pregnancy.

The proportion of HIV-infected Romani people is disproportionately high – 7% of all infected people and 2% of all Romani residents of Latvia. This has mostly to do with IV drug use among younger Romani men. Programs that are aimed at HIV/AIDS prevention, including needle exchange programs, have not managed to attract the Roma, even though it is well known that many Romani people sell and/or use drugs. There have been no programs or initiatives that are aimed at reaching this particular audience.

No studies have been conducted in relation to other illnesses or disorders, but the living conditions of many Romani people, their limited access to medical treatment and to information about it and their exclusion from health promotion programs because of their low level of education causes real concerns regarding the disproportionate spread of other transmitted diseases such as tuberculosis and STDs among the Roma. This requires further investigation.

Information from the Roma and from NGOs suggests that there might also be a disproportionately large number of disabled people among the Roma. The Roma health situation must be studied at a national level with the aim to ensure equal access to the health care system.

8. RELATIONS WITH THE LAW

One of the most common prejudices against the Roma is their supposed “tendency toward criminal behavior” or “crime as a way of life”. During World War II, the Roma were labeled as a “criminal and anti-social” group, and countless thousands of them were exterminated.

Research in Eastern Europe and in some Western European countries, along with reports that human rights NGOs have filed with international organizations, suggest that Romani people who commit crimes often end up facing discrimination in the judicial system because their right to a fair trial is denied. In many cases there has been extensive documentation of cases where the police have engaged in racist violence, but few police officers have been punished for this. As opposed to being released on bail, the Roma are remanded in custody pending trial more often than members of other ethnic groups, and prison sentences that are handed down for Romani people tend to be longer. The Roma have limited access to state attorneys, and they are often punished more harshly than others.

Considerable numbers of Romani people commit crimes repeatedly, so one possible reason for this trend is that courts in Eastern European countries tend to impose harsher punishments to those who have committed repeated crimes, even if subsequent violations have been relatively minor. At the same time, however, specialists have found discriminatory and racist trends in court systems, with Romani residents receiving longer prison terms just because they are Romani.⁷⁰ In the prisons of many countries, the population of Romani prisoners is disproportionately high. In Spain, for instance, 25% of imprisoned women are of Romani origin, and that is a percentage which exceeds the proportion of the Roma in Spanish society by 20 times.⁷¹ 60% of incarcerated men in Hungary are Romani, while the Roma account for 4.5% of the national population according to an official census and for 7–8% of the population according to NGOs.⁷² In Bulgaria, 50–60% of all prisoners in many prisons are Romani people.⁷³

The fact that Romani people in all Eastern European countries are disproportionately represented in the world of crime and the law is something which unquestionably influences and perpetuates prejudices about this ethnic group, all the more so in places where the Roma have not successfully integrated into local societies and where many people of other ethnic extraction have had little or no contact with them. In order to evaluate this information, however, there is a need for complex analysis, which takes into account such factors as poverty, unemployment, social marginalizing, etc. Moreover, major percentage-based differences among ethnic groups may itself point to discrimination, both direct (people are more likely to be suspected of crimes without reasonable grounds, incarcerated, convicted falsely, etc.) and indirect (causes for social marginalization – if one would control for socio-economic indicators and factors like discrimination at work and education, the differences among ethnic groups would likely be smaller). The scope of this project does not permit such complex analysis, but it is clear that prejudice – negative and inflexible generalizations about the properties of a specific nationality or a member of that nationality – will not facilitate any objective evaluation of the situation. When people believe that an entire ethnic group is tended toward crime, that is a purely racist belief which stands in contradiction to the basic rule of a liberal democracy – that individuals, not collectives, are responsible for human actions and that individuals, not collectives, are the subject of basic rights.

In Latvia, the relationship between Romani people and law enforcement institutions have emerged through a complicated process. In Soviet times, the Roma were seen as a distinct group, and the militia were ordered to raid the homes of Romani people to see whether they had found jobs and had registered officially in their place of residence.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ See “Roma and the Law; Demythologizing the Gypsy Criminality Stereotype”. Project on Ethnic Relations, Paris, 7-8 October 1999; written comments for the European Roma Rights Center Concerning the Republic of Hungary for Consideration by the United Nations Human Rights Committee at its 74th session, 18 March – 5 April 2002.

⁷¹ The Barani Project. “Romani Women and the Spanish Criminal Justice System”, see <http://web.jet.es/gea21/ing.htm>

⁷² Profession: Prisoner. Roma in Detention in Bulgaria European Roman Rights Center, p. 19.

⁷³ <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/pressrels/romafacts.html>, last time visited on 25 June 2003.

⁷⁴ From an interview with an officer of the National Police in Tukums, 11 March 2003.

8.1. Police

According to the Latvian Interior Ministry, more than 300 Romani persons have committed crimes in each of the last three years. In 2000 there were 306, in 2001 – 362 and in 2002 – 334 Romani people who had committed criminal offenses.⁷⁵

Number of Roma Offenders by Type of Crime,⁷⁶ 2000–2003

Article of Latvian Criminal Law	16–118	125	159	176	231	175, 180	177	191, 253.1–4 ⁷⁷
2000. g.	3	1	2	37	4	141	5	44
2001. g.	2	6	3	27	10	169	2	81
2002. g.	1	8	2	34	7	151	10	54

Source: Information Center, Interior Ministry, Republic of Latvia

Over the last three years, some 45% of the crimes that have been committed by Romani people have involved theft. Then there are drug-related crimes – approximately 20% of those committed by the Roma (14% in 2000, 22% in 2001, 16% in 2002). Over the last few years, the percentage of crimes that have involved robbery has hovered around 10%. This is the third most common type of crime among the Roma.

In 2002, there were 629 registered drug-related crimes, and 133 Latvians, 248 Russians and 54 Romani persons faced criminal charges. Thus 12.41% were Romani, even though the proportion of the Roma in the population is between 0.3 and 0.6%.

Since November 6, 2002, the Latvian Criminal Law foresees criminal liability for the use of drugs, and this might increase the number of Romani people – especially men – who will be the focus of attention on the part of law enforcement institutions. According to the Center for AIDS Prevention, a significant proportion of HIV-infected people in Latvia are Romani men, most of whom are intravenous drug users.⁷⁸

Statistics on Romani Persons Who Have Violated the Law

Year	No. of Romani persons to commit crimes	Of them, with previous criminal convictions	Minors	Crimes committed in a group	Crimes committed under influence of alcohol
2000	306	130	48	119	64
2001	342	200	41	121	81
2002	334	193	44	107	91

Source: Information Center, Interior Ministry, Republic of Latvia.

According to the Information Center of the Interior Ministry, the percentage of Romani persons with previous convictions who are facing criminal charges has increased fairly rapidly, from 41% in 2000 to nearly 60% in 2002. In 2002, the share of Latvian and Russian criminals with a criminal record was lower than the percentage of Romani people with respect to whom this was true – 38% of Latvians and 43% of Russians. Because a criminal record is often used as a reason to remand defendants in pre-trial detention, it may be that Romani people face this situation more often than do people of other ethnic groups. Another problem may be that many Romani people do not have an officially registered place of residence, which, according to the police, is a fairly common

⁷⁵ Data from the Information Center of the Interior Ministry of Latvia, May 2002.

⁷⁶ These are the most common types of criminal violations.

⁷⁷ Articles 116 to 118 – murder, murder under aggravated circumstances and murder under very aggravated circumstances; 125 – intentional bodily injuries; 159 – rape; 175 – theft; 176 – robbery; 180 – minor theft; 231 – hooliganism; 177 – fraud; 191 – storage or sale of unlawfully imported products; 253 – unlawful preparation, storage, transport or shipment of narcotic or psychotropic substances.

⁷⁸ See the chapter on health.

among the Roma. Between 85% and 90% of those people who have been remanded in pre-trial custody in Latvia receive a prison sentence,⁷⁹ therefore, we can conclude that among Romani people who are convicted of crimes, a significant percentage end up in prison.

Some 30% of crimes that have been committed by Romani persons have been committed in a group, and there is no difference in this case between the Roma on the one hand and Russians and Latvians on the other. About 13% of those who committed crimes are juveniles – a lower proportion than among Latvians and Russians. Nearly 30% of crimes in 2002 were committed under the influence of alcohol, while among Latvians and Russians this percentage was 10% and 6% higher, respectively.

Although the statistics from the Ministry of Interior indicate a fairly high proportion of Romani people among those who violate the law, nevertheless police officials told researchers that there is no data about Romani people in the criminal justice system, because the ethnicity of those who have committed crimes is not registered. Most police officials claim that they do not specifically notice the presence of Romani people in their towns and that there are no major problems. In bigger cities, Romani people who commit crimes are involved in petty theft or robbery at the marketplace, and also engage in illegal sale of alcohol and other products. In all of the cities that were visited for the purposes of this study, Romani persons were involved in the sale of drugs. Most of those who were selling drugs were unemployed, and this was their only source of income. Police officers often speak of drug cases and Roma in the same breath. A representative of the police in Ventspils, Anatolijs Dzelzkalējs, claimed that “99.9% of drug cases are Romani.”⁸⁰ Whole families – wives, husbands, even small children – are sometimes involved in the sale of drugs. Some police officers spoke of Romani involvement in prostitution.

Cooperation with Roma

The police in Jelgava have tried to collaborate with the local Romani society. In some towns, other official sources claimed unofficial cooperation between the police and the Romani community, with representatives of the community informing the police about incidents within the Romani society. Several interviewed police representatives admitted that during Soviet times, the militia sometimes collaborated with what were then known as the “Gypsy barons.” Back then there was reportedly strict hierarchy among the Roma, and there were instances when agreement was reached between official authorities and individuals who were in a position of authority within the community. This allowed for a quick resolution of many conflicts. These days, report the police, no single member of the Romani community has that kind of influence anymore.

Attitudes

Police attitudes towards the Roma often depend on the size of the populated area in question. In small towns where the Roma have been present for a long time, interviewed police officers claim that there are no problems with them, although they often make it clear that they are speaking only of the local Romani people. One police officer said that the Roma, in comparison with other ethnic groups, face detention as pre-trial security measure more frequently after they commit crimes. Seldom, for instance, are they allowed to sign a document stating that they will not change their place of residence if they are allowed to go free pending trial, because “the Roma often don’t have a registered place of residence.” The police officer also said that it is not easy to work with the Roma and that “if the police officer is not experienced, he can explode, he can hit the Romani person in the face.” Furthermore, said the officer, Roma persons after their arrest often behave as though “they don’t know anything, they don’t remember anything,” and this, too, might lead to a “sharper reaction from the police.”

Some interviewed police officers illustrated the influence of negative stereotypes and racial prejudice in what they said about the Roma: “The Roma don’t like to work,” said one. Another divided non-Romani and Romani people into “white and black people.” Still another said that “Romani children are mentally retarded.” Although a majority of police representatives claimed that police attitudes toward the Roma are non-discriminatory, there were some officials who admitted that “nothing is certain, because police officers are people like everyone else” and that the views of subordinates concerning the Roma might differ from the views of their commanders.

⁷⁹ Statistics (unpublished) from the Prisons Board of the Latvian Justice Ministry on people who have been arrested or convicted and who are in investigation prisons, 2001-2002.

⁸⁰ An interview with the commander of the National Police in Ventspils, Anatolijs Dzelzkalējs, 7 May 2003.

Nearly all of the interviewed police officers also said that the Roma are well-informed about their rights if they are arrested and about appeal opportunities if they think that their rights have been violated. Although most police officers say that the reason for the large number of Romani people who violate the law is that the Roma face serious financial problems and have little education, some also say that “the Roma themselves don’t want to change anything in this situation.” Of eight police officers who were surveyed, only one said that responsibility for changing the situation rests with the government and that various dedicated programs and assistance must be put into place so that the Roma can become better educated and find jobs.

No Romani person working anywhere in the police system was encountered during our study, and police staff held the view that this is because of a lack of appropriate education and training. The police in Jēkabpils told us of a Romani man who has expressed a desire to work for the police and is studying at the Latvian Police Academy. A young man applied to work as an assistant at the police in Talsi, but he was a juvenile, and so he could not be hired.

8.2. Courts

After amendments to the Latvian Criminal Procedure Code, which were adopted in 2002, Article 209.2 no longer states that a complaint against an alleged lawbreaker must state the ethnic group of the suspect. Ethnicity is also not stated in documents related to civil cases. However, the courts still use old forms, which are still forwarded to them by the Ministry of Justice. These forms provide for an ethnicity entry of the accused person, and the majority of courts continue to register the ethnicity of the accused person appearing before them. Therefore there was information available specifically on Romani people who have been accused of crimes.

Civil cases, criminal cases and administrative cases in Latvia are heard by 40 courts, which are divided into three levels – 34 district courts, five regional courts and the Supreme Court. The study covered information about 11 city and district courts that were visited, as well as about the Riga, Zemgale and Kurzeme Regional Courts. Data were collected about criminal cases in which Romani people were defendants – 4.15% of the total number of criminal cases.⁸¹

Criminal Cases Heard at the First Level of the Courts in 2002 and the Number of Cases Involving Romani Defendants, 2002

District and city courts and the regional courts	No. of criminal cases at the lowest level	Criminal cases involving Romani defendants	%
District courts			
Riga City Latgale District Court	1,265	30	2.37
Riga City Kurzeme District Court	319	–	–
Riga City Vidzeme District Court	626	4	0.64
Riga City Central District Court	443	8	1.8
Riga City Northern District Court	418	4	0.96
Jēkabpils District Court	296	15	5
Jelgava Court	751	18	2.4
Talsi District Court	200	8	4
Tukums District Court	221	6	2.71
Valmiera District Court	338	9	2.66
Ventspils Court	300	15	5
Regional courts			
Riga Regional Court	541	24	4.44
Zemgale Regional Court	123	10	8.13
Kurzeme Regional Court	97	14	14.43

Source: Information Center, Interior Ministry, Republic of Latvia.

⁸¹ More than one person can be the defendant in a criminal case in Latvia.

In district and city courts (excluding Rīga), the proportion of criminal cases with Romani defendants ranged between 2.4% and 5% in 2002. The greatest proportion of cases involving Romani defendants was heard in Jēkabpils and Ventspils. The proportion of such cases as heard by regional courts ranged from 4.45% to 14.4%. The highest proportion of cases with Romani defendants was found in the Kurzeme Regional Court. The significant differences among district, city and regional courts can be attributed to the way in which cases are assigned in Latvia. For instance, only regional courts review drug-related cases.

Court employees confirm that most Romani men that appear before court are charged with theft, while Romani women more often face drug-related charges. In the Zemgale and Kurzeme Regional Courts in 2002, there were 19 drug-related cases with Romani defendants, and of these 11 involved female defendants, while eight involved male defendants. In the Rīga Regional Court there were 19 cases where Romani people were charged with drug related offenses – 16 (84%) of them women and just four of them men.

Attitudes

One judge, asked to describe a court session in which the defendant is a Romani person, had this to say: “The courtrooms are full of their supporters, their own people,” but he added that this does not cause problems with order during hearings. He also said that officials are perceived as authority figures by the Roma. Judges claim that Romani people have greater respect toward the courts than do members of other ethnic groups, but they also note the low level of education among the Roma. If the documentary level of education is only one or two grades at school, then in practice this often means that the person cannot write at all. Reportedly there are cases when Romani defendants do not understand questions that are posed by the judge, but then the judge claimed that simpler vocabulary was used.

Police Violence

In June 2003 there was a scandal when the Latgale District Court in Riga heard a case in which four former policemen were accused of beating a man to death. In July 2002, these officers had privately received a complaint alleging rape. They unlawfully entered a private home in Rīga and beat up two men, one of whom was suspected of the rape. According to the charges, the four policemen then took one of the men to a place near the Rumbula train station in the city, where they beat and kicked him, causing serious injury. The man was then taken to No. 23 Police Headquarters, where it was established that he was dead. The Latvian language press initially did not mention the ethnicity of the dead man, while Russian newspapers wrote that the victim was a Romani man.⁸²

An investigation was organized by the Riga Police Board, and it was found that the police officers had acted unprofessionally and that they had exceeded their authority by entering the house without a warrant. It was also found that the officers had left men with visible injuries without medical attention and that they had not called an ambulance. Rather, they had brought the men to headquarters. All four police officers were sacked in August 2002. They were accused of purposefully causing serious bodily injury and of exceeding their authority. The court session took place in June 2003. The prosecutor asked for 10-year prison sentences. The defendants pleaded not guilty. On June 5, 2003, the Latgale District Court found all four officers innocent on the grounds of a lack of evidence, claiming primarily that the expertise establishing that the man had indeed died as a consequence of the injuries could nevertheless not establish beyond a doubt that the injuries were not caused before the arrival of the police to the house.⁸³ The Ls 3,000 civil lawsuit from the common law spouse of the dead man, in which the spouse was seeking compensation for the property and money, which she said the man had carried with him at the time the police forcibly removed him from the house, was also dismissed. In announcing her ruling, the judge violated the principle of accessibility of courts. At the last minute she moved the hearing from a larger courtroom to a smaller one, effectively barring the room to the victim's widow, to a court translator and to journalists. Later she claimed that she acted as she did because of “fear of revenge by the Roma.” The Judicial Disciplinary Board

⁸² Āboltiņš, J. “Tiesa apliecina valsts beztiesiskumu” (Court demonstrates absence of the rule of law in Latvia), *Rīgas Balss*, 6 June 2003; see also Krastiņš, J. “Aiz žurnālistiem slēgtām durvīm tiesa attaisno policistus” (Behind doors that were closed to journalists, the court acquitted the police officers), *Diena*, 6 June 2003; see also Viksne, I. “Policistu tiesātājai bail no čigāniem” (Judge of police officers is afraid of the Roma), *Rīgas Balss*, 10 June 2003; see also Belousova, R. “Cik atvērti esam pret savu sabiedrību?” (How open are we to our society?), *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 11 June 2003.

⁸³ The ruling in case No. 1089136002/K29-626/03/9 was adopted on 5 June 2003.

launched a disciplinary investigation against the judge, but in the end she received the mildest of sanctions – reprimand. The secretary who had not told the judge that the victim’s widow had remained out in the hallway was sacked.⁸⁴ Prosecutors have appealed the ruling, and the case will next be heard by the Rīga Regional Court.

8.3. Prisons

Iļģuciems Women’s Prison

Because there are many Romani women who are sentenced to prison terms, the researchers in this project visited the women’s prison at Iļģuciems, conducting in-depth interviews with the deputy head of the prison, a psychologist, with a doctor from the prison’s children’s home, with other prison employees and with the imprisoned women themselves. The prison does not collect statistics about the ethnicity of prisoners, but unofficial data suggest that Romani women account for 25–30% of all prisoners (the total number of inmates at the prison is 500). The Romani women have come to the prison from various places in Latvia – Ventspils, Jūrmala and Daugavpils. The percentage of Romani women who are in prison for drug-related offenses has been increasing, while the share of women who are serving prison sentences for theft has been on the decline. When women were asked why they had become involved in the drug trade, they talked about the need to put food on the table for their families and to help relatives. There are some instances when both the mother and daughter are in prison.

The number of drug addicts among the imprisoned Romani women is not as high as is the percentage among female inmates of other ethnic groups. This is confirmed by data from the Center for AIDS Prevention. The average prison sentence for women who have been convicted for drug-related crimes is five years, and that applies to all ethnic groups, according to prison representatives. The prisoners themselves, however, feel that Romani women receive much longer sentences than others do. Some respondents talked about a poor or denigrating attitude toward them on the part of the police after their arrest.

There is an evening school branch at the prison where lessons are taught in Russian and Latvian, and 80% of the women who attend the school are Romani. They study subjects which would normally be covered in the 1st to the 5th grade. The prison also offers sewing courses and eight hours of work in a sewing work facility. All of the women, including the Romani women, have no job when they are released from prison, and many don’t have any place to live, either. Older women face particular difficulties. If we remember data about discrimination in the area of employment, then it is no surprise that imprisoned Romani women talk about the matter too: “They won’t hire you because they see on your face that you are a Romani person.” One of the prisoners had once completed courses to become a saleslady, but a store in Valmiera had told her flat out that “we don’t hire Roma.” Despite the skills that the women can acquire while in prison, it is highly unlikely that they will be able to find proper jobs without special assistance and a targeted program of rehabilitation.

Prisoners try to uphold contacts with their relatives through letters and phone calls, but the level of writing and reading abilities among the Roma suggests that Romani prisoners might have greater problems in maintaining such contacts. That may be all the more true because Latvia’s only women’s prison is in Rīga, which is comparatively distant from many places where the Romani relatives live.

The prison has its own children’s home for kids up to the age of three. At the time of our visit, there were 12 children at the home, five of them Romani. The nurses at the children’s home speak Romani, and a Romani woman worked there as a nanny for a while. One prison employee expressed the opinion that there should be someone among the workers who speaks Romani.

Relationships between imprisoned Romani women and women of other ethnicity involve a certain amount of segregation. There have been cases when some women have refused to live in the same room with a Romani woman.

⁸⁴ Āboltiņš, J. “Tiesa apliecina valsts beztiesiskumu” (Court demonstrates absence of the rule of law in Latvia), *Rīgas Balss*, 6 June 2003; see also Krastiņš, J. “Aiz žurnālistiem slēgtām durvīm tiesa attaisno policistus” (Behind doors that were closed to journalists, the court acquitted the police officers), *Diena*, 6 June 2003; see also Viksne, I. “Policistu tiesātājam bail no čigāniem” (Judge of police officers is afraid of the Roma), *Rīgas Balss*, 10 June 2003; see also Belousova, R. “Cik atvērti esam pret savu sabiedrību?” (How open are we to our society?), *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 11 June 2003.

Conclusions

A total of 12% of people who are charged with drug-related crimes in Latvia are Romani persons. Romani persons have been involved in drug transactions all over Latvia, although judges and police officers alike report that they are the lowest level in the distribution chain. Most of those who sell drugs are unemployed, and this is their only form of income. Women predominate in drug cases, men are a majority in theft cases. Recent changes in the Criminal Law foresee criminal liability for drug use. Considering the substantial number of young Romani men who use drugs, this may mean that the number of Romani people – especially men – who attract the attention of law enforcement may be on the rise.

Romani women make up approximately one-quarter of imprisoned women in Latvia. Despite the high proportion of Romani people in criminal cases and in prisons, there are no Romani employees at police institutions, courts or prisons, nor are there any people who speak the Romani language. Although the Roma speak Latvian and/or Russian, international organizations have recommended that prisons hire people who speak a minority language.⁸⁵

In law enforcement, too, there is information that points to the possibility of discrimination, both direct (the possibility that Romani people face different treatment than do other suspects or defendants, as well as the possibility that Romani people might more often be suspected of crimes just because they are Romani) and indirect (poverty, unemployment and low education levels facilitate the involvement of Romani people in crime, especially in drug sales). The fact that the percentage of Romani people who have a criminal record is higher than is the case among other ethnic groups, as well as the fact that many Romani people do not have an officially registered place of residence – these may be reasons why Romani more often face pre-trial detention. This, in turn, may lead to the more frequent imprisonment Romani people.

Among the Romani people who were surveyed as a part of this project and who said that they have encountered discrimination, 20% claimed that this had happened in contacts with the police. Some police officers, for their part, admitted that the behavior of Romani people have provoked more intolerant attitudes or even violence on the part of the police.

There may be biases against the Roma among judges, too. This was indicated by statements which a judge at the Latgale District Court made at a time when she barred Romani relatives of the victim from the court hearing. Surveyed judges have stressed, however, that attitudes toward the Roma depends on the specific judge, because absolute objectivity can never be achieved. All judges, in addition, claimed that the ethnicity of a defendant has nothing to do with the ruling that is handed down. It was not possible to evaluate the claim among many Romani people that they receive harsher sentences than other people do, because criminal cases involving defendants from other ethnic groups were not included in the analysis.

⁸⁵ The Oslo Recommendations on the Use of Minority Languages in Public and Private, with Explanatory Note, February 1998. See <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/documents/recommendations/oslo/index.php3>. See also the United Nations' Minimum Standards on the Treatment of Prisoners, Article 51.1 and 51.2, as well as the Council of Europe's European Prison Rules, Articles 60.1 and 60.2.

9. THE PARTICIPATION OF THE ROMA IN POLITICAL AND CIVIC ACTIVITIES

9.1. Political Participation

The Saeima (parliament)

Normunds Rudevičs, the president of the Latvian National Roma Cultural Association, is the only Romani person who has ever been elected to the Latvian parliament since the restoration of the country's independence in 1990. He was elected in the 7th Saeima election in 1998, when he ran on the list of the Latvia's Way political party.

Candidates in Saeima elections

According to the Central Elections Commission, there was a Romani woman who ran for election on the list of the Latvian Union Party in the 7th Saeima election, while there were no self-declared Romani people on any candidate list in the 8th Saeima election in 2002. Here it must be noted that Rudevičs has listed his nationality as "Latvian" in the 7th Saeima election, while the three candidates in the 8th Saeima election who are known to be Romani – Rudevičs, Gindra and Zamicka – did not state their ethnicity, which since the 8th Saeima election is a voluntary entry. None of the Romani candidates was elected to the parliament, however, nor was any of the parties on behalf of which they were running – the Progressive Center Party (Gindra, listed for this party, but officially a member of the Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party, or LSDSP), Latvia's Way and the LSDSP. Normunds Rudevičs was on the ballot only in Riga and came in 8th place on the list. Vanda Zamicka and Leons Gindra were on the ballot in Riga, Kurzeme and Zemgale, but their parties did not receive very many votes at all (a party must receive 5% of the national vote to win seats in the Saeima).

Membership in Political Parties

Romani political activity is also manifested through membership in political parties. Several Romani people are members of the LSDSP – eight of them in one single branch in the Riga neighborhood of Mežaparks alone. Vanda Zamicka, who is the leader of a Romani NGO and ran for election to the Saeima on the party's list in 2002, suggests that there might be some 50 Romani people in the party's ranks in Riga and another 15 in Ventspils. The LSDSP cannot provide documentary evidence of this, however, because the ethnicity of members is not recorded when they sign up.

Activities in Local Government Politics

Romani people have been much more active in local government elections. There were three candidates for local government office in the 1997 local government elections, and interestingly, they ran in localities where there are not that many Romani residents – the city of Liepāja, as well as the Kazdanga Parish (Liepāja District) and the Aglona Parish (Preiļi District). In the 2001 local government elections, there were eight Romani candidates in the country. Three of them ran in Jelgava, representing the LSDSP, the People's Party and the Christian Democratic Union, one ran on behalf of Latvia's Way in Ventspils, one ran on the list of the Latvian Farmers Union in the Bērze Parish (Dobele District), one ran on a dedicated list called "Kazdanga" in the Kazdanga Parish (Liepāja District), one was a candidate for the Latvian Democratic Party in Ludza, and still another ran for office from the Latvian Farmers Union in Tukums.⁸⁶ None of these candidates was elected, according to the relevant local governments.

If we compare Romani activity with the activity of other minority groups in Latvia, then we find that in the 2001 local government elections there were nine ethnically Estonian candidates and six German ones, even though there are 3.5 times fewer members of those ethnic groups in Latvia than there are Romani people. There are more Ukrainians in Latvia, but only five of them stood for office (the fact is, it must be noted, that the number of citizens with voting rights among the Ukrainians is not much higher than the number of Romani people who have suffrage).

There are Romani people who are involved in the non-elected work of local governments. Haralds Didžus sits on the Jelgava city's Integration Commission as an NGO representative, while Anatolijs Berezovskis is a member of the Tukums City Council's Social Affairs Commission.

⁸⁶ Data from the Latvian Central Statistical Commission, valid as of 18 June 2003.

The Roma are reportedly active voters – nearly all of those who were surveyed for this article said that they voted. Many NGO leaders – Didžus, Rudevičs, Zamicka – argue that the Romani electorate is used for malicious purposes during election campaigns. The Romani are given various specific promises in advance of elections, but the promises are quickly forgotten afterward. It is also said that Romani voters are sometimes paid to deliver their vote for a specific list.

Rudevičs and Šimanis, in discussing the Romani electorate, stressed that they are able to direct that electorate, adding that this is a force that might change existing situations if, for instance, they were called up to vote against EU membership in the referendum that is to be held on that question in September 2003. Other Romani leaders are much more positive about Latvia's accession to the EU. One of the documents that was adopted at a Romani congress which was organized by "Gloss" spoke of support for Latvia's accession, and it also promised that the Roma would be informed about issues that are related to the EU and called for voting in favor of accession.

9.2. Civic Participation: NGOs

There are a number of Romani NGOs in Latvia. According to the Minorities Department of the Secretariat of the Minister for Social Integration, there are 16 registered Romani NGOs in Latvia, although 10 of them are branches or affiliates. The Roma are one of the few minorities in Latvia with organizations that are based on a regional principle. There are also independent Romani organizations, for instance, in Jēkabpils, Ventspils and Jūrmala. Proportionally to their share in the population, the Roma have established the largest number of non-governmental organizations.

The first such organization was registered in 1993 – the Latvian National Roma Cultural Association. The next was registered in 1998 in Ventspils – that is the Romani organization "Gloss." Both organizations have an extensive network of branches.

9.2.1. The Latvian National Roma Cultural Association

The Latvian National Roma Cultural Association, or LČNKB in the Latvian acronym, was registered in June 1993, but its leader, Normunds Rudevičs, claims that it actually launched operations on May 9, 1990. Initially the organization did not receive support from the state, but once its leader was elected to Parliament in 1998, the LČNKB became the representative of Romani interests at the national level. Between 1998 and 2002, the Latvian government provided a total of Ls 101,000 to this Romani organization alone.⁸⁷ The money was supposed to be spent on the establishment of 12 regional centers, which would deal with improving the social environment of the Roma and other projects. The LČNKB claims that it operates through 12 regional centers, but the fact is that only one branch has been officially registered – the one in Jelgava. A Romani organization in Kuldīga has not been registered, but it is working as a branch of the LČNKB. Elsewhere in Latvia – in Valmiera and Talsi, for instance – informal Romani leaders have stated their support for the LČNKB. In 2003, the government did not grant any money to the organization.

The leader of the LČNKB has been talking for several years now about the establishment of regional centers, but the fact is that only three Latvian local governments have had any information from or collaboration with regional LČNKB representatives – Jelgava, Kuldīga and Valmiera. The LČNKB has provided little or no financial support to its branches. Office space has been provided by city councils or with the assistance of local governments. In Kuldīga, the LČNKB has received Ls 62 (100 Euro) for renovation of its offices. The only officially registered branch – the one in Jelgava – was established several times as a cultural association for the city's Romani people, but once Rudevičs visited Jelgava, it was proclaimed to be a branch of the LČNKB.

⁸⁷ Zankovska-Odiņa, S. "Čigānu politizācija" (Politicizing the Roma), published on the Internet portal www.politika.lv, 10 December 2002.

9.2.2. "Gloss"

According to the aforementioned Minorities Department, the Romani group "Gloss" has eight branches in Dobeles, Jelgava, Jēkabpils, Kandava, Liepāja, Rīga, Talsi and Tukums. The director of the organization, Leons Gindra, however, claims to run 24 branches all over Latvia.⁸⁸ In fact, only the branch in Tukums can really be seen as an active organization. The director of the branch is not very happy with "Gloss" as such: "'Gloss' is not active. It didn't do the necessary work," he has said.

All three of the Romani congresses that have taken place in Latvia have been organized by "Gloss." The first took place on 24 May 2001. Delegates approved a program of activities for the Romani community and decided that "the congress shall be assembled once per year so as to discuss the survival of the nation." Delegates also expressed support for Latvia's membership in the EU. The press did not make note of the number of participants.

The second congress was held on 14 May 2002, at which a decision was taken to request a government loan of Ls 3 million (5 million Euro) so as to allow the Romani community to emerge from its crisis situation. The congress was organized with the support of the Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party, and it was settled that it would submit the request to the government. The financing was being planned to be used to help in the establishment of farms, to organize activities at retail centers, to develop construction work and to set up a coordination center.

The latest congress took place on June 21, 2003, and only some 25 people (four of them women) took part. Financial support came from the Secretariat of the Minister of Social Integration. A representative of the ministry attended the congress, as did one representative from the New Era party's faction in Parliament and one representative of the LSDSP, who was an attorney. The main reason for the congress was that "Gloss" had elaborated an economic program with projects aimed at attracting Romani people to economic activities. This program was to be submitted to the government via the good offices of the New Era deputy.

9.2.3. Other Organizations

A Romani organization called "Dorsis" has been established in Jūrmala. There is an organization in Jēkabpils called "Šatra," and it operates along with "Gloss" in that town. A recent newcomer in Rīga is "Ame Roma," which also has a chapter in Ventspils. The greatest number of Romani organizations is found in Rīga (4), as well as in Ventspils (3), Jēkabpils and Jelgava (two each).

Only a few of the registered organizations are actually active. That may be because they can't find financing, or perhaps they simply are unable to specify goals and missions and then locate the resources to pursue these. In regional towns, only few organizations have office space, and that is usually financed by city councils. In Jelgava, for instance, the Romani organization is the only minority organization to have its office space financed by the City Council. Some organizations are registered at the addresses where their leaders or founders reside.

There is little official cooperation, and no joint projects among the various Romani NGOs. The Romani community in Latvia is a small one, however, so all of the official and unofficial NGO leaders are acquainted with one another.

9.2.4. Education Level of NGO leaders

NGO leaders' education level varies a lot – some of them have only completed a couple of grades of elementary school, and a few others, regardless of their age, have started postgraduate studies, mainly in business and law. One of the most highly educated leaders is "Ame Roma" director Vanda Zamicka, who has a degree in law and is pursuing her master's degree at this time.

9.2.5. The Role of Women

Both of the largest and most active Romani organizations – the LČNKB and "Gloss" – are directed by men, and both of those men are secondary school graduates, according to the information which they themselves have provided. One of the Romani leaders, Anatolijs Berezovskis, has said that "we do not have a matriarchal society – when a father or older brother says that something has to happen, then that is what happens." Nevertheless,

⁸⁸ LETA news agency. "Čigānu biedrība 'Gloss' aģitē par sociāldemokrātiem" (The Romani organization 'Gloss' agitates in favor of the Social Democrats), <http://www.leta2000.com/latvian/arhivs/arhiveitem.asp?itemID={8D0C020C-6715, 14.05.2002, last time visited on 5 March 2003.>

women are actively involved in the leadership and operations of Romani NGOs. There are three known leaders of Romani NGOs – Laila Leiskina at the Jēkabpils Romani organization “Šatra,” Biruta Agamedova at the Kuldīga branch of the LČNKB, and Vanda Zamicka at the recently established “Ame Roma.” According to the Secretariat of the Minister for Social Integration, four of the eight regional leaders of “Gloss” are women – Indra Krastiļova (Rīga), Velta Pitepa (Talsi), Daina Briede (Jelgava) and Laila Leiskina (Jēkabpils). There are women on the board of “Gloss” and among the founders of the organization. There are no women, however, among the board members or founders of the LČNKB.

9.2.6. Views of Romani NGO leaders

Most of the surveyed NGO leaders agree that the primary problem for the Roma is a lack of work (Rudevičs, Berezovskis, Zamicka). They also speak of problems with education and social conditions. The leader in Jelgava says that the biggest problems are “the issue of housing and survival.” Just one leader spoke of concern about the possibility of assimilation.

As far as discrimination against the Roma is concerned, Romani NGO representatives speak of law enforcement institutions, especially the police. All of the Romani leaders spoke of instances when Romani people have been arrested or asked to leave cafes without cause.

According to Rudevičs, “discrimination comes from the government. In a civilized society, the state, the government helps ethnic minorities.” As evidence of discrimination against the Roma at an international level, leaders speak of the time when Estonia refused to admit Romani people from Latvia into the country, because they were on a list of undesirables. The leaders all say that the mass media contribute in strengthening stereotypes. Television stories about negative events in which Romani people have been involved frequently stress the ethnicity of the participants.

Asked why the Roma don’t approach law enforcement agencies when things like this happen, leaders respond that the Roma, too, have their own stereotypes – “that it is better not to become involved with the police or with government institutions.” Many Romani people have had negative experience with employees of these institutions, they do not believe that any assistance is available there.

None of the surveyed leaders, neither male or female, agreed with the idea that there is discrimination against Romani women within the community – refusal to allow girls to go to school, arranged marriages, etc.

Child subsidy payments, disability subsidies and old age pensions are the only source of income for a majority of Romani people in Latvia. During the summer and autumn, many Romani people head for the forest to earn money – they pick berries and mushrooms. Romani people also do various seasonal work in agriculture and construction. An exception was a young man who is an informal Romani leader in Talsi. He said nothing about poverty and did not think that the Roma in Talsi have any major problems.

Negative trends which have emerged more recently include prostitution, alcohol abuse and drug addiction. Romani people are loath to speak about narcotics. They admit that many of their fellow Romani people are involved in the sale of drugs, but they say that this is because many Romani people face a hopeless situation in life.

Project proposals have been prepared by a Romani organization in Tukums, by the LČNKB and by “Ame Roma,” but the number of funded projects is low. Berezovskis claims that he has submitted project proposals to the Baltic–American Partnership Fund, the PHARE Program in collaboration with Society Integration Foundation, and the Soros Foundation, but without success. Berezovskis feels that proposals that are written by Romani NGOs may not be supported, but if the same proposals are submitted by non–Romani NGOs, then they receive support. Major projects that have been organized at the national level by Romani NGOs have been prepared in collaboration with local governments, and these are shown on project proposals as partners (this was true in a project in Kuldīga which was financed by the Society Integration Foundation). At the local level, Romani NGOs develop projects in collaboration with other organizations (“Ame Roma” and the Ventspils Evening Secondary School). In other cases projects are very inexpensive (see the chapter on employment with respect to Jēkabpils).

For six years now, "Ame Roma" has been running a project providing Romani people in Ventspils who were victims of the Holocaust with a sum of around USD 100 dollars each month. The sum depends on the amount of money that is collected by the Roma Foundation in Switzerland. Initially there were around 200 people who received the payment, now only some 80 remain. "Ame Roma" also has an active musical ensemble which performs at various events. It receives financial support from the Ventspils City Council.

Romani NGOs have established various models of relationships with those who are in power in their towns and cities. The leader of the Romani community in Tukums, Berezovskis, speaks positively of his work with the City Council ("Without their help, nothing would happen"). He adds, however, that if a project is not successful in Tukums, then he tries to "organize it through Riga." He did not specify what he meant.

"Ame Roma" director Zamicka says that many of her organization's projects are implemented with the financial support of the Ventspils City Council. A leader in Kuldiga, Agamedova, also speaks positively of her town's City Council.

In Jelgava, however, local leader Didžus, who is a member of the city's Integration Commission, doesn't think that there has been successful cooperation with the City Council. He claims that his membership on the integration panel is merely a formality. Didžus does admit, however, that the City Council helped in elaborating a project aimed at studying the situation of Romani people in Jelgava.

NGOs are active in various attempts to improve the situation of the Roma. In order to help promote competition in the job market, the Latvian Roma Association in Kuldiga is working with the Kuldiga Regional Information and Coordination Center and the Kuldiga Region Adult Education Center to implement a project on computer courses for Romani people. This received financing from the Society Integration Foundation in the second half of 2002.

Conclusions

Normunds Rudevičs was an elected MP in the 7th session of the Latvian Saeima, but in the current, 8th session of the Saeima, there are no Romani MPs. Neither are any Romani people members of local government councils.

The proportion of Romani non-governmental organizations to Romani population share is one of the largest in Latvia, compared to other ethnic groups in the country. The Roma are most active in Kurzeme, as well as in Jelgava and Riga. There are no official Romani organizations in Latgale, however. Many of the organizations have mostly been established by two leading Romani structures which have branches or chapters in various parts of the country. There has been a complete lack of cooperation between the leading organization and its chapters, however. There are also small Romani organizations in Latvia's various regions, which are completely independent.

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Researchers in this study also made use of unpublished statistical information from the Central Statistical Bureau, from the Center for AIDS Prevention, from the Information Center of the Latvian Interior Ministry, from the Secretariat of the Special Task Minister for Societal Integration, from the National Employment Agency and from the Central Election Commission of Latvia.

Appendix No. 1

Methodology

1. This study has made use of qualitative analysis and descriptions, quantitative data, as well as published and unpublished statistics from the Central Statistical Board, from various state and government institutions, and from visits to schools, prisons, courts, hospitals and social service institutions.

The authors obtained qualitative information through various sociological methods – surveys, focus group discussions for Romani people and in-depth interviews.

2. Data were received from the market and public opinion research center SKDS through a survey that was conducted on the subject "Attitudes Toward the Roma." Between 10 and 27 April 2003, SKDS surveyed 1,041 permanent residents of Latvia in the age brackets between 18 and 74. Respondents were selected randomly on the basis of territorial and national stratification. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the homes of respondents in 104 regions of Latvia – 33.8% in Rīga, 22.9% in Vidzeme, 13% in Kurzeme, 14.2% in Zemgale and 16.1% in Latgale. Among respondents, 46.6% were men, and 53.4% were women. 55.1% were Latvians, 44.9% were of other ethnic groups. 78.5% of respondents were citizens of Latvia, while 21.5% were not. A single questionnaire was used to learn about public attitudes in relation to three major subjects – contacts with Romani people in various situations, ideas about the Roma, as well as views about the integration of the Romani people into society.

3. The Baltic Social Sciences Institute conducted focus group discussions on the subject "Integration of Romani People into Latvia's Society," the aim being to study obstacles that stand in the way of the integration of the Roma into Latvia's society. The study was conducted in February and March 2003, with five focus group discussions with respondents from target audiences in Rīga, Talsi, Ventspils and Jelgava. On a random basis, 43 Romani persons were selected for the focus group discussions. In order to learn about the obstacles which stand against the social integration of the Roma, the living situation of the Roma was studied, as was the situation in the following areas: education, employment, health care, designation of ethnic belonging, the social relationships of the Roma with other nationalities, as well as everyday living conditions.

4. Fieldwork was done in order to gain as much information as possible from primary sources. Researchers studied living conditions and engaged in in-depth interviews. Researchers visited all towns and cities in Latvia where there are more than 200 Romani people (according to the 2000 national census) – Valmiera, Jelgava, Tukums, Talsi, Jēkabpils, Daugavpils, Ventspils, Kuldīga, Jūrmala and Rīga. The choices were made on the basis of numbers, not proportions, because the proportion of Romani residents is significant in most cases only in small rural villages. Given that 84% of the Roma in Latvia live in cities and towns, the situation of rural Romani people would not tell us much about the overall situation of the Roma in Latvia. In the future it would be important to learn whether there are differences in the lives and problems of Romani people in urban and rural areas, including those areas where there are large or small proportions of Romani people in the surrounding population.

In all of the aforementioned towns and cities, there were in-depth interviews with local government officials who are responsible for social, housing, education and integration (in some towns) issues, as well as with regional representatives of the National Employment Service, the National Police, district courts, schools and hospitals. The Iļģuciems women's prison was visited. A total of 82 interviews were conducted over the course of three weeks. The interviews were conducted by LCESC researchers Dace Lukumiete and Signe Martišūne and by "Ame Roma" director Vanda Zamicka.

A project assistant studied court data about Romani people who have been convicted of crimes. She studied data in eight different courts.

In addition, more than 70 interviews were conducted with Romani people in Latvia's various regions, as well as with women who are incarcerated at the prison in Iļģuciems. The interviewees were determined during the fieldwork itself. According to information from national, local and city governments about the areas of various towns in which Romani people live, researchers visited the homes that had been indicated and sought to reach

agreement on an interview. Assistance in reaching agreement was provided by the leader of "Ame Roma", which was a partner organization in the study. More than 70 interviews with Romani people were conducted in all. For semi-formal interviews, a pre-prepared questionnaire was used, but answers were not limited in any sense, neither in terms of time nor in terms of subject matter.

The authors also interviewed five leaders of Romani NGOs, as well as two informal leaders who were identified as such by the Roma themselves or by civil servants. The Romani leaders who could be found in Rīga were interviewed – Normunds Rudevičs (LČNKB), Vanda Zamicka ("Ame Roma"), as were leaders in Jelgava (Haralds Didžus, Jelgava Romani Cultural Association), in Tukums (Anatolijs Berezovskis, "Gloss"), in Kuldīga (Biruta Agamedova, a chapter of the LČNKB that has not been registered officially), in Valmiera (Tahirs Simanis, informal leader), and in Talsi (Rustams Eberharts, informal leader).

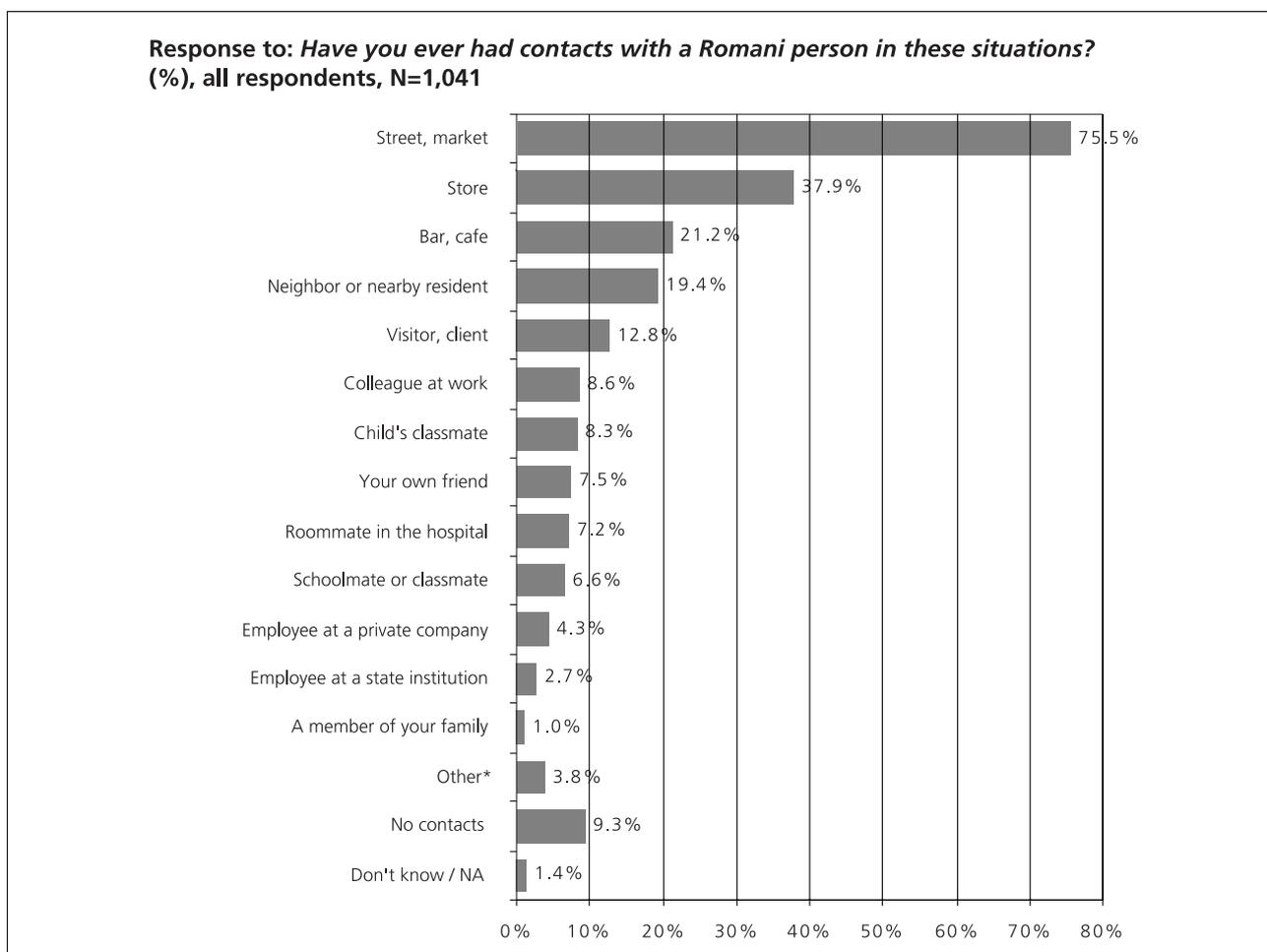
The interviews were coded and analyzed on the basis of standard sociological methods.

Appendix No. 2

Attitudes Toward the Roma Survey Results

The SKDS public opinion research agency was commissioned to conduct a study on the attitudes of people in Latvia toward the Roma.

Most people in Latvia have no close Romani acquaintances. For a convincing majority (75.5%) of Latvia's residents, contacts with the Roma have occurred in the market or on the street. Nearly 40% of respondents have encountered Romani people at stores, 20% have come into contact with them in bars, cafes or as neighbors, and only 10% reported contacts with Romani people as visitors/clients. Long-term contacts with Romani people are uncommon – colleagues at work, friends, schoolmates of children, classmates, etc. – less than 10% in each of those categories. Approximately the same percentage of Latvia's residents have been in the same room as a Romani person in a hospital. Nearly 10% of respondents said that they have never had any contacts with the Roma.



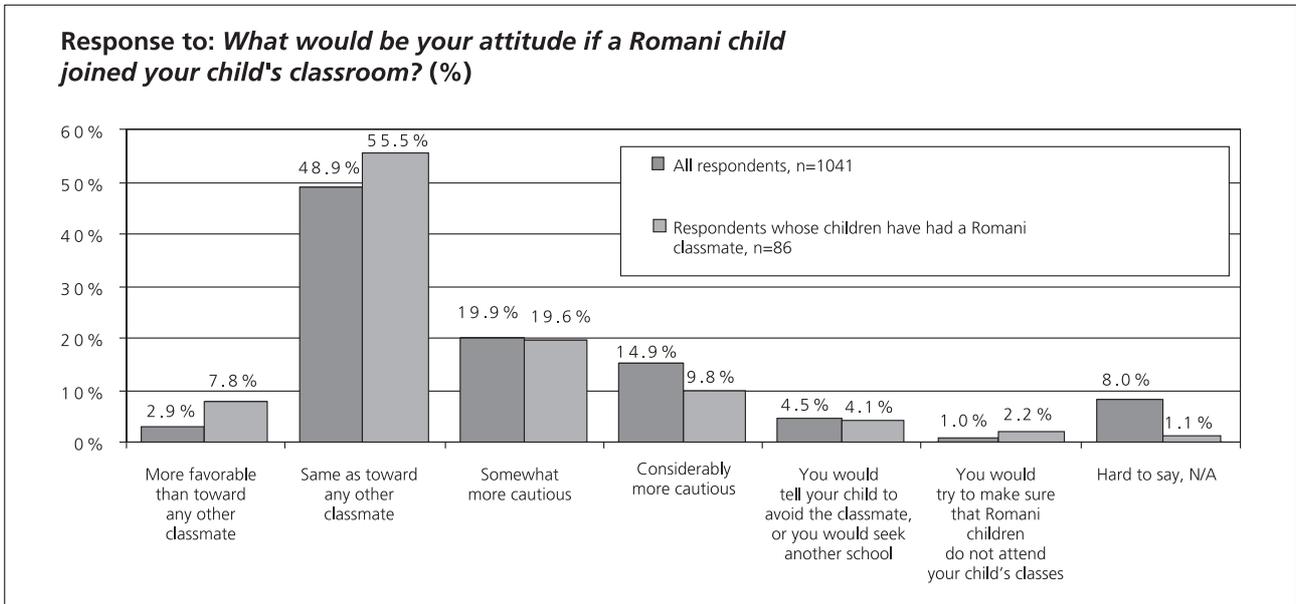
*Because respondents were allowed to mark more than one answer, the total exceeds 100%.

Latvians more than non-Latvians have had contacts with Romani person as classmates of their children, which confirms data which show that Romani children attend Latvian-language schools more than Russian-language ones. A total of 11% of Russians, 13% of people of other ethnic groups, but only 6% of Latvians said that they have had Romani colleagues. More Latvians than non-Latvians are the neighbors of Romani people, but as a family member, a Romani person is found in 3% more families of other ethnic groups than in Latvian or Russian families.

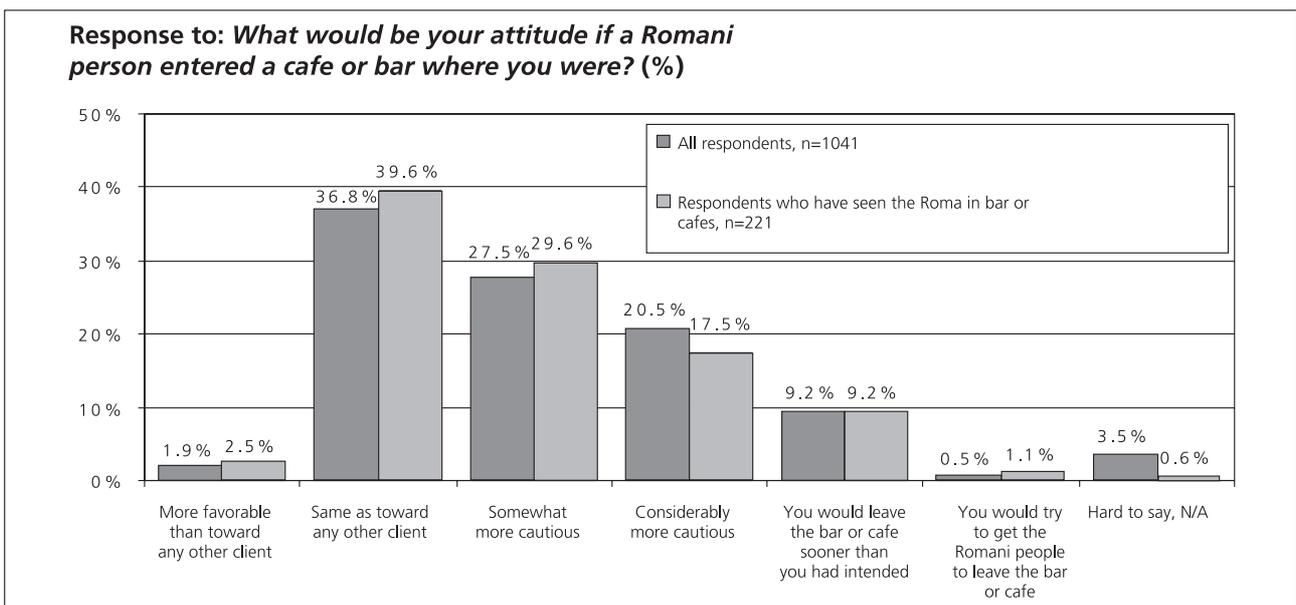
Asked to think about the possibility of contacts with Romani people in various everyday situations, 49% of survey respondents said that they would treat a Romani classmate of their child's like anyone else. In other situations, however, attitudes were less favorable. Only 37% would treat a Romani visitor to a bar or cafe just like any other

visitor, 34% would have the same attitudes with respect to a neighbor, 32% – with respect to a potential colleague, and just 25% in encounters with Romani people on the street or at the market.

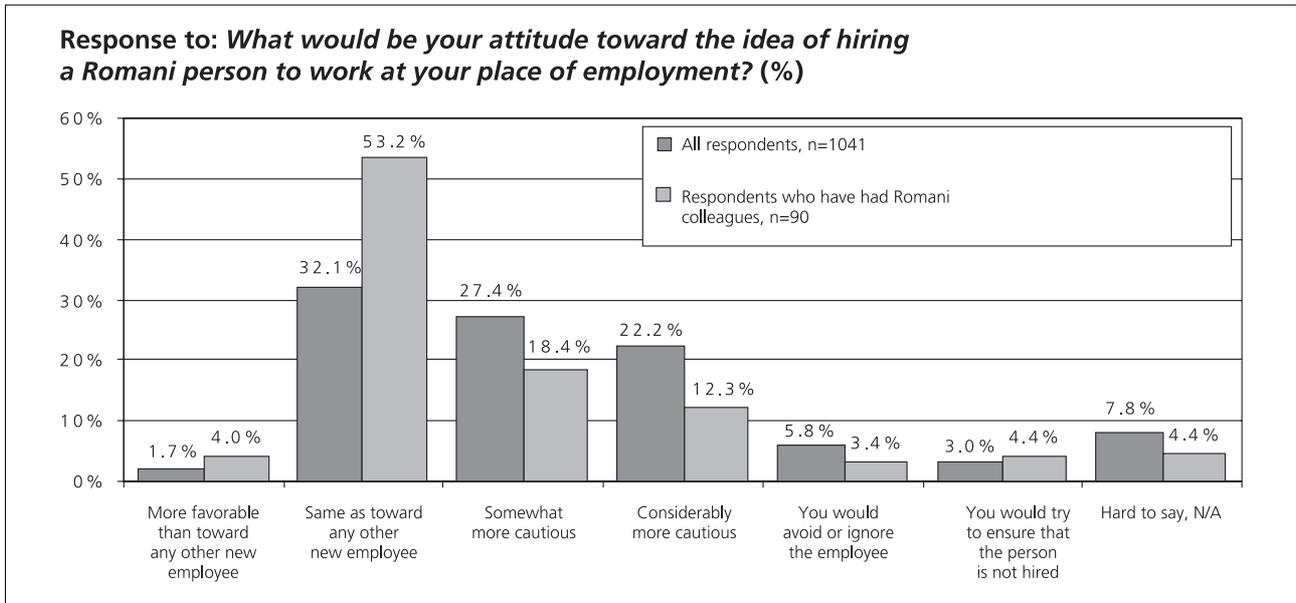
Only between 1% and 3% of respondents said that they would treat Romani people more favorably than others in the given situations. Interestingly, those who have had contacts with Romani people as colleagues, as the classmates of their children or as neighbors were more likely than other respondents to say that their attitudes toward the Roma would be the same as toward anyone else, but those who have had contacts with Romani people on the street or at the market chose that response less often than the average.



The survey data show that if a Romani child were to join a respondent's child's classroom, about one-half of respondents would take a neutral view of the matter. Some 35% of respondents, however, would be somewhat more cautious or considerably more cautious, while 5.5% of parents would take steps – 4.5% would ask their children to avoid the Romani classmates or would seek out another school, while 1% would try to get the Romani child out of the classroom entirely. Only 3% of parents would have more favorable attitudes toward a Romani child than toward any other. Survey respondents who have already encountered Romani children in this situation were more likely than average to say that their attitudes toward the Romani child would be better or the same as toward any other classmate.



Negative attitudes, including greater cautiousness, departure from the bar or cafe sooner than had been planned, as well as efforts to get the Romani people to leave the institution, were more common (58%) than were neutral or positive attitudes (38%). Nearly one-half of Latvia's residents (48%) would treat Romani people in a bar or cafe with somewhat or considerably more caution. Very few – 1.9% – would have a more favorable attitude. Nearly one-tenth of respondents said that they would leave the bar or cafe sooner than planned, while 0.5% would try to get the Romani people to depart. Respondents who said that they had already had contacts with Romani people in this situation did not have distinctly more favorable attitudes. The number of people with favorable attitudes was almost the same among those with previous contacts and among all respondents. A neutral attitude would be displayed by 3% more of those respondents who have had such contacts.

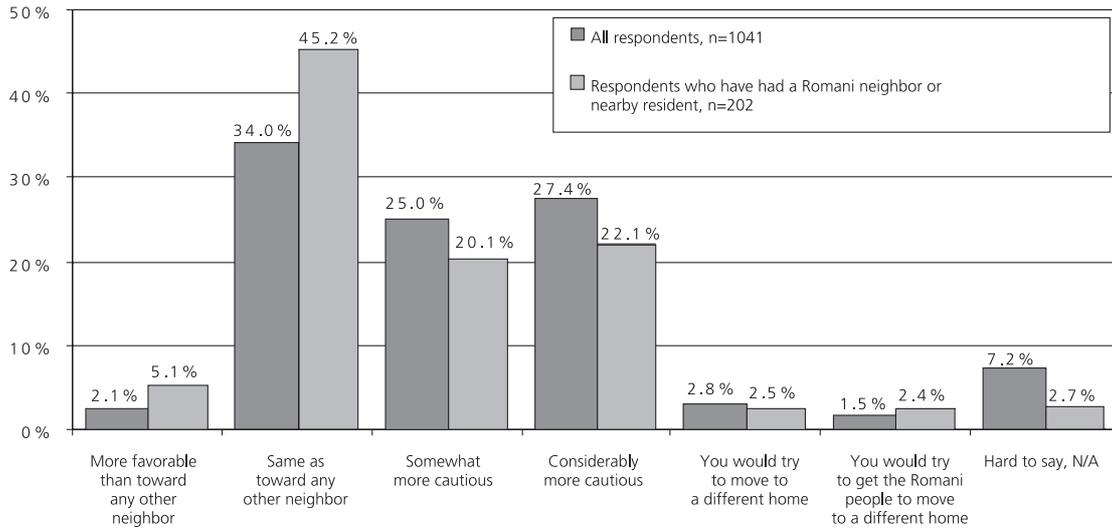


When it comes to the idea of a Romani colleague at work, Latvia's residents are either cautious or distinctly negative (they would ignore the colleague or try to ensure that the person is not hired in the first place). Approximately 58% of respondents expressed these combined views. 32.1% would have a neutral attitude, 1.7% of respondents would have a more favorable attitude, 5.8% of respondents would try to avoid a newly hired Romani person, and 3% would try to make sure that the Romani person is not hired in the first place.

In this case, unlike contacts in cafes or bars, respondents who had already had contacts with Romani people as colleagues were much more positive than those who had not. The difference between the two groups when it comes to those who would treat a Romani colleague just like any other employee was by 21.1%, and the difference between the two groups in terms of those who would be more or less cautious about the employee was also nearly 20%.

19.4% of Latvia's residents have had contacts with Romani people as neighbors or nearby residents. When respondents were asked to respond to a question about the possibility of a Romani neighbor, these are the responses that were gained:

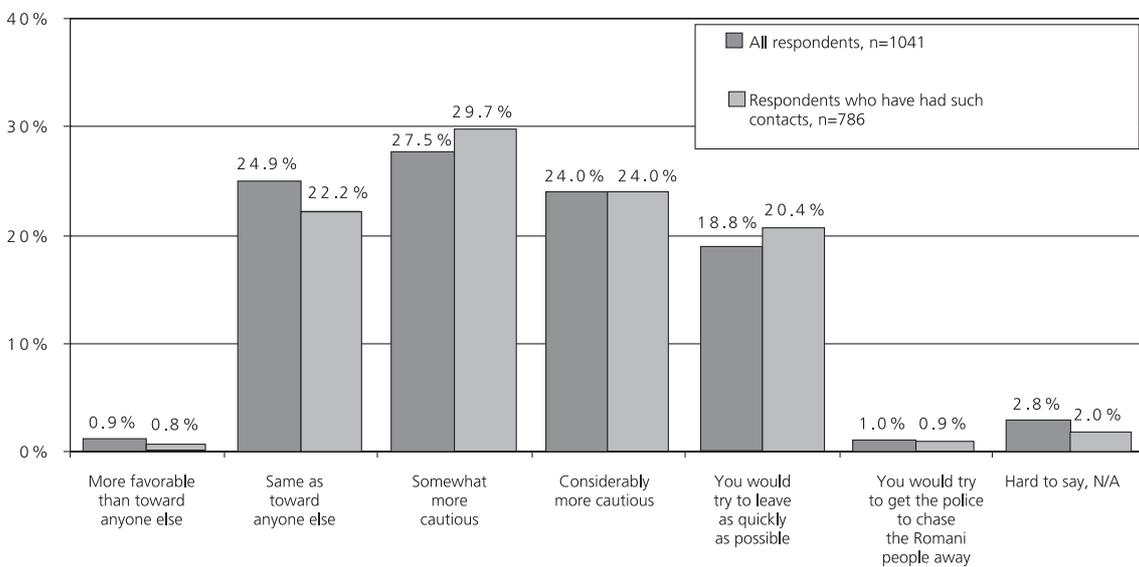
Response to: What would be your attitude toward a Romani neighbor or nearby resident? (%)



52.4% of respondents would be cautious if they had a Romani neighbor, and that represents greater caution than is the case in relation to colleagues or the classmates of children. One-third of respondents would have the same attitudes toward a Romani neighbor as toward any other, while 2.1% would treat the Romani neighbor more favorably. More than 4% of respondents would try to avoid the situation altogether – 2.8% would try to move, while 1.5% would try to get the Romani people to move.

The responses of people who have already had Romani neighbors are much more positive – 10% fewer would be cautious, while 14% more respondents in this group than among all respondents would have a more favorable or a neutral attitude.

Response to: What would be your attitude in finding Romani people nearby on the street or at the market? (%)

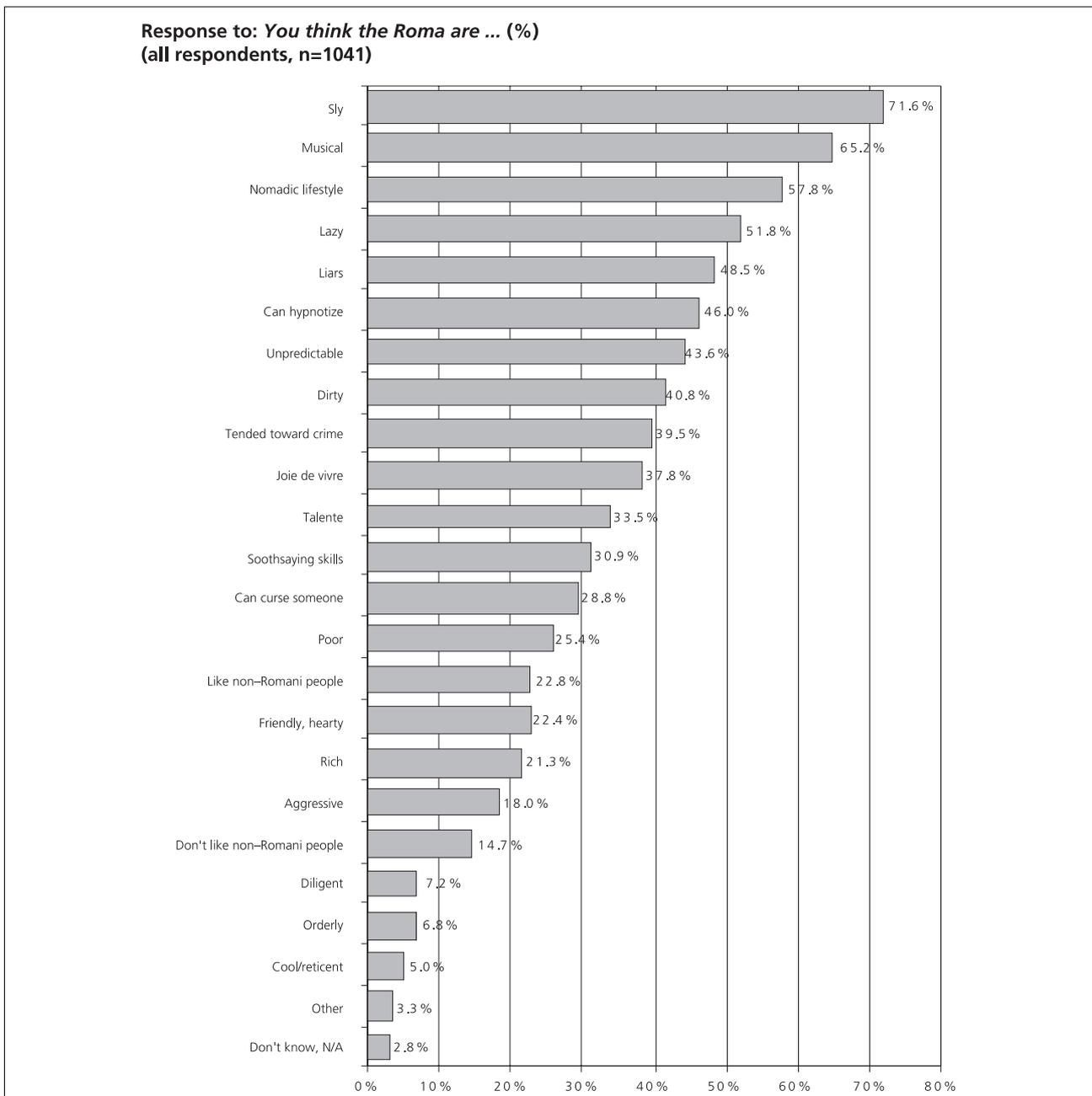


A bit more than one-half of surveyed residents (51.5%) would be somewhat more cautious or considerably more cautious when encountering Romani people on the street or at the market. 18.8% would leave as soon as possible, while 1% would ask the police to chase the Romani people away, and this means that fully 71% of respondents have negative attitudes. Only 24.9% would treat the Romani person just like anyone else, while 0.9% would have a more favorable attitude. Those respondents who reported previous contacts with Romani

people in these situations had an even more negative attitude – 2% more would be more cautious, and nearly 2% more would try to leave the place as quickly as possible. 2.7% fewer respondents who have had contacts with the Roma than all respondents would have the same attitude as toward any other person.

Characteristics Attributed to the Roma

Asked to state the first word that comes to mind when hearing the word “Roma,” most respondents came up with negative properties and characteristics. Most frequently people talked about cheats, liars and frauds (17%), or about people with a tendency toward theft and stealing (16.9%). More than 5% of respondents mentioned such words as sly, pushy, speculator, shameless, doesn’t like to work and unclean. The most frequently mentioned positive association with the Roma (6.2%) involved Romani music and dancing. Other positive associations include romantic (3.3%) and joie de vivre (1.6). Other positive associations were mentioned very seldom. The frequency of neutral associations is comparable to the frequency of positive associations. Some of the associations can be seen either as negative or as neutral (trading, fortune-telling).

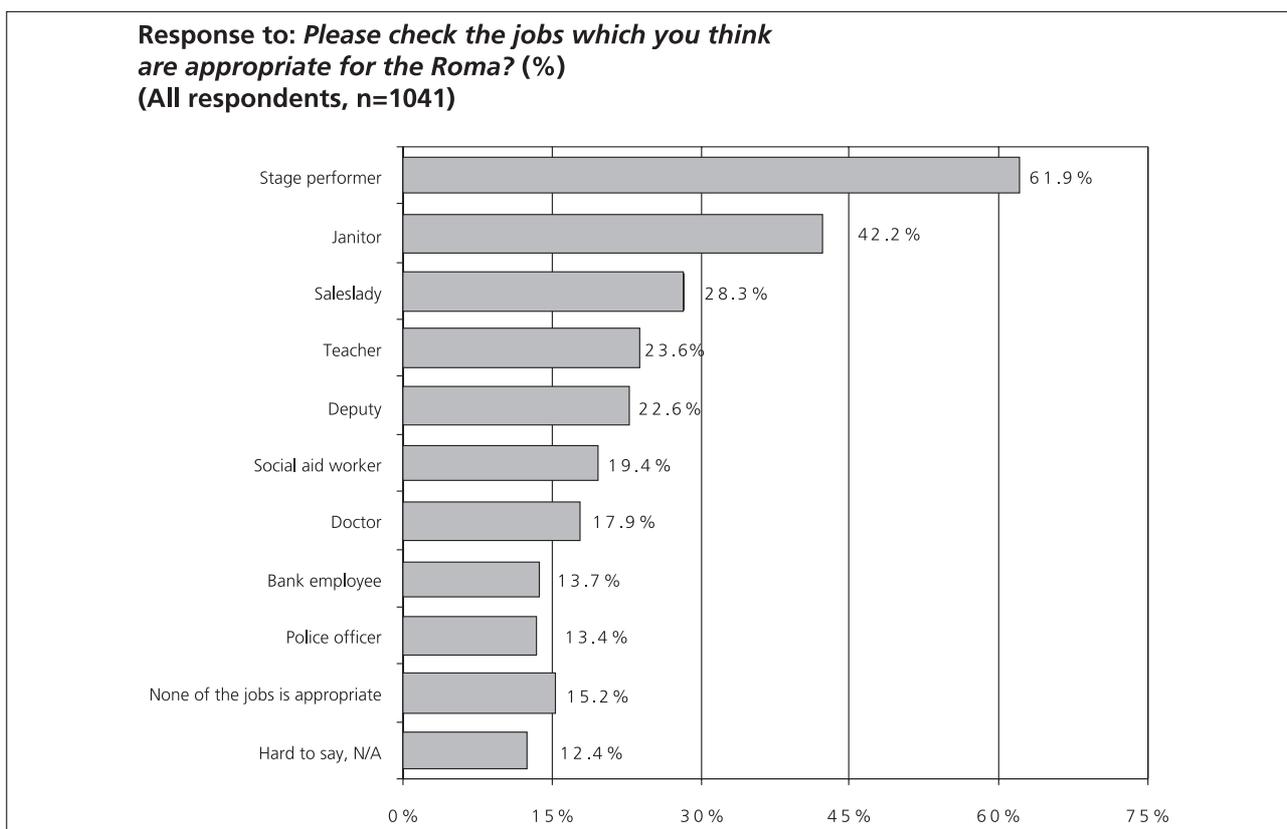


*Because respondents were allowed to mark more than one answer, the total exceeds 100%.

From the list of associations, respondents most often chose the concept that Romani people are sly (71.6%). The next most frequently mentioned association was musical (65.2%). Lazy and liars – nearly 50% of respondents. Unpredictable, dirty, tended toward crime – approximately 40% each. Nearly as many think that the Roma have joie de vivre (37.8%), while 33.5% of respondents think that the Roma are talented. Only slightly fewer respondents think that Romani people are rich than that they are poor. Respondents who think that Romani people like to have contacts with other people are 8% more in number than are those who think that Romani people don't want any such contacts. Quite a few respondents think that Romani people have special gifts – 46% think that the Roma can hypnotize others, while 28% think that Romani people can curse others. Some 30% believe that Romani people can predict the future. Very few respondents – fewer than 10% – think that the Roma are diligent, orderly or reticent. Nearly 3% couldn't come up with any association. Among those who have had no contacts with the Roma before, only 10% declined to answer the question about associations.

It is interesting to compare the responses of respondents on the basis of the situations (if any) in which they have encountered Romani people before. Positive and neutral associations (friendly, hearty, diligent, musical, talented, orderly, joie de vivre, etc.) were more common among respondents who had family members or friends who are Romani people, or who had had contacts with Romani people as colleagues, as neighbors or as employees of public or private institutions.

Respondents were also asked to name professions they consider to be the most appropriate for the Roma. These choices confirmed the positive and negative stereotypes which prevail. Fully 61.9% of respondents said that stage performer is the most appropriate profession for a Romani person. Next on the list was the profession of janitor (42.2%). More than 20% of respondents think that appropriate jobs for Romani people include salesperson, teacher and deputy. At the bottom of the list are bank employee and police officer – just 13% or so of respondents mentioned these professions.

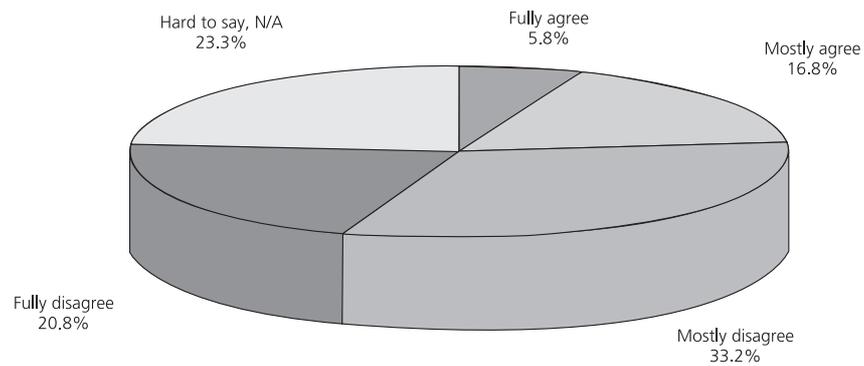


*Because respondents were allowed to mark more than one answer, the total exceeds 100%.

A total of 15% of respondents said that none of the listed jobs would be appropriate for a Romani person, and this suggests either that respondents did not think that one profession or another would be appropriate for all

of the Romani people in Latvia, or that respondents were upholding the common stereotype which suggests that Romani people don't want to work at all.

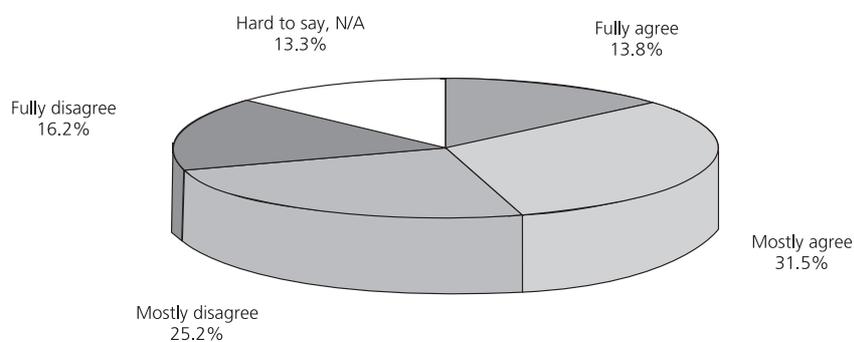
Response to the claim: *The Roma have fewer chance to receive social aid than other people do (%)*
(All respondents, n=1041)



More than one-half of survey respondents did not agree with the statement, "The Roma have fewer chances to receive social aid than other people do" (54%). Nearly one-quarter (22.6%) think that the Roma have limited access to social aid, and approximately the same share of respondents did not answer the question.

The results of the study show that Russians (27%) and people from other ethnic groups (25%) were more likely than Latvians (20%) to agree with the statement.

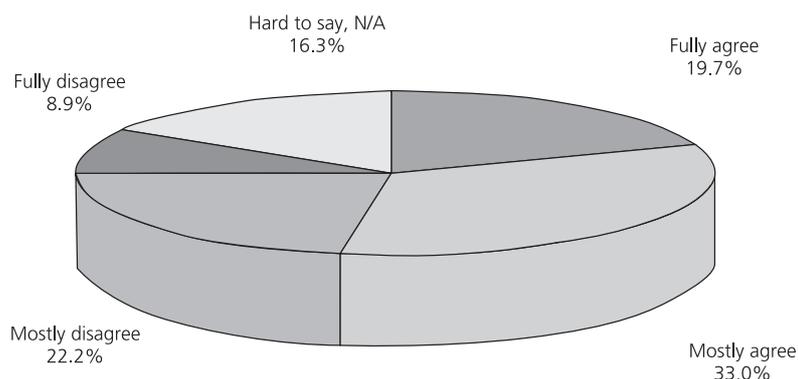
Response to the claim: *The state must support special aid for the Roma so as to improve, for instance, their socioeconomic status or education (%)*
(All respondents, n=1041)



Here the responses to the question were split up nearly 50–50. 45% of respondents generally agree that the state should have special aid programs for the Roma, while 41% do not.

Russians (49%) and people of other ethnic groups (47%) were a bit more likely than Latvians (42%) to say that such programs are needed.

Response to the claim: *There must be an increased police presence in those areas which are populated by the Roma (%)* (All respondents, n=1041)



More than one-half of respondents (52.7%) want a stronger law enforcement presence in places where Romani people live. 31% don't think that this is necessary, and quite a few – 16% – refrained from stating a specific opinion on the matter.

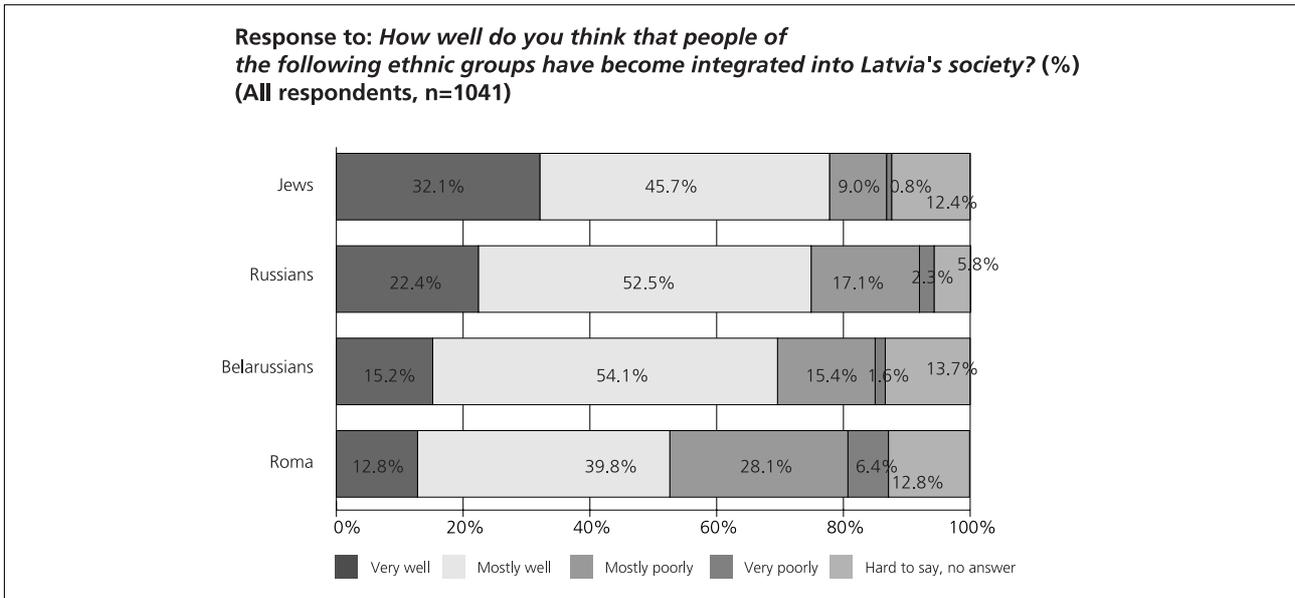
The responses that were given to this question show that there are no major differences between Latvians, Russians and other people when it comes to the police presence – between 51% and 54% of respondents in all three groups supported the view that a stronger police presence is needed.

When the responses are broken down by income level, we find that people with higher income were more likely to support the claim than people with lower income. Among those with monthly income per family member of Ls 42 or less, 46% supported the claim, while amongst those with income of Ls 85 or more, fully 59% did.

A strengthened police presence in regions where Romani people live was supported more often by the people of Riga (62%) than by respondents in other towns (51%) and in the countryside (45%).

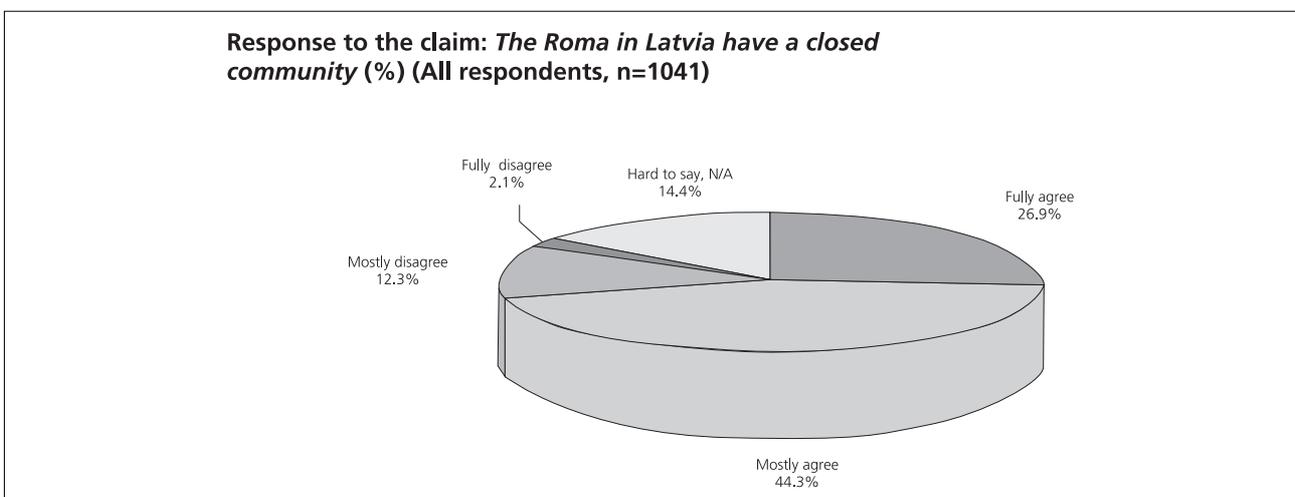
Social Integration

The next graph shows responses to the question of how integrated into Latvia's society are Russians, Belarussians, Jews and Romani people.



A majority of Latvia's residents (71%) think that Romani people constitute their own, secluded community, and they are less often recognized to be well integrated into society than are Jews, Russians and Belarussians.

The survey results show that approximately three-quarters of respondents believe that Jewish and Russian residents are well integrated into Latvia's society, while a bit fewer (70%) think the same with respect to Belarussians. Only 53% of respondents thought that the Roma are well integrated. It must be added that no more than one-third of respondents marked the answer "very well" for any of the groups that were mentioned. Responses given by Latvians, Russians and people of other ethnic groups show that Latvians were a bit more likely (79%) than were the Russians (67%) and the others (77%) to say that Russians are, generally speaking, well integrated in Latvia. People of other nationalities were more likely than Latvians and Russians to say that Belarussians (78%) and the Roma (62%) are integrated. Russians were less likely than other groups to say that the Russians (Latvians 16%, Russians 26%) and the Belarussians (Latvians 12%, Russians 26%). Russians are less negative when it comes to the poor level of Romani integration (Latvians 34.2% and 27.3%). It must be noted that the views of people from various ethnic groups do not differ much when it comes to Romani integration.



In response to the question about Romani integration into Latvia's society, more than one-half of respondents said that the Roma are well integrated, but nearly three-quarters (71%) of surveyed residents agree with the idea that "the Roma in Latvia have a closed community." Latvians (76%) agreed with the statement more often than Russians (65%) and people of other ethnic groups (66%).

Appendix No. 3

ECRI general policy recommendation no. 3

Combating racism and intolerance against Roma/Gypsies

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance:

Recalling the decision adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the member States of the Council of Europe at their first Summit held in Vienna on 8–9 October 1993;

Recalling that the Plan of Action on combating racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance set out as part of this Declaration invited the Committee of Ministers to establish the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance with a mandate, *inter alia*, to formulate general policy recommendations to member States;

Recalling also the Final Declaration and Action Plan adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the member States of the Council of Europe at their second Summit held in Strasbourg on 10–11 October 1997;

Stressing that this Final Declaration confirms that the goal of the member States of the Council of Europe is to build a freer, more tolerant and just European society and that it calls for the intensification of the fight against racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance;

Noting the proposal concerning the nomination of a European mediator for Roma/Gypsies contained in Recommendation N° 1203 (1993) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe;

Bearing in mind the conclusions of the human dimension seminar on Roma in the CSCE (OSCE) region organised on 20–23 September 1994 by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), in close consultation with the Council of Europe and the continuing co-operation between the two Organisations in this field;

Welcoming the nomination by the Secretary General in 1994 of a Co-ordinator of Council of Europe Activities on Roma/Gypsies;

Bearing in mind the work of the Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsies (MG–S–ROM);

Recalling Recommendation N° R (97) 21 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the media and the promotion of a climate of tolerance;

Recalling the provisions contained in ECRI's general policy recommendation N° 1, which sought to assist member States in combating racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance effectively, by proposing concrete and specific measures in a limited number of particularly pertinent areas;

Profoundly convinced that Europe is a community of shared values, including that of the equal dignity of all human beings, and that respect for this equal dignity is the cornerstone of all democratic societies;

Recalling that the legacy of Europe's history is a duty to remember the past by remaining vigilant and actively opposing any manifestations of racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance;

Paying homage to the memory of all the victims of policies of racist persecution and extermination during the Second World War and remembering that a considerable number of Roma/Gypsies perished as a result of such policies;

Stressing in this respect that the Council of Europe is the embodiment and guardian of the founding values – in particular the protection and promotion of human rights – around which Europe was rebuilt after the horrors of the Second World War;

Recalling that combating racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance forms an integral part of the protection and promotion of human rights, that these rights are universal and indivisible, and that all human beings, without any distinction whatsoever, are entitled to these rights;

Stressing that combating racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance is above all a matter of protecting the rights of vulnerable members of society;

Convinced that in any action to combat racism and discrimination, emphasis should be placed on the victim and the improvement of his or her situation;

Noting that Roma/Gypsies suffer throughout Europe from persisting prejudices, are victims of a racism which is deeply-rooted in society, are the target of sometimes violent demonstrations of racism and intolerance and that their fundamental rights are regularly violated or threatened;

Noting also that the persisting prejudices against Roma/Gypsies lead to discrimination against them in many fields of social and economic life, and that such discrimination is a major factor in the process of social exclusion affecting many Roma/Gypsies;

Convinced that the promotion of the principle of tolerance is a guarantee of the preservation of open and pluralistic societies allowing for a peaceful co-existence;

recommends the following to Governments of member States:

- to sign and ratify the relevant international legal instruments in the field of combating racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance, particularly the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;
- to ensure that the name used officially for the various Roma/Gypsy communities should be the name by which the community in question wishes to be known;
- bearing in mind the manifestations of racism and intolerance of which Roma/Gypsies are victims, to give a high priority to the effective implementation of the provisions contained in ECRI's general policy recommendation N° 1, which requests that the necessary measures should be taken to ensure that national criminal, civil and administrative law expressly and specifically counter racism, xenophobia, anti-semitism and intolerance;
- to ensure that discrimination as such, as well as discriminatory practices, are combated through adequate legislation and to introduce into civil law specific provisions to this end, particularly in the fields of employment, housing and education;
- to render illegal any discrimination on the part of public authorities in the exercise of their duties;
- to ensure that suitable legal aid be provided for Roma/Gypsies who have been victims of discrimination and who wish to take legal action;
- to take the appropriate measures to ensure that justice is fully and promptly done in cases concerning violations of the fundamental rights of Roma/Gypsies;
- to ensure in particular that no degree of impunity is tolerated as regards crimes committed against Roma/Gypsies and to let this be clearly known among the general public;
- to set up and support specific training schemes for persons involved at all levels in the various components of the administration of justice, with a view to promoting cultural understanding and an awareness of prejudice;

- to encourage the development of appropriate arrangements for dialogue between the police, local authorities and Roma/Gypsy communities;
- to encourage awareness-raising among media professionals, both in the audiovisual field and in the written press, of the particular responsibility they bear in not transmitting prejudices when practising their profession, and in particular in avoiding reporting incidents involving individuals who happen to be members of the Roma/Gypsy community in a way which blames the Roma/Gypsy community as a whole;
- to take the necessary steps to ensure that rules concerning the issue of de jure and de facto access to citizenship and the right to asylum are drawn up and applied so as not to lead to particular discrimination against Roma/Gypsies;
- to ensure that the questions relating to “travelling” within a country, in particular regulations concerning residence and town planning, are solved in a way which does not hinder the way of life of the persons concerned;
- to develop institutional arrangements to promote an active role and participation of Roma/Gypsy communities in the decision-making process, through national, regional and local consultative mechanisms, with priority placed on the idea of partnership on an equal footing;
- to take specific measures to encourage the training of Roma/Gypsies, to ensure full knowledge and implementation of their rights and of the functioning of the legal system functions;
- to pay particular attention to the situation of Roma/Gypsy women, who are often the subject of double discrimination, as women and as Roma/Gypsies;
- to vigorously combat all forms of school segregation towards Roma/Gypsy children and to ensure the effective enjoyment of equal access to education;
- to introduce into the curricula of all schools information on the history and culture of Roma/Gypsies and to provide training programmes in this subject for teachers;
- to support the activities of non-governmental organisations, which play an important role in combating racism and intolerance against Roma/Gypsies and which provide them in particular with appropriate legal assistance;
- to encourage Roma/Gypsy organisations to play an active role, with a view to strengthening civil society;
- to develop confidence-building measures to preserve and strengthen an open and pluralistic society with a view to a peaceful co-existence.