

# The Path to eliminating the marginalization of the Roma Community

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## Abstract:

**Objective:** The paper examines selected indicators declaring the validity of the implementation of field social work in marginalized communities.

**Methods:** Selection of conceptual documents related to field social work with marginalized groups, analysis of secondary quantitative data using descriptive statistics and systematization of qualitative data.

**Results:** The results show that the Roma community is experiencing marginalization as a result of which countries, not excluding Slovakia, are adopting strategies to reduce the gap between the minority and the majority. One of the implemented strategies is the National Project focused on field social work, which contributes to the elimination of social exclusion through competently equipped workers.

**Conclusion:** The article concludes that field social work is one of the possibilities of working with marginalized communities, which is of fundamental importance for alleviating their marginalization.

## Introduction

Solving the problems of the marginalized Roma community is of a supra-departmental and horizontal nature, for which countries adopt strategies with the aim of reducing the often significant cultural and social differences compared to the majority society. Despite the fact that the Roma community is the largest ethnic minority in Europe, as reported by international organizations (WHO, 2021) [1] it continues to face inequality and exclusion in all social areas, [2] including healthcare. [3] The Roma community consists of heterogeneous groups with diverse cultural, linguistic and territorial identities (Berményi, 2023) [4] which are often characterized by vulnerability in social inclusion (Melotti et al., 2023) [5]. It is often the result of otherness, which is not well accepted by the majority population, which makes the Roma an excluded group closed to the margins of society. [6]

According to research and strategic documents, the Roma in Slovakia regularly appear among the groups most at risk of poverty, social exclusion and discrimination, while the situation of the part of the Roma population that lives in segregated settlements is described as the worst. [7] In the context of these claims, as well as the results of the last census of inhabitants, houses and dwellings in the Slovak Republic 2021, [8] where 1,23% of the population (67 179 out of 5 449 270 inhabitants) officially registered as a Roma minority (designation of the first nationality). The Government of the Slovak Republic approved the Strategy of Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation until 2030, [9] which aims to achieve visible changes in the field of Roma equality and inclusion.

## Theoretical Framework

Stopping the segregation of Roma communities and their gradual integration into society is a space for quality social work that can draw attention to the emergence of problems, mobilize forces to solve them, and reveal the possibilities of help already at the root of the problem. Espe-

cially social work carried out by field and outreach social workers is indispensable for effective assistance to people, as it offers support in the natural environment of the clients. This form of social work in Slovakia is defined by Act No. 448/2008 Coll. on Social Services [10] as social work that is provided to an individual in his/her natural social environment or home environment [23]. Several authors (Samyn 2024) [11], (Filčák, Polačková and Dokupilová, 2019) [12] describe it as a supra-ministerial program aimed at marginalized Roma communities aimed at activating people's potential, supporting positive changes in housing, education, employment and social inclusion. Field social work has its principles and specifics typical for it, e.g. low threshold, Harm reduction (Vakharia, Little, 2017), [13] screening, [14] utekontakt (Dynamo International, 2020) [15]. Its main contribution is to increase the level of the quality of human life, to help fulfill the basic needs of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, living in poverty and in difficult social conditions (Ondrušková, Kulifaj, 2023). [16] The priority of field social work is primarily the establishment of an informal therapeutic relationship with the client in non-traditional conditions (Pružinská, Labáth, 2021), [17] which can often be a specific intervention on the street in the form of streetwork (Hill, Laredo, 2019). [18]

The National Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation until 2030 [9] represents a set of starting points and goals aimed at stopping the segregation of Roma communities, strengthening the social inclusion of Roma, non-discrimination and improving coexistence. It is defined in four priority areas, namely: employment, education, health, housing, which are also the starting point for defining the specific goals of several national projects. One of the projects that is currently being implemented is the National Field Social Work and Community Centers project - "NP Together for Communities", [19] the aim of which is the individualized provision of support to people in solving difficult life situations and their activation with the

aim of improving social inclusion.

## Methodology

The basic method applied in the present paper is the systematic selection of relevant documents related to social work with marginalized groups and the subsequent selection of secondary data. The choice and selection of data was aimed at selected indicators declaring the justification of the implementation of social work.

In the context of the defined objective, we focused on three basic levels, namely:

- the initial situation underlying the need for projects aimed at reducing social exclusion of marginalized groups,
- the involvement of subjects in a national project promoting the social inclusion of marginalized groups,
- the social work methods applied in the work in marginalized communities within the framework of the national project implemented.

At the first level within the selection, we chose the basic conceptual documents, namely the Atlas of Roma Communities 2019 [20]

**Table 1** Number of settlements and number of dwellings according to the Atlas of Roma communities 2019

Region	Number of settlements				Number of dwellings			
	Together	From that			Together	From that		
		Inside	On the edge	Outside the village		Unimocells	Shacks	Caravans, mobile homes
<b>Banskobystrický</b>	209	77	83	49	5505	124	385	19
<b>%</b>	-	36,84	39,71	23,45	-	2,25	6,99	0,35
<b>Bratislavský</b>	24	7	15	2	1158	6	12	2
<b>%</b>	-	29,17	62,50	8,33	-	0,52	1,04	0,17
<b>Košický</b>	291	61	177	53	11478	175	1918	48
<b>%</b>	-	20,96	60,83	18,21	-	1,52	16,71	0,42
<b>Nitriansky</b>	118	75	25	18	2119	61	49	4
<b>%</b>	-	63,56	21,19	15,25	-	2,88	2,31	0,19
<b>Prešovský</b>	309	82	162	65	14113	334	2583	18
<b>%</b>	-	26,54	52,43	21,03	-	2,36	18,30	0,13
<b>Trenčiansky</b>	28	15	12	1	1200	14	55	0
<b>%</b>	-	53,57	42,86	3,57	-	1,17	4,58	0,00
<b>Trnavský</b>	50	28	17	5	1457	67	40	6
<b>%</b>	-	56,00	34,00	10,00	-	4,60	2,75	0,41
<b>Žilinský</b>	23	11	11	1	925	77	46	3
<b>%</b>	-	47,83	47,83	4,34	-	8,32	4,97	0,32
<b>Together</b>	1052	356	502	194	37955	858	5088	100
<b>%</b>	-	33,84	47,72	18,44	-	2,26	13,41	0,26

Source: own processing

**Table 2** Approved applications for inclusion in the project Together for communities by region

Region	Number of subjects involved	Project workers (number)						Together
		TSP	Ø / subject	TP	Ø / subject	OP	Ø / subject	
Banskobystrický	66	78	2,33	79	2,36	0	0,00	157
Bratislavský	2	4	2,67	0	0,00	0	0,00	4
Košický	67	98	2,88	108	3,18	0	0,00	206
Nitriansky	26	33	2,44	26	1,93	0	0,00	59
Prešovský	117	166	2,81	152	2,58	4	0,07	322
Trenčiansky	3	5	2,50	2	1,00	0	0,00	7
Trnavský	6	8	2,29	5	1,43	0	0,00	13
Žilinský	7	9	2,25	6	1,50	0	0,00	15
<b>Together</b>	294	401	-	378	-	4	-	783
<b>%</b>	-	51,21	-	48,28	-	0,51	-	100,00

Source: own processing according to the evaluation of the requests of the National Project

and 2013 [7]. By selecting secondary data, we specified the basic categories, namely the number of settlements and the number of dwellings. The basic documents in the second level of examination were the results of the evaluation of applications for participation in the national project of field social work and community centres (NP Together for Communities). In the third examined level, a systematic review and synthesis of information from selected documents of the national project was carried out: the Manual for the subjects involved in the national project and the Standards for field social work and field work in social exclusion.

Quantitative data were analysed descriptively, while qualitative data, such as standards, methods of social work, were systematized thematically. The aim of the synthesis of findings was to provide an understanding of the current focus of social work in marginalized communities.

## Results

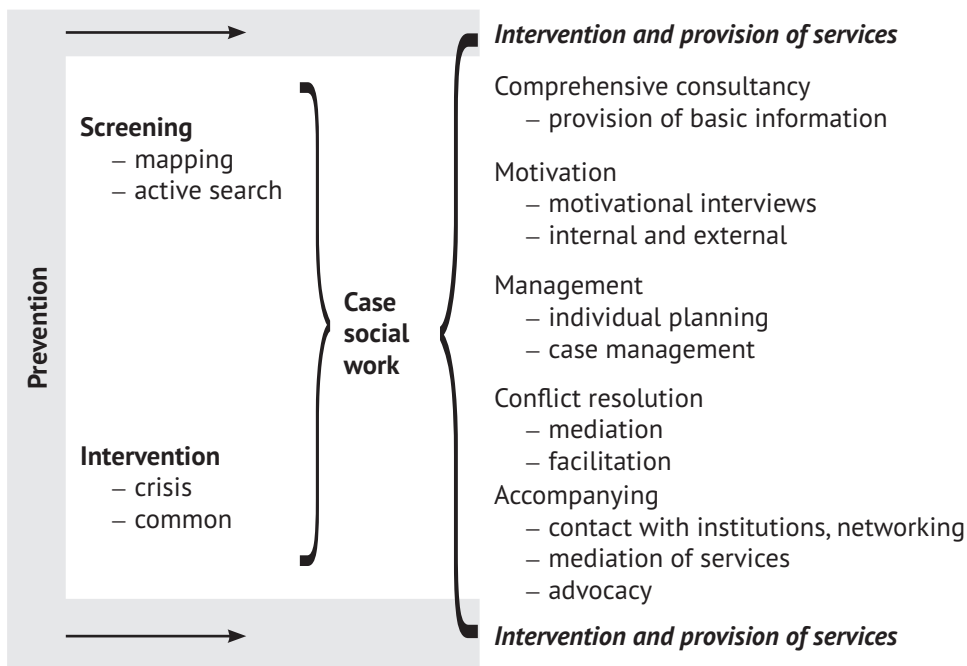
The basic starting situation, which clearly indicates the possibility of the involvement of subjects in the National Project Together for Communities, is the inclusion of a settlement in the Atlas of Roma Communities 2019. The decisive condition for inclusion of a municipality in

the Atlas of Roma Communities is the presence of a Roma settlement with more than 30 inhabitants or more than 30% share of Roma in the total population if there is no Roma settlement in the municipality. By processing secondary data from the Atlas of Roma communities 2019 [20], Table 1 is created, which presents selected areas by region that strongly indicate the urgency of applying social work and the application of its methods in marginalized communities.

According to the Atlas of Roma communities 2019 [20] there are 1052 settlements registered in Slovakia, of which 502 (47,72%) are on the outskirts of the village and 194 settlements (18,44%) are located outside the village. When compared with the Atlas of Roma communities 2013 [7] there was an increase in registered settlements by 31,01% (from 803 settlements to 1052 settlements), while from the point of view of localization, the most numerous type of settlement on the outskirts of the village also increased from 40,34% representation to 47,72% representation (an increase of 7,38 %). From the point of view of the number of dwellings, 5188 shacks, caravans and mobile homes represent 13,67% of the total number of dwellings.

In the new program period to address the situation of marginalized groups, new project calls

**Table 3** Intervention in field social work



Source: own processing

are implemented aimed at providing individualized support to people in solving difficult life situations and at activating people at risk of poverty and social exclusion with the aim of improving their social inclusion. A cardinal role is played by staffing, which consists of the positions of field social worker, field worker, professional worker, coordinator at the local or supra-regional level. Among the basic prerequisites for all positions is the fulfillment of the condition of professional competence. Table 2 points to the fact that 294 subjects participated in the national project, with the highest representation in the Prešov region, which is also related to the concentration of marginalized communities and the number of their settlements. The second most represented region is the Košice region - 67 subjects, and only one subject less (66 subjects) is involved in the Banská Bystrica region. From the point of view of the ratio of representation of individual positions in the project, the subjects filled the positions of field social workers ( TSP – 51,21%) and field workers (TP – 48,28%) as a priority.

The key factor for fulfilling the project’s goals is the use and support of human capital of indi-

vidual, family, group and community. The intervention is consistent with field social work and field work standards, which are focused on four areas: procedural standards, ethical standards, personnel standards, and operational standards. These are in line with the definition of social work adopted by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). There are three basic areas of work performance: search and contact work, intervention and provision of services, other activities - work that goes beyond.

Table 3 shows the primacy of prevention in social work. When meeting the goals, the intervention is focused on active mapping and searching in the target community with the gradual implementation of crisis and regular intervention. The primary focus is on individual planning and case-based social work with the use of comprehensive consultancy, in which the client’s motives for positive change are essential.

### Discussion

The 2021 Census of Inhabitants, Houses, and Dwellings revealed that 67 179 inhabitants officially declared themselves to be of the Roma mi-

minority [8], however, this figure needs to be supplemented by the 88 985 inhabitants who stated Roma as their additional nationality, which together represents a 2,86% share in the total census. Experts [21] estimate that this proportion is significantly underestimated and represents only about a quarter of the actual number. Such a situation is recorded in every national census.

If we base on the Atlases of Roma Communities 2013 [7] and 2019 [20], we can state that the number of registered settlements displaced to the outskirts of the village and even to the extra-village, where people often live in undignified living conditions in the form of shacks, is increasing.

As a consequence of the Roma being different from the majority population, the risk of deepening inequality and social exclusion of the minority increases, as pointed out by several authors [4, 6]. Also, the European Parliament has drawn attention to the need for more intensive implementation of national Roma integration strategies [22,24]. In Slovakia, one of the implemented projects is the National Project “Together for Communities”, where one part involves the implementation of outreach and field social work. The project currently involves 294 subjects, with 783 workers, of which 401 are field social workers meeting the qualification prerequisite of completing a second-level university degree in social work. Together with the field workers, they carry out field interventions, focusing primarily on prevention as a basic principle of social work. An integral part of the intervention is mapping the area, screening through active searching for at-risk individuals, and, if necessary, implementing crisis and routine interventions.

Case-based social work in marginalized communities is implemented in a holistic manner while adhering to the basic ethical principles of social work [25].

## Conclusion

The number of settlements and the number of dwellings that were identified within the processing of the Atlas of Roma Communities 2019 in Slovakia clearly declare the necessity to address the problem of marginalization. The displacement of Roma dwellings to the outskirts

of the village or even outside the village widens the gap between the majority and the minority, while at the same time pushing them into ever-increasing marginalization, which also opens up space for the implementation of social work.

The work of a social worker is not measured in terms of working hours and tasks completed as defined in standards, but in terms of changing the lives of people who are in need of help. It is the greater intensity of social workers in the field that can help to break down barriers that are often the result of strong prejudices against difference. Only by starting up the clients' internal resources, by increasing their motivation for positive change, can field social work experience a positive shift [26, 27]. Projects aimed at marginalized communities and the active involvement of subjects in their implementation is a way to contribute to mitigating the effects of poverty and social exclusion on the lives of people who have limited access to the resources and services of the majority society [28].

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