

**REF**

**Analysis of Roma employment Rates  
in the Labour Markets in Serbia and Western Balkan Countries**

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Belgrade, September 2022

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in the Labour Markets in Serbia and Western Balkan Countries**

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All terms used in the analysis in the grammatical masculine gender refer to the natural masculine and feminine gender.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AP	Action plan
AEP	Active employment policy
FBEA	Functional basic education of adults
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
CPE	Commissioner for the Protection of Equality
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
NES	National Employment Service
SCRCA	Standing Conference of Roma Citizens' Associations
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
REF	Roma Education Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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## BACKGROUND

Before you is an analysis of both the employment and the employability of Roma men and women in Western Balkan countries, with a focus on Serbia. This analysis was conducted as part of the project Employment Empowerment of Young Roma - Phase II, implemented by the Roma Education Fund Serbia from Belgrade, and funded by the German Financial Cooperation programme implemented by the German Development Bank KfW on behalf of the German Government — Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

This analysis aims to showcase the situation on the labour market in Serbia and the other five economies of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo<sup>1</sup>, and North Macedonia), the position of Roma men and women in the labour market, the research and presentation of deficiency occupations and human resources needs in each of the countries, and, finally, their intersection with data on academic profiles and qualifications that Roma men and women can offer from the moment of moving into the labour market. This rundown is needed in order to get an overview of what necessary and missing occupations young Roma people should be pointed towards and enable their training with a view to building up their competitiveness in the open and competitive labour market.

The task is challenging in several aspects: bearing in mind the very turbulent changes brought on by digitalisation, globalisation, and then also the pandemic period that is behind us, it is not easy to accurately predict what occupations will be in short supply in the future, especially in the long term, and we are limited to handling data on current shortage occupations, which is a trend that might change in the coming five-year period. Moreover, accurate information on the employment of Roma men and women and the unemployment rates among this ethnic group are few and far between. The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia from 2006 is clear on the issue of declaring one's nationality — every citizen of the Republic of Serbia is guaranteed the right to not do so. Amidst concerns around systemic and individual discrimination, members of the Roma ethnic minority often do not report their ethnicity when registering with official government registers (population census, National Employment Service directory), and institutions neither can nor want to insist on it. In turn, this results in incomplete data, and we draw conclusions about the position of the Roma population based on the portion of the sample for which information is available. The situation is somewhat better in the areas that bring certain benefits when identifying as part of the Roma minority — this is why we can find somewhat more complete data on secondary education and qualifications acquired by Roma during three-year or four-year schooling owing to the prospect of applying affirmative measures upon enrolment, which is possible only with explicitly identifying as belonging to the Roma minority. When it comes to employment itself, certain incentive programmes and some types of affirmative measures in employment can also motivate

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<sup>1</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

members of the Roma ethnic minority to declare their affiliation when registering with the NES, but here the issue is that the Roma population is insufficiently informed about these options, hence the low registration rate in the unemployed persons directory. Missing data is replaced by estimates of national and international organizations and agencies, but a precise analysis certainly requires more data and a bigger number of focussed directories, especially on education and employment. The analysis attempts to comprehensively look at areas that are relevant to achieving the objective featured in all existing strategic documents — increasing the employment and employability of Roma men and women, which is a process that starts with education and results in rising living standards and breaking the cycle of decades of poverty. However, bearing in mind that this is a live process and the subject matter is very dynamic, this analysis aspires not to provide a simple answer to the complicated question of how to achieve it, but to put forward the state of play, an overview of the biggest challenges, and basic and general guidelines for navigating prospective programmes and projects that will deal with education and employability in the near future. Finally, the analysis also encourages further research in this area — especially field research — in order to collect as much precise data as possible on the qualifications and employment rates of Roma men and women, both in terms of quality and quantity.

The data shown in this analysis were collected through desk research — review of available statistical data for working and employment, as well as data pertaining to the unemployed population group with a focus on the Roma population; and review of relevant research by national civil society organizations and international organizations (mainly UNDP and EU) that dealt with this matter. The process of conducting the analysis involved contacting relevant institutions in the field of work and employment, which means that it incorporated data from the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, the National Employment Service, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, as well as their counterparts in Western Balkan countries. Data were also collected from the private sector, including the Serbian Association of Employers, existing analyses and research, interviews with former participants of the Roma Education Fund Serbia's programmes, as well as a survey conducted among pedagogical assistants in the Republic of Serbia for the purposes of this analysis.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to preparing this analysis, first of all Naim Leo Beširi from the Institute for European Affairs, Branislav Nikolić and Ajša Alić from Romanipen, Marijana Rakić from Roma Education Fund Serbia, Vesna Đorđević from the National Employment Service, as well as all pedagogical assistants across Serbia who took part in the anonymous survey.

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## The labour market situation<sup>2</sup>

The most complete data on the labour market in Serbia can be obtained from the records of the Statistical Office and the National Employment Service. Monitoring trends and comparatively analysing annual reports for the purposes of this analysis provided an insight into the data for 2019, 2020, and 2021, while the general overview of the state of play and trends in the labour market during the previous decade was prepared based on reports from international and national organizations.

Registered employment — as the basic indicator of employment rates — includes persons who are under formal legal employment contracts, contracts for services, or temporary and casual contracts, persons who are self-employed, who are founders of companies/businesses, or who are registered with the Central Register of Compulsory Social Insurance as performing agricultural work. At the Republic of Serbia level, based on the Statistical Office's registered employment records, during the previous year 2021, the total number of employees was 2,273,591 (an increase of 2.6% compared with the previous year), in 2020 that number was 2,215,475 (a rise of 1.9% compared with the previous year), while in 2019 the total number of employed persons stood at 2,173,135 (a rise of 2.0% compared with the previous year).

The data provided by workforce surveys conducted annually by the Statistical Office is slightly different from the information on registered employment, bearing in mind that in these surveys, the *employed population* category includes persons who worked at least one hour for wages or income during the observed week, including unpaid family workers; persons who have a business, but they were absent during the observed week even though they are attached to the business (sick leave, parental leave, seasonal workers, producers of agricultural goods whose products are intended for barter), persons who produce goods for their own use, volunteers, persons undergoing unpaid training, as well as persons involved in other forms of work. Workforce surveys also provide data on the *unemployed population* — persons who had no employment in the observed week, persons who were available for employment within two weeks of the observed week, and persons who are actively looking for work.

The *active population* category includes all employed and unemployed persons. The *inactive population* category includes the population outside the workforce — the most common reason for being outside the workforce is either retirement or dismissal/company bankruptcy, while interestingly the group outside the workforce due to taking care of children or disabled adults is made up 90.4% of women.

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<sup>2</sup> Statistical data obtained from the workforce surveys directory of the Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, available at <https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-Latn/oblasti/trziste-rada>

Bearing in mind the purpose of the analysis and the fact that members of the Roma ethnic minority fall relatively often under the *employed* category, but not the *registered employed* category, the employment rates relevant for this analysis were taken from the annual workforce surveys in the Republic of Serbia. From 2021, a new methodology was introduced in preparing and processing survey results, which makes the last valid data from 2021 incomparable with the data obtained using the old methodology in the period up to 2020.

In 2021, the employment rate of the population aged 15 and over was 48.6%, the unemployment rate was 11%, while the population's activity rate was 54.7%. The highest employment rate is observed in the Belgrade Region, followed by the Vojvodina Region and the Šumadija and Western Serbia Region, while the lowest employment rate and the highest unemployment rate are seen in the South and East Serbia Region (employment rate 43.2%; unemployment rate 13.6%).

During the previous decade, the employment rate ranged from 37.9% in 2010 and the lowest level of 35.5% in 2012 up to today's level; the unemployment rate ranged from 20.9% in 2010 and the highest level of 25.9% in 2012 up to today's 11%.

Among the employed population, special attention is paid to young people aged 15 to 24 and women, as vulnerable groups. The number of employed young people increased in 2021 by 27,600, or more precisely by 19.3%, while the number of unemployed persons rose by 6,600, or by 12% compared with the previous year 2020. When it comes to women, the employment rate in 2021 stood at 41.3% (an increase of 1.2% compared with 2020), while the unemployment rate rose by 1.9%. For the sake of comparison, the unemployment rate among the male segment of the population spiked by only 0.8%. As in the general population, the highest employment rate of young people and women was seen in the Belgrade Region, while the highest unemployment rate is typical of the South and East Serbia Region.

When it comes to the unemployed population, the cross-section derived from classification by education level and field of study is also interesting for this analysis. The biggest number of unemployed people belong to the category of population with secondary education, which corresponds to the fact that in the general population, the biggest percentage of the population completes secondary education as the highest education level. By field of study, the most of unemployed (between 30,000 and 35,000) decidedly come from engineering and construction, followed by service occupations, business, and social sciences. A slightly smaller share (less than 20,000 people) falls under health care, agriculture, forestry, art, and education, while the smallest category is made up of the unemployed with education in information technology. The most common reason for termination of employment reported among unemployed persons is the job being seasonal or temporary, followed by dismissal (which includes company bankruptcy).

According to data from the National Employment Service, 65.4% of unemployed persons are registered with the NES and do not receive any type of benefits, 2.0% are registered with the NES



and receive some type of benefits, while 32.5% are not registered with the National Employment Service. Half of the unemployed population (50.08%) has been looking for a job for less than 12 months; 17.6% have been looking for a job between 12 and 24 months; 24.2% have been looking for a job for more than four years, while the long-term unemployment rate is 5.5%.

From the moment an unemployed person starts looking for their first/new job, different methods are used to find information about available jobs or jobs themselves. The biggest percentage of the unemployed population turns to asking around with friends, relatives, and acquaintances, a slightly smaller group resorts to placing ads or responding to them, a part of the employed studies job-related ads, while a much smaller percentage of the population decides to turn to the National Employment Service or contact an employer directly.

For a regional overview, the situation in neighbouring countries may vary, but the similar historical circumstances resulting in greater or lesser economic development, the people's mentality, and the geographic location have had an effect on today's labour markets in these countries looking very alike. In 2021, Montenegro's active population stood at 272,700, of which 230,000 or 84.6% were employed and 41,900 or 15.4% were unemployed. In both employed and unemployed categories, the predominant group in terms of education level are those with completed high school. The educational structure of employed persons reveals that 60.7% completed high school, followed by employees with completed higher education (34.3%) and persons with completed elementary school or lower education (5%). The structure of employed persons by activity sector reveals that the highest share of the employed is in the service sector — 78.5%, followed by the non-agricultural sector (industry and construction) — 16%, and the agriculture, forestry, and fishing sector — 5.5%.<sup>3</sup>

When it comes to Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 2021, the workforce was made up of 1,402,000 people, of which 1,173,000 (83.6%) were employed and 229,000 (16.4%) were unemployed. The number of people outside the workforce was 1,502,000. The activity rate was 48.3%, the employment rate 40.4%, the unemployment rate 16.4%, and the inactivity rate 51.7%. The educational structure of employed persons shows that 68.6% completed secondary school and specialization, followed by persons with college, university, master's degree, or doctorate (22%) and persons with elementary school or lower education (9.3%). Among the unemployed persons, 72.2% of them completed high school and specialization, followed by persons with college, university, master's degree, or doctorate (15.4%) and persons with elementary school or lower education (12.4%). Out of the total number of the employed, the largest share of the population works in services (57.4%), followed by industry and construction with 32.6%, while 10% are in agriculture, forestry, and fishing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Statistical data retrieved from the Statistical Office of Montenegro — Monstat, available at [https://monstat.org/uploads/files/ARS/2021/4/ARS%20saopstenje\\_2021\\_Q4.pdf](https://monstat.org/uploads/files/ARS/2021/4/ARS%20saopstenje_2021_Q4.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Statistical data retrieved from the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, available at [https://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/Saopstenja/2021/LAB\\_00\\_2021\\_Q3\\_1\\_SR.pdf](https://bhas.gov.ba/data/Publikacije/Saopstenja/2021/LAB_00_2021_Q3_1_SR.pdf)

According to data from the State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, the economically active population in this country during the previous year stood at 812,056, of which 694,376 were employed and 117,680 were unemployed. The activity rate was 55.3%, the employment rate 47.3%, and the unemployment rate 14.5%. When it comes to the educational structure, the situation is similar to the previously mentioned countries: the employed group is mostly made up of persons with high-school education — 49% with four-year education, 7.3% with three-year education, 27.7% with higher education, and 12.7% with primary education. The biggest share of the unemployed are also those with four-year high-school education — 32.3%, while 11.5% of this group have primary education and 10.5% of unemployed persons have higher education.<sup>5</sup>

During 2021, the employment rate in Albania reached 62%, while the unemployment rate stood at 11.3%. The Institute of Statistics of the Republic of Albania's data on the educational structure do not vary much and corroborate that the majority among both the employed and the unemployed are those with high-school education, but indicate a noticeable uneven growth in employment by sector — 4.5% in agriculture, 0.5% in services, and 10% in industry.<sup>6</sup>

Compared with other countries in the region, Kosovo is facing the biggest issue with low employment rates. According to the results of the workforce survey for 2021, two thirds of Kosovo's population are fit for work. Within the work-capable population, the labour force participation rate was 37.7%, while the employment rate stood at 30%, with employment glaringly higher among men (44%) than among women (16%). Conversely, the unemployment rate was 20.5%, with the unemployment rate being highest among the 15–24 age group at 38.9%. The inactive workforce rate is quite high at 62.3%, with a particular emphasis on women at 79.4%, compared with the rate for men at 45.1%. The economic sectors with the highest employment rates are commerce at 18.1%, construction at 11.4%, education at 11.3%, and manufacturing at 9.6%.<sup>7</sup>

The labour market circumstances in the above-mentioned countries are not fully comparable on account of the different national agencies monitoring labour market trends using and applying different methodologies. However, a preliminary examination reveals that the employment rates are similar and common denominators can be noticed in the structure of the employed and unemployed population groups — the unemployed are mostly made up of people with high-school education because this is also the most prevalent completed level of education in the general population. The exception is Kosovo, which — owing to its considerably underdeveloped economy — falls behind with its employment rate, as well as growth trends.

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<sup>5</sup>Statistical data retrieved from the State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, available at [shorturl.at/fpw39](http://shorturl.at/fpw39)

<sup>6</sup>Statistical data retrieved from the Institute of Statistics of the Republic of Albania, available at <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/labour-market-and-education/employment-and-unemployment-from-lfs/publication/2021/quarterly-labour-force-survey-q3-2021/>

<sup>7</sup>Statistical data retrieved from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, available at <https://ask.rks-gov.net/sr/agencija-za-statistiku-kosova/add-news/anketa-o-radnoj-snazi-ars-k2-2021>

## Roma men and women on the labour market

The areas of work and employment are of particular importance for the Roma population, bearing in mind that, on the one hand, work that generates income affects increased economic independence and personal and family standards, and on the other hand, employment has a particular effect on socialization and social participation. At the same time, the entering of members of the Roma ethnic minority into the work process and the working environment itself changes the attitudes of that environment by assuring it of the economic soundness of inclusion, and, through promoting examples of good practice, prevents further development of prejudice and stereotypes.<sup>8</sup>

Official data on the position of Roma men and women in the labour market in Serbia are not available, nor do any relevant institutions in this area — the Statistical Office, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit — have accurate data on how many Roma men and women are in each of the above-mentioned population categories, or, consequently, what are the biggest challenges faced by Roma men and women in the labour market.

The reason for this is at least twofold. Firstly, at the general population level, determining the exact number of members of the Roma ethnic minority is difficult. According to the 2011 census, around 150,000 Roma live in Serbia, while the Council of Europe's field research studies estimate that the number stands at 600,000.<sup>9</sup> Owing to concerns around systemic and individual discrimination, many members of the Roma ethnic minority avoid identifying by their ethnicity during the job search process. On the other hand, official institutions insist that — with a view to eliminating any potential discrimination — special records on persons cannot be kept based on nationality. These factors consequently lead to lacking official data on the position of Roma men and women in the Serbian labour market, and most of the data on their employment relies on various surveys by national and international organizations.

The only valid data come from the National Employment Service, based on the number of persons who identified as members of the Roma ethnic minority on registration, but this number does not include the entire work-capable Roma population in the Republic of Serbia, so the data are incomplete and must be taken with a grain of salt. The classification of Roma men and women who are registered with the National Employment Service based on the criteria of age, education level, and length of job search is shown in Table 1:

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<sup>8</sup> Dražić, Marija, Position of Roma men and women in the labour market in Kraljevo. Belgrade, NGO Praxis, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Estimated and official data on the number of Roma in Europe (2012). Council of Europe, available at <http://bit.ly/2hP1pIe>

Unemployed persons in the NES directory — Roma	As of 31 August 2022	
	Total	Women
15–19 years	1,808	909
20–24 years	2,641	1,336
25–29 years	3,146	1,607
30–34 years	3,361	1,770
35–39 years	3,254	1,691
40–44 years	3,208	1,657
45–49 years	3,211	1,710
50–54 years	2,712	1,378
55–59 years	2,386	1,170
60–65 years	1,757	781
<b>Age</b>	<b>27,484</b>	<b>14,009</b>
I	24,024	12,645
II	343	113
III	1,736	563
IV	1,136	555
V	14	2
VI-1	50	28
VI-2	56	36
VII-1	121	65
VII-2	3	1
VIII	1	1
<b>Hierarchy Occupation Secondary education</b>	<b>27,484</b>	<b>14,009</b>
up to 3 months	2,787	1,294
3 to 6 months	2,120	973
6 to 9 months	1,703	828
9 to 12 months	1,332	640
1 to 2 years	4,256	2,128
2 to 3 years	2,887	1,389
3 to 5 years	3,394	1,736
5 to 8 years	4,014	2,221
8 to 10 years	1,346	737
more than 10 years	3,645	2,063
<b>Length of job search</b>	<b>27,484</b>	<b>14,009</b>

*Table 1, Unemployment of Roma in Serbia, NES 2022*

According to the NES data up to and including August 2022, their directory has 27,484 registered Roma people, of which 13,475 are men and 14,009 are women. The table shows that the unemployed Roma population is made up of nearly equal numbers of men and women, but it should be noted that this does not reflect the situation in the entire Roma population, but only in that portion of it that is registered in the NES directory, and — looking at the overall community — the influence of traditionalist beliefs, which are commonly prominent even among the majority population, results in women being the ones who more often have no job or who

belong in a significant number to the economically inactive population. The data also indicate that unemployed Roma persons mostly fall under the 25–50 age category. When it comes to the educational structure, the majority of registered Roma (87%) belong to the unskilled workers group, 6.3% have three-year education, 4.1% have four-year education, while a much lower number of Roma men and women have high or higher education (0.89%). Even though most of registered Roma persons look for jobs for three months to three years, it is a concern that not-insignificant groups of unemployed Roma look for jobs for longer than five (14.4%) or even ten years (13.2%). The NES notes that cross-referencing the data on education level and length of job search shows that Roma men and women with completed primary education wait five and a half years for employment on average, while the period for Roma men and women with completed secondary education is between three and four years.

According to estimates provided by the Standing Conference of Roma Citizens' Associations League of Roma, around 100,000 work-capable Roma live in the Republic of Serbia, and the NES directory is incomplete, while over the past ten years, the already small percentage of Roma employment has decreased by 6%.<sup>10</sup> According to a study<sup>11</sup> conducted on a sample of the Kraljevo local self-government by NGO Praxis, the underlying causes of unemployment among Roma registered with the NES are the disadvantageous structure of the economy and low level of competitiveness, low participation of work-capable Roma men and women in the formal labour market, functional illiteracy, early school leaving, low level of acquired qualifications, the existence of the grey market and high participation of Roma in the informal sector, underdeveloped system of career guidance and counselling, low level of demonstrated willingness to cooperate in the job seeking process, and discrimination and prejudice in employing this ethnic group. An often-cited reason for this population group's registering with the NES is exercising rights to unemployment benefits, such as financial security, child allowance, health care, and the like, while actively looking for work is cited to a much lesser degree, in part because of the small number of those who found a job through the NES despite being registered. Another conclusion is that the trust of members of the Roma population in institutions is very low, as well as that they have no high expectations with regard to improving their legal labour status on account of joining measures implemented by the NES.

There are no official data from national institutions that show labour market tendencies pertaining to members of the Roma ethnic minority during the last decade that would indicate certain trends, but some of this information can be found in reports by international organizations. A study published by the UNDP in 2018<sup>12</sup> showcasing a comparative overview of the situation of the Roma and the non-Roma population in Serbia and the region focuses on the category of marginalized

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with the president of SCRCA, Osman Balić, available at <https://www.ligaroma.org.rs/sr/>

<sup>11</sup> Dražić, Marija: The position of Roma men and women in the labour market in Kraljevo. Belgrade, NGO Praxis, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Regional Roma Survey, UNDP, 2018, available at <https://www.undp.org/eurasia/publications/regional-roma-survey-2017-country-fact-sheets>

Roma and points to the considerable discrepancies present in housing, education, and employment. According to the survey's data, over the last ten years, the gap between the Roma and the non-Roma population has widened, while the percentage of the marginalized Roma population belonging to the work-capable who participated in the labour market (15–64 years of age) dropped from 52% in 2011 to only a third in 2017. The unemployment rate among the Roma population was estimated at 37%, while at the time this percentage for the general population at the national level was 16%.

Young people are a particularly vulnerable group, and the data for the observation period (2011–2017) reveal that only 27% of young Roma men and women in the 18–24 age group were in some form of employment or involved in training, while an entire 73% of young people from this group were not only out of work, but they were also not involved in any educational processes that would qualify them for some form of employment in the future. A concerning finding in the study is that more than half of them had been forced to go hungry at some point in their lives because of lacking funds for basic needs and foodstuffs. Another vulnerable group that stands out are Roma women, with the findings revealing that nine out of ten Roma women were not in employment, education, or training, a third had gotten married before reaching the age of majority, and half had no access to health or pension insurance; only 9% of Roma women had employee status at the time of the study's publication.

Newer data — especially concerning the last three years (2019/2020/2021) — paint a somewhat more optimistic picture, and developments are especially evident in improving the employing of vulnerable groups within the Roma population — many more young people are involved in upskilling, training, and retraining programmes. One example of good practice in this area is the *Local Initiative for the Social Inclusion of Roma in Serbia* project, which included 65 Roma young men and women who completed an upskilling, awareness raising, and learning programme with a human-rights focus, participated in volunteering work, and eventually launched the Young Volunteers Association. After the end of the project — which was supported by UNDP and UNHCR — 26 participants found employment. Another example of good practice is a multi-phased project titled *Employment Empowerment of Young Roma*, implemented by the Roma Education Fund Serbia and supported by the German Financial Cooperation programme implemented by the German Development Bank KfW on behalf of the German Government — Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development. So far, the multi-faceted programme — which aims to improve education, and consequently promote employability — has seen more than 600 participants who completed professional trainings, internships, and foreign language courses, with the programme's multidimensional approach being especially beneficial by not losing sight of the need to diversify knowledge and skills, so the participants had the option to build more than one skill or change the course in relation to their formal educational profile, making them more competitive and appealing in the labour market. With the support of GIZ as the key partner, another multi-phased project titled *Inclusion of Roma and Other Marginalized Groups in Serbia: Promoting Employment* has been implemented in the last five years. Even though the

project is still ongoing and outcomes data are not available, hundreds of people so far have completed internships and trainings, acquiring sufficient qualifications to become competent in the labour market and find a job, and another 300 young Roma men and women are expected to gain employment by the end of the year. More than 70 employers and 40 local self-governments joined the project, which resulted in a very broad range of opportunities, and in turn different levels of required knowledge, skills, and competences that the participants can offer, making the project highly inclusive. It is important to note the efforts made in both Serbia and the region by the German charitable organization HELP, which runs and funds a number of multi-year projects centred around improving the living standards and conditions of marginalized groups. One of these that is significant in this context is definitely the *Employment and Self-Employment Assistance for Vulnerable Groups* project, which gets funding from the Government of Sweden through HELP and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). This type of projects is aimed at qualification courses or other forms of educating and training members of vulnerable groups for performing specific jobs, while competitions are also launched annually throughout Serbia to offer support such as equipment for starting or expanding business, which substantially contributes to solving the issue of early stage financing among Roma men and women who are self-employed this way. A big chunk of HELP's programme users are also Roma returnees, under the readmission agreement, and an even bigger portion is made up of users coming from socially disadvantaged families. Making important headway is also the *Barvalipe: Roma in Serbian Public Administration* project, launched at the National Academy for Public Administration of Serbia and intended for highly educated Roma with the aim of them gaining employment among the state administration ranks. The coming period will also see the implementation of projects initiated in this year that pertain directly to employing Roma men and women — the projects launched during the summer of 2022 included *Promoting Employment of Highly Educated Roma in Local Governments* (also supported by GIZ), as well as *Respecting Diversity as Basis for Roma Integration through Employment: The Cases of Slovenia and Serbia*, which is supported by the European Commission, so an additional increase in Roma employment rates is expected through these projects' outcomes.

Even though these projects are of such nature that they address particular parts of the Roma population and in turn cannot dramatically change the employment and employability statistics of the entire population group, they are most certainly among the most significant employment-centred efforts in Roma inclusion, and their benefits they can be multifold. Even if we factor out the fact that assistance has been provided to a not-insignificant number of direct beneficiaries — and in turn also their families — definitely significant is the message that is sent to the Roma community through the examples of the project participants, which is that education, additional effort, and hard work can break the cycle of poverty and raise the standard of living. Bearing in mind that in the last two decades — since the percentage of Roma who continue their formal education beyond primary has increased — the Roma community has been facing the fact that even educated Roma have difficulties finding employment and in turn are forced to go back to the shadow economy despite their competencies, it is not surprising that the motivation for

higher education and additional training is rather low. For that reason it is very important to use the examples of individuals who serve as role models in their communities to decidedly communicate that the only way to break the vicious cycle of lacking education and poverty is to invest in continuing education. On the other hand, these projects contribute to dispelling prejudices and eliminating elements of discrimination that — despite being supposedly unlawful — are indeed very common in the labour market and among some employers, especially those in the private sector. The fact that those employers will witness the success of Roma employees and their performance in their own ranks or perhaps with their competitors and neighbours contributes to dispelling the stereotyping of the Roma ethnic minority, employers opening up to hiring Roma men and women, erasing the invisible barrier faced by the Roma population, and normalizing the presence and involvement of Roma men and women across economic and administrative sectors.

The fact that the situation on the labour market has improved and that Roma men and women are somewhat more adjusted to its needs is also demonstrated in more recent studies, especially those that indicate improvements in vulnerable groups as the least employable — one example is the study<sup>13</sup> conducted by Opre Roma in 2021 on a representative sample of Roma women coming from all over Serbia as a group subjected to double marginalization. Even though the traditionalist views of the position of women in society that are upheld both in the general and in the Roma population represent an obstacle to education — especially higher education of Roma women — as well as to venturing into traditionally ‘male’ professions, the general trend of a rising percentage of educated women has taken off also among the Roma population, and today there is a significantly greater number of Roma women with secondary or higher education, as well as those who invested additional time and effort in their competencies and completed professional and foreign language courses or learned a trade. The study was conducted on a sample that included a greater number of women with higher education, as well as Roma women with completed secondary or primary education and those with incomplete primary education. The results revealed that more than half of the women in the group were employed, while 48% were unemployed, although it should be taken into account that the unemployed respondents also included those who were not applying for jobs (around 15%) — those who fall under the inactive population in the labour market. Even though this is not a percentage that should be highly satisfactory, it still represents a big step forward compared with the previous observation period, when employment among Roma women stood at 9%. This does not make for solid grounds to claim that the Roma population’s position in the labour market has dramatically improved, but the fact that improvements are evident in the most vulnerable groups provides a legitimate basis for assuming that this can carry over to the entire ethnic community. A comparative analysis of the available overview for the 2011–2017 period and the data we have for the last three years gives the overall impression that the programmes, projects, and individual efforts of members of the Roma ethnic minority in search of work have brought about a modest but visible result, and that

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<sup>13</sup> Do Roma women have the same opportunities for jobs as others?, Belgrade, Opre Roma, 2021, available at <https://www.opreromasrbija.rs/publikacije/25-da-li-romkinje-imaju-iste-zivotne-prilike-da-se-zaposle-kao-i-drugi>



this upward trend — with all of the mentioned factors continuing — might extend into the coming period.

This progress, which pushed to the fore in the last three to five years, saw a short cut-off due to the pandemic, which inevitably affected the labour market as much as it did every segment of life and which had a particular effect on the Roma population in Serbia. The global pandemic and government measures aimed at protecting public health have had a negative impact on every aspect of the position of Roma people. More recent studies show that access to work and income sources is a key area in which the risks for Roma men and women increased during the restrictions and the government's response to the pandemic, and the most affected were precisely workers in the informal economy, especially in raw material collection, commerce, market stall selling, seasonal and casual jobs, and music. These risks are primarily manifested in the impossibility of working amidst the introduced state of emergency and measures aimed at protecting public health, which left a significant number of these people without basic sources of income. The data show that a large number of members of the Roma population found themselves in much more dire financial circumstances compared with the time before the pandemic, while 46% were not able to meet their basic needs at all.<sup>14</sup> However, as the pandemic is coming to an end, what needs to be done in the coming period is to remedy the damage caused by the turbulence in the labour market, and then also take advantage of the few but significant benefits that the pandemic has brought about. For example, the increased possibility of remote work for foreign companies, which are opening up more and more for workers from the Western Balkan countries.

The situation in the region varies depending on the country. In Montenegro, for example, records on Roma and Egyptians are not separate, so the employment data on these two, albeit different, ethnic groups are combined. According to an analysis carried out in partnership with the European Union and the Council of Europe<sup>15</sup>, about 1,000 persons on average annually identify as members of the Roma or the Egyptian population for the records of the Employment Agency of Montenegro, with the share women in this number being around 40%. This population's share in the total registered unemployment ranges between 3% and 4%. Information on the employment of Roma in Montenegro is also available from the Regional Roma Survey from 2017, which shows the Roma employment rate standing at 14%. For comparison, the employment rate for their non-Roma neighbours was 37%, while the general employment rate was 52%. When it comes to the informal

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<sup>14</sup> Effects of COVID-19 on the position of vulnerable groups and groups at risk, 2020. The UN Human Rights Unit in Serbia (supported by UNHCR) and the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of the Republic of Serbia (supported by the Government of Switzerland), available at [http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Posledice\\_Kovid19\\_na\\_polozaj\\_osetljivih\\_grupa\\_i\\_grupa\\_u\\_riziku.pdf](http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Posledice_Kovid19_na_polozaj_osetljivih_grupa_i_grupa_u_riziku.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Radović, Milan; Međedović, Kerim: Analysis of legal and institutional mechanisms for social integration services for Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro, Podgorica, Romacted, 2019.

work rate, 61% of Roma were in undeclared employment, compared with only 33% of the non-Roma population living in close to them.<sup>16</sup>

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Roma employment rate during the previous five years was around 11%, while the employment rate of non-Roma living close to them was 27%. According to data from the Regional Report on the Position of Roma from 2017, 63% of Roma are involved in informal work, in contrast to only 17% of non-Roma who live near them.<sup>17</sup> Data from the employment office show that 2,645 Roma are registered in the unemployed directory and should be included in employment programmes. Government officials estimate that the actual number of unemployed persons is at least twice as high, as shown in the Strategy Summary from the 2018 National Platform.<sup>18</sup>

The employment rate of Roma men and women in North Macedonia is twice as low as the general employment rate and amounts to 23%, while the unemployment rate is extremely high and stands at 67%, while the employment rate among Roma women is much lower (8%). The data from the Roma Inclusion Strategy 2022–2030<sup>19</sup> rely on the Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process, signed in Poznan in 2019<sup>20</sup>. The strategy also shows that 92% of unemployed Roma have no primary education, and only 1% have university degrees. With a view to solving the issue of unemployment, the strategy provides for greater investments in the education of young Roma people.

In Albania, the Roma employment rate stands at 18%, while the employment rate of their non-Roma neighbours is around 27%. According to the same sources<sup>21</sup>, around 62% of Roma are involved in forms of informal work, while only 23% of the non-Roma population from the immediate surroundings of the observed parts of the Roma population are involved in these forms of work. Another UNDP study<sup>22</sup>, Mapping the Skills, Employment Opportunities, and Undertaking by Roma and Egyptian Communities, conducted in Tirana, Durrës, Berat, and Shkodra, shows that Roma are still primarily involved in waste collection (collection of recyclable materials), outdoor or street retailing, followed by cleaning services (mainly involving women),

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<sup>16</sup> Roma integration, Roadmap 2019–2021, Montenegro, available at

<https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/933442bb7ca89d78b83e307b36a00887.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Regional Roma Survey, UNDP, available at <https://www.undp.org/eurasia/publications/regional-roma-survey-2017-country-fact-sheets>

<sup>18</sup> Roma Integration, Roadmap 2019–2021, Bosnia and Herzegovina, available at

<https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/8c91226cabf79dfa93a5d6d0773edc17.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Roma Inclusion Strategy 2022–2030 of the Government of North Macedonia, available at

<https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2022/Strategija%20za%20inkluzija%20na%20Romite%202022-2030%2003-02-2022%20finalna%20verzija.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process 2019, available at <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/docs/105/the-poznan-declaration>, accessed on 17 July 2022

<sup>21</sup> Regional Roma Survey, UNDP, available at <https://www.undp.org/eurasia/publications/regional-roma-survey-2017-country-fact-sheets>

<sup>22</sup> Mapping the Skills, Employment Opportunities, and Undertaking by Roma and Egyptian Communities, available at <http://cessalbania.al/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Botimi-i-ri.pdf>

construction (unskilled workers), and manufacturing (tailoring, footwear, etc.). The same study reveals that Roma are by and large excluded from welfare assistance schemes (financial aid, health insurance, pension, etc.).<sup>23</sup>

The employment rates among Roma in Kosovo are not available in the National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS), but it does indicate that the employment rate among Roma is 7%, compared with 40% for the Albanian and 21% for the Serbian population. Data from the Regional Roma Survey from 2017<sup>24</sup> portray a similar situation and indicate an employment rate of 13% among Roma, while the employment rate among the non-Roma population living near them is 21%. At the same time, informal work or ‘clandestine work’ among Roma as well as among non-Roma in Kosovo is very prevalent. This form of work in Kosovo makes up close to 70% among Roma, while reaching up to 50% among the non-Roma population.<sup>25</sup>

In each of these countries (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo), Roma are among the most important and prolific ethnic minorities, but they are also among the most marginalized groups everywhere. Nonetheless, when looking at Roma people’s employment and position in the labour market, it is crucial to take into account the overall structure and the general state of the labour market in each of the countries described in the first chapter because this inevitably reflects on the circumstances of the Roma community — so the fact that the Roma employment rate is higher in North Macedonia than in Kosovo does not necessarily mean that only Roma as an ethnic community come up against greater obstacles or higher degrees of discrimination in Kosovo, but rather that the general population in Kosovo is in a less favourable position (underdeveloped economy, lower standard, and lower employment rates) and that, consequently, both Roma men and women are at a disadvantage. As a result, it is very important to look at the position of Roma in a country in the context of the economic development and positioning of the general population in the country. However, the available regional research conducted by UNDP in 2017 and 2018 shows that the obstacles encountered by the Roma population in these countries are very similar, as well as that Serbia requires a special focus — both because of the position of Roma men and women in the labour market, and because of the fact that the gap between the Roma and the non-Roma population is the most pronounced in Serbia.

## **Legal frameworks and strategic documents**

The Roma ethnic minority represents not only an officially recognized but also the most populous ethnic minority in Serbia and in turn is entitled to proportional representation when it comes to

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<sup>23</sup> Roma Integration, Roadmap 2019–2021, Albania, available at

<https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/047a185c6a843ce4f67e090aaa633bff.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Regional Roma Survey, UNDP, available at <https://www.undp.org/eurasia/publications/regional-roma-survey-2017-country-fact-sheets>

<sup>25</sup> Roma Integration, Roadmap 2019–2021, Kosovo, available at

<https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/a87ac83da9dbc3570769ad3640f83f59.pdf>

participating in public affairs and holding public office. This area is recognized as a room for improvement of Roma's position and is also outlined in the strategic documents of the Republic of Serbia.

The *National Employment Strategy 2021–2026*<sup>26</sup> and the *Roma Social Inclusion Strategy 2016–2025*<sup>27</sup> are documents that form the backbone of a legal framework that recognizes the employment of members of the Roma ethnic minority as an area that requires additional encouragement. The national strategy classifies Roma under vulnerable groups that need additional support to increase their competitiveness in the labour market. The Action Plan for 2021–2023<sup>28</sup> includes an objective titled *Better position of unemployed persons in the labour market*, with one of its measures being *Improving unemployed Roma's position in the labour market*, which — among other things — aspires to increase the participation of unemployed Roma in AEP measures<sup>29</sup> in relation to the total number of registered unemployed Roma from the existing 25% in 2021 to 27% in 2023. This goal would be reached through including unemployed Roma in the FBEA measure<sup>30</sup>, including unemployed Roma in motivation and activation training, reaching out to and informing Roma about the NES's measures and services, including Roma with multiple vulnerabilities in a scheme, and encouraging entrepreneurship with additional support and mentoring. The institution in charge of supporting and implementing this process is, in principle, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs. As is evident, said action plan includes only Roma men and women who are in the National Employment Service's directory and who officially identified as members of the Roma ethnic minority upon registration, which means that the portion of the Roma population that is not included in the NES directory remains invisible to institutions and outside the scope of incentive measures.

The Roma Social Inclusion Strategy 2016–2025 refers to research by NGO Praxis, which revealed that Roma men and women most commonly find formal employment in utility services as street cleaners or manual labourers at construction companies; when it comes to jobs in the informal economy, they most commonly work in raw material collection. The Strategy further states that 'the findings of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination of the United Nations show that Roma men and women, regardless of the Republic of Serbia's efforts to improve their position, are still subjected to discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes, especially in the area of employment, while the Human Rights Committee expressed its concern about the unsatisfactory representation of minorities in state administration and local government bodies; as a result, special focus should be placed on the consistent application of anti-discrimination regulations. However, the involvement of the Roma population in local employment policy measures implemented

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<sup>26</sup> Available at [https://www.nsz.gov.rs/live/digitalAssets/15/15855\\_strategija\\_zaposljavanja\\_u\\_rs\\_2021-2026.pdf](https://www.nsz.gov.rs/live/digitalAssets/15/15855_strategija_zaposljavanja_u_rs_2021-2026.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Available at <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/dokumenti/predlozi-i-nacrti/sektor-za-medjunarodnu-saradnju-evropske-integracije-i-projekte/strategija-za-socijalno-ukljucivanje-roma>

<sup>28</sup> Available at

[https://www.nsz.gov.rs/live/digitalAssets/15/15766\\_akcioni\\_plan\\_za\\_period\\_od\\_2021.\\_do\\_2023.\\_godine.pdf](https://www.nsz.gov.rs/live/digitalAssets/15/15766_akcioni_plan_za_period_od_2021._do_2023._godine.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Active employment policy

<sup>30</sup> Functional primary education of adults

against local employment action plans is extremely low. The most common reasons why the planning and implementation of the local Roma employment policy are not at the required level are the lack of a systemic approach to the issue of the Roma population at the local level, insufficient cooperation with civil society organizations that advocate the improvement of Roma's position, lack of formal monitoring and monitoring methodology for the implementation of measures on local level, as well as lacking financial resources.'

The document *Employment Policy and EU Accession Social Policy Reform Programme (2016)*<sup>31</sup> notes that 'in the category of less employable persons, Roma are the only ethnic group that is nearly completely excluded from the formal labour market.' It also states that the issue of inclusion of the Roma population in the formal labour market is inextricably linked to their emancipation in terms of education, housing, and participation in public affairs, and requires patient and systematic efforts and significant resources. In this sense, one major obstacle is the education level that Roma men and women can offer, keeping in mind that a number of members of the Roma ethnic minority have no formal education, a high number have finished only primary school, and there is also the added factor of a high percentage of early school leavers. Furthermore, the specified characteristics of the work-capable Roma population include the lack of required skills, knowledge, and work experience, predominantly working in the informal economy, as well as — by and large — dependence on welfare benefits.

## **Shortage, disappearing, and future jobs**

The idea behind this chapter is to show what occupations are in short supply in Serbia and the region<sup>32</sup>, but discussing occupations that are currently in short supply without an overview of obsolete professions and those of the future would lead us to a dead end in our decision on the recommendation for choosing a future profession. The general advice to parents and future high school students and university students is to not think only within the current shortage and surplus occupations and to expand their horizons to future occupations as well. Making a decision about a future profession at an early age is a decision that is not easy for many, and it may be safer to approach this choice with an open mind and focus on educational profiles that could allow for a simple switch to another occupation or greater flexibility.

The age of increasing interaction and mobility of citizens of the world is marked by great fluctuations and fluidity in choosing and changing professions. In many economies today it is acceptable for employees to change not only their employers, but also their professions in the middle of career because of job saturation, burnout, dying occupation, or simply discovering a new professional passion. In past decades, workers have commonly held multiple jobs in related or completely different industries. It should be noted that switching between professions in developed

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<sup>31</sup> Available at <https://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/SIPRU-ESRP-2016-Srpski.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, the region means to include these six economies: Albania, BiH, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

countries is easier than in developing countries that have high unemployment rates. This means that yesterday's dairy farmer in the Netherlands may switch to grasshopper farming because the biofertilizer market has become far more profitable than working in the European dairy industry, while farmers in Serbia and the region could not easily access this opportunity for radical change.

The development of the economy and a truly differentiated labour market enable specialization and vertical and horizontal mobility within one or more companies and professions. After twenty years in the primary health care system, a general practitioner might choose to turn his diving hobby into a profession by becoming a professional diving coach if the underwater sports market is more lucrative than the stress at the health centre. After years of reading fairy tales to children, a long-time kindergarten teacher might continue her career as a writer of fairy tales. An economist might specialize in VAT exemption for non-profit organizations, and a lawyer might undergo additional training for a career in copyright protection for underage TikTokers. Jobs that are increasingly in demand today did not even exist five years ago, so predicting future shortage occupations is all the more difficult. On the other hand, history is a graveyard of obsolete trades and professions, and it is easier to determine what professions will almost certainly disappear. In other words, when choosing a profession and educational profile, young people and their parents should think long-term and outside the box, which means they should not stick to traditional career choices where the son or the daughter is set to become only an engineer, doctor, economist, or physician.

However, not everyone will make a radical change or have opportunities for specialization, but it is clear that in the 21st century it is no longer enough to be an expert in your field — you will be expected to know languages, manage projects, have additional knowledge in related and unrelated areas, and increasingly advanced computer and mobile device skills will become prerequisite. The key is in multiperspective formal and informal education during which different knowledge and skills are acquired.

In this sense, educational systems are also changing. The world's top-ranking universities have been asking students to diversify their knowledge for decades, with students choosing the main courses for their future profession, but also being expected to select courses that are not of primary interest to them. This means that a future electrical engineer at MIT might take classes in acting, fine arts, and project management. Even though his or her primary profession in the future will involve planning and maintaining telecommunications systems at mobile network operators, presentation, speaking, and project management team organization skills will make a considerable difference compared with peers who do not possess these skills despite their primary knowledge being identical. Today's mechanical engineer can be expected to possess the skills of persuasion, presentation, and negotiation in order to be able to sell a complicated machine to his or her company's customers. A neurologist at a clinical centre will have to know at least English in order to be able to provide the best care in the tertiary health care system in line with current trends in the field. Journalists today are dramatically different from their peers twenty years ago. While in

the past a journalist was specialized in the subject he or she wrote and reported about, today every big private company expects the journalist to organize the interviewee and the place and time of recording, to record video and sound, and then to edit it in video editing software and prepare the report for the evening news. So today, a journalist often works also as a driver, camera operator, sound engineer, editor, and coordinator. In other words, multiperspectivity in knowledge and skills is the future of a well-paid and sought-after employee. The broader the knowledge and the more comprehensive the skills, the more valued, paid, and in turn more in demand the future employee will be. The labour market will ask more from future employees.

At the beginning of the 20th century and up to the emergence of the internet, one's profession was conditioned by formal education, social status, or limited opportunities for additional training. It was socially acceptable for our parents and their peers to work and retire in the same workplace within the same company. Best-case scenario, an employee would advance within one company as the years go by and only if they had higher education. Blue collar workers — the working class meant to hold manual jobs with low educational profiles — would not have any advancement opportunities, and their wage would increase only on the basis of years of service.

In the 1980s, one of the most popular jobs was the typist. This was a person who existed in every company and whose job it was to tirelessly retype texts on the typewriter or transcribe the superior's dictation by pressing on the typewriter keys, which then writes the text on the paper with mechanical letters in ink. Touch typing was taught at school, and a A4 page of text — or 500 words — required between five and ten minutes of rapid typing, for a single copy. Today, with speech recognition software, typing with the computer predicting what you will write, and the overall dominance of audio and video over text, the typist's job is disappearing. Related occupations that had existed for more than a hundred years — machinists, typing teachers, and typewriter ribbon makers — have also largely disappeared. With the advancement of technology, the process of duplicating written content has accelerated indefinitely.

Professions that disappeared and that were more than present after the industrialization also include the lamplighter, who has been replaced by automated street lighting; the printer's typesetter, whose job was taken by laser printers; and the switchboard operator, who used to connect you to the neighbour's phone and became redundant by the end of the 1980s when digital switchboards arrived. Before the freezer arrived, ice delivery men were responsible for our cold drinks, the telegraphist who used Morse code to transmit messages over long distances was replaced by Gmail, and the blacksmith was replaced by cheap pans from China. The whitesmith who trained in Kragujevac for decades was replaced by Fiat's robots, and milkmen no longer go from house to house owing to the widely available affordable milk in shops.

And while some professions do not exist today, at least not to a significant extent, it is only a matter of time before space pilots, remote work facilitators, human-machine collaboration team leaders, and virtual reality technicians actually become a necessity in any growing economy. By then, jobs

like pharmacists, train drivers, cashiers, accountants, telemarketers, tour guides, and agents will largely disappear. Belgrade's parking service is being automated, so most parking checks are now done by the Hawkeye, an automated vehicle of the Communal Police that uses cameras to detect (un)paid and illegal parking and automatically issues surcharge tickets and fines that are instantly sent to the vehicle owner's mobile app, and after a few days also to their home address. At the same time, well-paid employees in public car parks are being replaced by automatic parking ticket machines.

In the future, we can expect all manual operations to be done by machines. Many taxi, truck, and bus drivers will be out of work, as will miners, fast food workers, referees, florists, photographers, sonographers, translators, jewellers, and technical support workers, all to be replaced by artificial intelligence. Those who chose to be librarians or tollbooth attendants will also be out of a job, and with the development of artificial intelligence and quantum computers, so will even computer programmers in the somewhat distant future.

On the other hand, according to the most visited social media platform for professionals LinkedIn, the top 25 most sought-after jobs in the last five years in the US included vaccine specialists and managers focused on inclusive employment, considering that big companies want to implement employment policies that foster and embrace diversity. Engineers working on artificial intelligence and machine learning are also on the list, side by side with marketers who drive customer and user engagement. There is a growing demand for profiles that have multiperspective knowledge, so biology experts with production management skills and system administrators with hardware and software skills are highly in demand. Amidst the ever-growing competitiveness between companies, the race for better employees has become imperative for success. The function that used to be called 'personnel' and involved managing employee files, recording absences, and possibly influencing further training is now turning into a talent acquisition expert. Even though conventional personnel has long since evolved into human resource management, talent acquisition — attracting employees — is the position of the future. It requires a deeper understanding of the labour market, work psychology, as well as an extensive network of contacts. Health care workers have proven to be essential in the two-year coronavirus pandemic, and medical technicians in intensive care units are especially in short supply. Developers, mergers and acquisitions specialists, molecular biologists, sales managers, strategic specialists, and HR managers are also on the list of the most popular roles in the US.<sup>33</sup>

Considering that Serbia and the region are lagging behind developed countries for several decades, the employment agency Infostud's<sup>34</sup> **data is unsurprising — in 2021, 241,636 people were looking for a job in Serbia through its website, and out of 67,284 vacancies, the most common**

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<sup>33</sup>The 25 U.S. roles that are growing in demand, LinkedIn, LinkedIn Jobs on the Rise 2022, available at <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/linkedin-jobs-rise-2022-25-us-roles-growing-demand-linkedin-news/>

<sup>34</sup> [www.poslovi.infostud.com](http://www.poslovi.infostud.com)



**advertised roles are the dying professions: sales assistant, driver, warehouseman, sales agent, and switchboard operator.**<sup>35</sup>

Secondary vocational education is in short supply because many turned to Germany and other European countries in their search for jobs as nurses and technicians, and nearly all tradespeople followed. Cooks, carpenters, hygienists, kitchen helpers, hairdressers, car mechanics, electricians, and plumbers are increasingly in demand alongside waiters, who are in shortage. According to a report on shortage occupations in Serbia published by the Serbian Association of Employers<sup>36</sup>, the forecasts from ten years ago have been fulfilled — the IT, construction, transport, and processing industries are suffering great losses on account of lacking trained staff. An employer's survey showed that there is a shortage of doctors, economists, lawyers, foreign language teachers, pharmacists, and marketing and sales experts. Among the highly educated staff, lacking are all types of IT engineers, as are construction, mechanical, and electrical engineers. In health care, anaesthesiologists, cardiologists, paediatricians, and gynaecologists are in particular shortage. Almost every area of work is missing staff and qualified workers — from sales assistants, waiters, cooks, and support staff to drivers, textile workers, mechanics, automotive electricians, and personal trainers with and without higher education.

The situation is similar in BiH. Bosnia and Herzegovina's Labour and Employment Agency's records have been showing the same occupations in both the shortage and surplus categories for years. Workers in demand include university graduates in IT, medicine, pharmaceuticals, and construction and electrical engineers. Despite being among the most sought-after, lawyers and economists are facing fierce competition in the labour market because of high numbers of graduates coming from these universities. When it comes to qualified workers — servers and hairstylists — they are most needed in service industries, same as in Serbia, side by side with call centre operators and data entry clerks. The numbers of graduates from economic, agricultural, and mechanic courses, as well as grammar and nursing schools are higher than what the system can handle. Like in the other former-Yugoslavian regions, economic migration in search of a better life has forced many masons, locksmiths, stonemasons, welders, and tailors to try their luck in Europe and the world, leaving BiH and the region with no qualified labour force. Because of the lack of appeal of these occupations, few primary school graduates opt for these professions. According to the Agency's data presented by its Director Muamer Bandić in May 2022, professions at risk of unemployment also include those in criminology, political science, journalism, social work, and English and classroom teaching.

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<sup>35</sup> More jobs — fewer candidates, Infostud, 2022, available at <https://poslovi.infostud.com/vesti/Sve-vice-poslova-Sve-manje-kandidata/55989>

<sup>36</sup> Shortage occupations in the Republic of Serbia, Serbian Association of Employers, available at <https://www.poslodavci.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/deficitarna-zanimanja-u-r.srbiji-converted.pdf>

Since Montenegro is a tourist destination, its shortage occupations mainly pertain to hospitality. A 2019 survey on shortage occupations in Montenegro was conducted by the Employment Agency.<sup>37</sup> Workers with primary education classified as unskilled workers were exceeding the market demand in the current year. On the other hand, construction equipment operators, cleaners, and hospitality aides were in demand. Nearly every segment of the hospitality industry lacks qualified workers. They need housekeepers, hospitality aides, servers, chef assistants, construction helpers, laundry machine operators, and lifeguards. Qualified workers also include utility and construction workers and salespeople. Bartenders, hospitality workers, truck drivers, electricians, and butchers fall under the third educational qualifications level, and they are in short supply not only in Montenegro, but in the entire region. As for the cross section of higher education and shortage occupations, this includes math, piano, music, physics, and classroom teachers, followed by Doctors of Medicine and, similarly to Serbia, all kinds of engineers — construction, architectural, electrical, and mechanic.

As for Kosovo, note should be taken of the high unemployment rate (30%) and the extremely high workforce inactivity rate (62.3%). Most of the roles posted on Kosovo employment websites indicate that the most sought-after are white collar professions, which require skills and knowledge that are acquired in or after higher education. Sales, management, and administration workers are in demand. The skills in the analysed 2018 ads required by employers included communication and computer skills, programming, analytical thinking, while English language skills are prevalent across all job postings<sup>38</sup>. *Owing to skyrocketing unemployment and limited job offerings, young people are leaving Kosovo and the informal economy segment that employs qualified labour force is difficult to zero in on.*

Shortage and surplus occupations in North Macedonia are no different in relation to the rest of the region. When it comes to higher education, leading the way are health care professionals, managers, specialists, and IT technicians and engineers, while the IT industry is deficient in workforce from nearly all profiles and educational levels. Metal workers, machine fitters, and similar occupations are on the surplus occupations list. Accountants, drivers, builders, and trainers are professions in moderate short supply. Lacking are also workers in mining, construction, production, transport, cleaning, and similar occupations. On the other hand, there are plenty of grammar school graduates on the labour market.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> A 2019 survey on shortage occupations in Montenegro was conducted by the Employment Agency, available at <https://www.zzzcg.me/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/ISTRA%C5%BDIVANJE-Deficitarna-zanimanja-ZA-SAJT.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Brancatelli, Marguerie and Brodmann, Job Creation and Demand for Skills in Kosovo, World Bank Group, June 2020, available at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33850/Job-Creation-and-Demand-for-Skills-in-Kosovo-What-Can-We-Learn-from-Job-Portal-Data.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>39</sup> Diagnostics of municipal labour markets in North Macedonia, Economic Research and Policy Institute, available at <https://www.financethink.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Zbirka-na-analiticki-izvestai-1.pdf>

High emigration rates are expected to cause shortage in nearly every profession in Albania by 2030.<sup>40</sup> The forecasts are the same for North Macedonia and Serbia, according to this year's European Training Foundation's report, while qualified workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina will be emigrating to European countries. The Western Balkan six is a small market with structural issues concerning corruption, organized crime, ineffective judiciary, and poor administration. Population-wise, it represents only 4% of the EU. The region's emigration rates are very high, but the report suggests that they differ between the six economies. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania have the highest rates of emigration of the local population. Eurostat data show that more than a million and a half citizens of the Western Balkans emigrated to EU countries, almost all of which are seeing record high employment rates and, at the same time, lack of labour force.

The European Labour Authority's report from November 2021<sup>41</sup> reveals that the shortage occupations are similar to those in the Western Balkan region. In 2020, there was a shortage of plumbers, nurses and technicians, system analysts, welders, and truck and ferry drivers, and these occupations are among the five most in-demand in at least sixteen of the twenty-seven EU member states. Almost every occupation in the construction and IT industries are in demand in EU countries. Civil, IT, mechanical, and electrical engineers with expertise in various fields are in demand in more than 11 member states. Skilled workers such as carpenters, mechanics, CNC operators, chefs, tool makers, and contractors are also in demand. On the other hand, the surplus workforce in most countries is made up of sales staff, taxi and pickup drivers, receptionists, servers, secretaries, and beauticians. Conversely, the most popular high-education professions include graphic and interior designers, journalists, sociologists, anthropologists, and translators, and these professions should be considered when trying to find work faster.

In choosing a profession, students and their parents can find it useful to know not only the current and potential labour market in the Western Balkans, but also the potential for training and gaining employment in the European Union, although the six economies would benefit from retaining the workforce, especially considering population aging, except in Kosovo, and the impossibility of renewing the workforce in almost all professions. The possibility of acquiring professional knowledge beyond the place of birth has existed since the dawn of the human race. Economic emigration is not necessarily a negative phenomenon, but the region's economies should nonetheless work on policies to retain qualified labour force, which is a subject matter for another analysis.

The transition from primary to secondary education in Serbia and the region is one of the most stressful moments for teenagers and their parents. A student's choice of high school depends on

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<sup>40</sup> 'Use it or lose it!' How do migration, human capital and the labour market interact in the Western Balkans?, available at <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/use-it-or-lose-it-how-do-migration-human-capital-and-labour>

<sup>41</sup> McGrath J, Report on Labour Shortages and Surpluses, European Labour Authority, 2021, available at <https://www.ela.europa.eu/en/media/725>

many factors. Those that have the most influence are definitely the parents' educational profile and understanding of the importance of education, the socio-economic status of the family or environment, demographic characteristics, the availability of schools and educational profiles, as well as what profiles are socially and economically desirable at a given time. Conditions are difficult for parents and children, and if the student belongs to the Roma or another minority community, making a decision is even harder because of multiple discrimination and, for many, difficult living conditions compared with the majority population.

One thing is clear, the way out of the vicious cycle of poverty for Roma men and women in all six economies is through education. It should be noted that a high school or university degree is not a guarantee of wealth. Education is, for the most part, only a prerequisite, and earlier in the analysis we presented evidence of employability with highest education levels. However, being educated is not enough — in increasingly complex economies, the skills we have are important in addition to what we know.

## **Education and the labour market**

In the Western Balkan six region, education systems are almost uniform. With slight variations, primary school starts at the age of seven, high school at fifteen and lasts three or four years, the same as basic university studies, master's up to two years, and doctoral studies up to five. If you are among the better students, you would become a doctor of science at the age of 27 and should be able to translate your knowledge and skills into economic gain for yourself and your family. However, this is not always the case.

Many studies show that the knowledge and skills acquired in the educational systems of six economies are not materially usable in the labour market<sup>42</sup>, and that the sluggish educational systems — which serve more as a social element of the ruling majority — use the same coursework for decades. This means that high schools still offer metal milling courses, even though machines replaced this manual labour more than ten years ago.

Research on the market and the relationship with educational profiles reveals an incongruity between the knowledge and skills acquired through formal education and the needs of jobs available on the market. The findings of one such study conducted in Kosovo show that as many as 60% of small business owners have to invest funds for additional training of graduates in order to prepare them for work. The key to the success of developed economies are small and medium-sized enterprises, which generally have limited resources for additional education of future employees and rely on the education system. However, the same study shows that English

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<sup>42</sup> Prof. Nikica Mojsoska Blazevski, the European Training Foundation, 2019, available at [https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2019-07/Skills%20mismatch%20measurement\\_North%20Macedonia.pdf](https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2019-07/Skills%20mismatch%20measurement_North%20Macedonia.pdf)

language skills, as one of those in demand, are noticeably poor.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, in an analysis of 44,000 jobs posted on Kosovo online job search platforms, the skills that employers were looking for included outgoingness and computer skills, followed by communication and analytical reasoning skills, with software development being the fastest-growing field looking for new employees.

Another issue is the usability of the acquired knowledge. Since 2000, the OECD has been running the programme for international student assessment (PISA testing) with 15-year-old students. The latest published results are from 2018 and show student performance in three areas — reading, math, and science.<sup>44</sup> Almost 600,000 students from 79 countries and economies took part in the international testing. Of the 79 rankings, none of the region's economies are among the most developed countries in Europe or the world. In three areas, students from Serbia are ranked as the best in the region, and students from Kosovo as the worst.

	<b>Math</b>	<b>Science</b>	<b>Reading</b>
<b>Albania</b>	49	60	62
<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	63	68	63
<b>Montenegro</b>	52	62	53
<b>Kosovo</b>	76	76	75
<b>North Macedonia</b>	68	63	67
<b>Serbia</b>	47	47	46

*Table 2. Ranking of the six economies of the Western Balkans in the 2018 PISA test*

The applicability of acquired knowledge in real-life situations and navigating the unknown is not as easy for students in the region as in the top thirty economies within the OECD, as shown by the results of the 2018 testing analysis.

Even though research shows that the gap between education and labour market needs affects the entire population, especially young people when they leave the education system and enter the market, minority groups — especially Roma men and women — are more affected. To understand the broader picture of the poverty of the Roma community, in addition to the variables that affect the general population, the Roma community's specificities must be taken into account when adapting policies or planning to provide additional support to the community. Here, we are mainly referring to the age and educational and economic structure of Roma. Below are three characteristics taken with the author's permission from the Analysis of Implementing Affirmative

<sup>43</sup> Besime Ziberi, Donat Rexha, Kosovare Ukshini, *Journal of Governance and Regulation* / Volume 10, Issue 3, 2021, available at

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353680563\\_Skills\\_mismatch\\_in\\_the\\_labor\\_market\\_The\\_future\\_of\\_work\\_from\\_the\\_viewpoint\\_of\\_enterprises\\_in\\_case\\_of\\_Kosovo](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353680563_Skills_mismatch_in_the_labor_market_The_future_of_work_from_the_viewpoint_of_enterprises_in_case_of_Kosovo)

<sup>44</sup> Andreas Schleicher, PISA 2018, Insights and interpretations, OECD, available at

<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/PISA%202018%20Insights%20and%20Interpretations%20FINAL%20PDF.pdf>

Measures for Roma Education in Serbia, authored by Naim Leo Beširi and published by the Roma Education Fund Serbia.

**The age structure of Roma in Serbia.**<sup>45</sup> The age structure of the is something that particularly separates Roma from the majority population, and a similar tendency has been observed among some ethnic minorities in Serbia like Albanians and Bosnians. What these ethnic communities have in common is high birth rates — unlike the majority population, the natural increase is highly positive, resulting in a relatively young population. In the case of Roma, the high fertility factor should be also taken into account — starting a family early is culturally conditioned among Roma girls. As soon as after the age of 15, and often even earlier, Roma girls become mothers, which leads to a higher number of families with four or more children, a relatively rare phenomenon among the majority population. In the case of Roma in Serbia, a comparison of censuses from the last century indicates a slight demographic aging tendency, but even so, only in the last census of 2011 did Roma reach the average age that the Serbian majority population had already in 1931 (27.7 years of age). Of the total number of registered Roma in Serbia, as many as 41.47% are under the age of 19. Unfortunately, the next age category in the census statistics is the group of people between 20 and 39 years of age, which makes it impossible to determine the number of Roma under 30 — young people in the formal and legal sense of the word. In addition, the data on young people up to 19 years of age is significant in the statistical processing of information on the education of Roma, especially when we take into account that this population group attends primary and secondary schools.<sup>46</sup>

**The educational structure of Roma in Serbia.** According to Radovanović and Knežević, education represents one of the most challenging aspects of Roma integration into society. The level and structure of the educated segment of the Roma population are conditioned by cultural specificities, as well as by very specific factors such as poverty, unfavourable position in society, and an inert government apparatus that responds slowly to this issue. All this combined results in the educational inferiority of the community in comparison with the majority population, as well as with other ethnic minorities in Serbia.

The percentage of the literate, as one of the key indicators of education, reflects poorly on Roma because, although the number of illiterate Roma dropped from 19.6% to 15.1% between the two last censuses, it is still far above the national average of 2%. What is particularly interesting about the Roma group that is determined as functionally illiterate is the difference in the group's gender structure. Even though there are no significant differences between the numbers of illiterate men and women at the national level, the ratio among Roma is 31% men and 69% women, which underlines the great distinction that parents make between male and female children and the

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<sup>45</sup> Naim Leo Beširi, Analysis of Implementing Affirmative Measures for Roma Education in Serbia, Roma Education Fund, 2021.

<sup>46</sup> Prof. Radovanović, S., PhD; Knežević, A., assoc. PhD, in Naim Leo Beširi (2021).

traditionalistic understanding of the role of women in the family and home. Higher illiteracy is observed among the older generations, and the imposing question is why there is a large percentage of illiterate older Roma up to 65 years of age, considering that these generations are included in the law on compulsory primary education. Another important fact is that, according to the latest census, 8.2% of the 10–19 age group of young Roma are illiterate.

Education levels are also quite different when the Roma population statistics are compared with the statistics for the entire country, looking at the data from the 2011 census. In the majority population, every 37th citizen over the age of 14 has no education, while among Roma this is the case for every 5th citizen. In addition, more than a third of Roma have not completed the eight-year primary school, while this percentage stands at 10.9% for the majority population. For the share of citizens with completed secondary school, the difference is even more pronounced — of the total number of Roma, 11.5% have secondary education compared with 48.9% of Serbia's general population, while only 0.7% of Roma have higher education and 16.2% of the majority population have it. The gender structure within these groups is also quite different, since in each category of Roma with some level of education, males are overwhelmingly prevalent. Slightly more recent data — the European Commission's Progress Report on Serbia for 2019 — points to the fact that only 9% of Roma children go to kindergarten, 84% enrol in primary school, and only 67% complete it, compared with 96% of the non-Roma population.

In light of increasingly developed and present technologies in everyday life, attention should definitely be paid to Roma's technology literacy. It is no surprise that with the increase in the level of general literacy, the number of those who are computer literate — those who know how to use computers — also rises, with the parameters considered including information on the ability to create text and tables, receive and send email, and use the internet. The findings points to a very low level of computer literacy of the Roma population — 77.3% of Roma are not computer literate, 13.8% are partially computer literate, and only 8.7% are considered computer literate.<sup>47</sup>

When reviewing the data, we must not ignore the fact that the level of computer skills is largely determined by the socio-economic status of the individual — achieving computer literacy requires financial resources that enable having a computer and internet access. As a result, a valid assumption is that the number of computer-literate Roma will increase with an improved standard of living, as well as that this situation has indeed improved during the past decade since the last census.

Efforts made by international organizations and the national non-governmental sector to cut to the core of the issue caused by the Roma community's low education level have resulted in a multitude of conclusions, with the most common being that the economic factors are the main thing standing in the way of Roma's better education, while the discrimination of Roma students at educational

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<sup>47</sup> Prof. Radovanović, S., PhD; Knežević, A., assoc. PhD, *op. cit.* in Naim Leo Beširi (2021).

institutions comes in second. Because of the low education level, Roma get trapped in a vicious cycle — poor education makes it more difficult to find a job that will provide sufficient financial support to lift families or individuals out of poverty. As a result, people remain in extremely difficult living conditions that do not allow them or make it much more difficult for them to go to school, which in turn leads them to financial inadequacy, which has become the main attribute of the Roma population in Serbia.

‘Surveys conducted in 2006 at seven locations where Roma were represented in Belgrade confirms the first conclusion, but to some extent refutes the claim about widespread discrimination against Roma students. According to the survey responses, the majority of children wanted to finish school because they saw it as a chance for a better life. However, according to the children, the biggest issue they face during schooling is not the discrimination by the majority, but above all the financial inability of their parents to provide them with the needed resources for schooling (books, teaching aids, and even adequate clothes and shoes). This is coupled with housing issues that prevent adequate conditions for schooling. Most parents cite poor living conditions as the main reason for their children's failure in education. Unlike their children, the parents are convinced that there is an issue of discrimination in schools — not on account of being Roma, but on account of being poor. When the parents were asked about the reasons for their own incomplete education at the time when they were supposed to be in school, they did not cite they were discriminated against, and they gave answers along the lines of “my parents would not let me”, “I got married young”, “I had to work”, “we were poor”, “school is useless”, etc. Another challenge is the parents' lack of awareness of the need for their children's education, as well as of the fact that education opens up greater opportunities for achieving a better socio-economic status in society.’<sup>48</sup>

Even though it would be very easy to shift the responsibility for the low education rate to the Roma population, we must take into account the factors that led to the disappointment in the Serbian school system, as well as the demotivation to continue education. Beyond doubt, one of the most influential factors is the fact that even those Roma who graduate from high school that qualifies them for a profession, or even the group of Roma with higher education, encounter extreme difficulties in finding employment. Even though unemployment is an issue also at the national level for the majority population, this challenge is more pronounced for members of the Roma ethnic minority, whose qualifications are relatively often overlooked in light of prejudice and stereotyping based on ethnicity. When the Roma community — told by the majority population that they can lift themselves out of poverty through education — sees how its educated members also struggle and have to do manual labour like everyone else, it naturally leads to demotivation in both parents and children to continue schooling.

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<sup>48</sup> Knežević, A.: *Roma (Gypsies) in Belgrade: Ethnic demographic studies*, Belgrade, University of Belgrade — Faculty of Geography, 2010, in Naim Leo Beširi (2021)



Furthermore, we cannot ignore the very harmful trend that was prevalent in Serbian schools and that resulted consequences still faced by today's generations and that came from a part of state apparatus's incompetence and misunderstanding of the specificities of the Roma population. As Roma in Serbia often live in a form of territorially compact communities that in many places have grown beyond quarters, children from those communities live the first years of their lives in a rather introverted environment, often without any contact with the majority population, and often without any contact with the Serbian language. When these children join the school system, they suddenly encounter a mostly unfamiliar language and a new system and way of functioning, and naturally achieve poorer results compared with children who have been adapting to and preparing for the existing education system during earlier years.

Successively repeating grades and not being able to follow classes led to a significant number of Roma children being transferred to schools for 'children with special educational needs'. According to the current UNESCO definition, the category of children with special educational needs includes, among other things, '...all those children who occasionally or continuously experience difficulties at school, children who lack interest or motivation to learn, children who repeat grades, children who are forced to work, children who live on the streets, children who live far from school, children who live in severe poverty and suffer from chronic malnutrition, and children who fail to attend school for any reason'.<sup>49</sup> 'According to most of these parameters, a significant number of Roma children in Serbia fall into this category, so according to the criteria of education, Roma are a phenomenon because special schools in Serbia have turned into institutions for children who mostly belong to the Roma ethnic community, which has serious consequences for the education and social status of Roma, as well as for the Serbian school system.'<sup>50</sup>

**The economic structure of the Roma population in Serbia.** This aspect of the life of the Roma ethnic minority directly depends on the demographic and other features of the population, such as the age and sex structure, the education level, the structure of the economy, the degree of economic development of territorial areas where the Roma population is more present, and the like. In ethnic communities, any movement on the social ladder actually means changing the previous way of life and adopting behaviour patterns and value systems and status parameters of the new social group. For the Roma population, this would entail also an ethnic element — moving away from one's ethnic group that is still limited by a lower social status and joining a social group that is higher on the ladder and that is different in the ethnic sense, which ultimately again leads to ethnic mimicry. This process is not a firm rule, but it is a somewhat frequent occurrence, and it should be taken into account when considering the hypothesis that this is precisely what makes it impossible to fully realistically see the economic changes in the life of Roma — the moment they leave their

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<sup>49</sup> Macura Milovanović, S.: *Roma children and school: Melting the snowball*, Belgrade, Zadužbina Andrejević, 2001 in Naim Leo Beširi (2021)

<sup>50</sup> Knežević, A.: *op. cit.* in Naim Leo Beširi (2021)

ethnic group and stop identifying as Roma, they are no longer included in statistical data processing.

As for the part of the Roma population that is visible in the statistics, it is unsurprising that the unemployment rate is higher than the national average. According to the latest census, opposite trends can also be noticed that are prevalent in the Roma and the non-Roma population groups. For example, the number of dependents in the Roma community increased by 10%, while the number of dependents in the general population category decreased by 15%. Among active Roma working jobs in 2011, 59.3% of the most common occupations included cleaners, auxiliaries, and raw material collectors; 10.8% included drivers and tradespeople; 9.9% were farmers and related workers; 8.9% were sellers; 6.9% were construction workers; 2.6% were night shift security guards and waiters; 1.5% were artists; other responses appeared in insignificant numbers. This situation leads to the conclusion that the most common occupations of Roma definitely point to the social and professional inferiority of Roma in society, while we should also consider their participation in the shadow economy, which is not covered by any relevant official data.<sup>51</sup>

The socio-economic, demographic, and educational configuration of the Roma community in Serbia has certainly improved over the last twenty years. However, there is still devastating data on all segments of the life of the community that lives marginalized on the fringes of social events. It is extremely important that the relevant government structures, international and national organizations, and citizens' associations work together to significantly improve living conditions. However, the biggest responsibility rests on government institutions to create conditions for equal opportunities. The vicious cycle of poverty, unemployment, and education is the easiest to break in the education system. Efforts to provide better opportunities for enrolment, education, mentoring support, and graduation are the first step towards reducing poverty and ensuring the social inclusion of the Roma community. The next step is employment, which leads to an increase in resources and improved housing, active participation in decision-making processes, and general promotion of financial independence of the community.

The demographic, educational, and socio-economic attributes of Roma communities in the other five economies of the Western Balkans are similar.<sup>52 53 54 55 56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Prof. Radovanović, S., PhD; Knežević, A., assoc. PhD, *op. cit.* in Naim Leo Beširi (2021).

<sup>52</sup> Special report on the position of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ombudsman BiH, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/e/110497.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> Analysis of the main policies aimed at the integration of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/4a586d9b9305c9c45a38c5b3128b2d54.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> Overview of the position of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in Kosovo, OSCE, 2020, [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/6/443593\\_1.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/6/443593_1.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> Roma Integration Public Policy in Albania – Background Paper, RCC, <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/3971f6d06c4ec62094cdcf7972700986.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> Strategy for the Roma in Republic of Macedonia 2014–2020, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in collaboration with the National Coordinator of the Decade and Strategy of Roma, 2014 <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/a4b7a7abd52eaa6a5b369f18f180cc12.pdf>

Even though there are differences — just like with differences in general employment, employability, and education among the six economies — the overall conclusions are that the decades of isolation and systemic discrimination of the Roma community are limiting access to education and the labour market, and in turn to other segments of society. As it has been repeatedly proven, the vicious cycle of poverty is broken by education, and the first step on the way to acquiring the qualifications needed for a future occupation is learning personal preferences and deciding on an educational profile that could significantly mark one's life.

According to a survey conducted among pedagogical assistants in Serbia for the purposes of this analysis in September 2022, more than half of Roma students contact a pedagogical assistant for advice in order to correctly choose a school and educational profile for after completing primary education. In 61.4% of cases, the final decision is made by the student in agreement with the parent, while in 27.3% of them, the final decision is made together by all three parties (student, parent, and pedagogical assistant). According to the same survey, although many factors influence the decision to choose an educational profile and occupation, the most influential is the one concerning employment prospects, which has a decisive influence in as many as 48.9% of cases. The second most influential one are prospects for enrolment, which means that the student's wishes do not always match the options, while the third most influential are the student's personal preferences (20%). The reputation of the profession in the community and parents' preferences are also cited, but much less.

When it comes to the most popular educational profiles among students in the survey, two are overwhelmingly prevalent — medical and technical. The most common desire and choice is the medical technician — an occupation that is a relatively common choice even for higher education; and a motor vehicle driver — with this option being particularly appealing in recent years for a number of reasons, one of which is getting a driver's licence as part of schooling, and the other the possibility of going to foreign countries where this occupation is in short supply. These two professions are followed in popularity by chemical lab technician, dental technician, hairstylist, and hospitality worker (waiter, cook). Of the three-year vocational courses, those that stand out are machine operator, motor vehicle mechanic, and health care worker, while other slightly less popular professions include heating and cooling systems maintenance worker, baker, economic technician, agricultural technician, traffic technician, veterinary technician, and tourism technician. When it comes to educational profiles that Roma students ultimately decide on, the list is similar to the list of preferred schools, and we can see the same popular profiles.

Pedagogical assistants who participated in the survey note that the rate of Roma children enrolling in secondary school is high (over 60% of them stated that between 80% and 100% of Roma children continue their education after primary school), and that a small percentage of them after secondary education opt for vocations for which they were not educated and for retraining related to those occupations (71.1% of assistants stated that this happens in less than 30% of cases). This information should be taken with a grain of salt, having in mind that the assistants are in charge of

providing assistance during primary education, and that it is not certain to what extent and with what capacity they can keep up with their former students' later movement through the labour market, which comes three to four years after they finish primary school.

The survey and the interviews conducted with the participants of the REF internship programme underscore that professional orientation is an ongoing process — it lasts almost all the time from preschool until the end of primary school — and that students are familiar with occupations in advance, which makes the decision easier. They also point to the fact that four-year vocational schools are more often enrolled, three-year educational profiles are chosen less often, and in very rare cases students enrol grammar schools. In addition, in some cases the choice of occupation is influenced by the specifics of the place the student comes from. For example, owing to the development of heavy industry and the opening of new jobs in this economic branch in Bor, interest in the educational profile of a chemical lab technician has increased here.

## CONCLUSIONS

An overview of the positioning of Roma in the labour market indicates that our conclusions are not applicable to the entire Roma population in a country because we only handle existing data — data on Roma men and women from records of institutions/organizations — while a significant part of this population remains invisible, and there is a concern that in the future they will remain beyond the reach of not only records, but also programmes and policies aimed at improving education and promoting employment and employability of the Roma ethnic community. Based on the data that is available, what stands out is that the Roma community, although slowly and sometimes inertly, is still transforming and starting to follow labour market trends, especially when it comes to the younger population groups, as well as doubly marginalized groups, such as women. Despite the fact that this process is visible, it has not yet reached the level required to make a quantitatively significant shift that will change the statistics of Roma employment in a country.

For now, the greatest efforts come from international organizations and the civil sector, translated into various programmes and individual projects. Keeping in mind that their reach is limited to a certain number of users, they are not sufficient for a full turnaround of the workforce that the Roma ethnic minority can offer, but they continue to be significant because — in addition to giving opportunities to individuals — they maintain and raise awareness of the importance of education, training, and motivation and at the same time encourage employers to break down invisible but present discriminatory barriers. The government, on the other hand, has done a good job by establishing strong and inclusive legislation and strategic documents pertaining to the inclusion of the Roma community with an emphasis on employment, and there has been even practical progress in government action such as the Barvalipe programme. However, these isolated projects, limited by duration and size of the included group, are insufficient for the supposed ultimate goal stated in the strategic guidelines — achieving the representation of Roma in state and public administration that is proportional to their share in the general population.

The collected and processed data indicate the following:

- There is a chronic lack of comprehensive data on acquired qualifications, employment, and employability of the Roma community without any differences in the data analysis of the six economies;
- Because of the widespread informal economy, there are more work-capable, employed, and unemployed Roma men and women than the NES's and related institutions' data shows;
- The unemployment of Roma men and women is almost three times higher than that of the majority population;

- The unemployment of young Roma and the overall population of Roma women is an additional concern;
- A quarter of Roma have been looking for a job through the NES for more than four years, and those without primary school have been looking for longer than that. The higher the education level, the shorter the job search period;
- Getting a job is easier with a high school diploma, and the fastest with a university degree, although there are about 1% of university graduates, depending on the analysed economy;
- Legal frameworks, strategies, and action plans are adequate but not comprehensive and often leave out the segment of the Roma community that is not in the NES records;
- The hygiene, cleaning, construction, and raw material collection sectors are the predominant source of employment for Roma men and women;
- Multiperspective formal and informal education leads to better positioning in the labour market;
- Foreign language skills, above all English, as well as computer and digital skills are underdeveloped among the Roma population;
- Even though they are widespread in the education system, poverty and deprivation are greater barriers to education than discrimination;
- Shortage secondary education occupations in the analysed economies are cooks, carpenters, hygienists, kitchen assistants, hairstylists, car mechanics, electricians, plumbers, and waiters. Montenegro also needs workers in the hotel industry — from maids and lifeguards to receptionists;
- Shortage higher education occupations are above all engineers in the construction, IT, mechanical, and electrical industries, followed by doctors with broad specializations, and especially anaesthesiologists, paediatricians, and gynaecologists;
- The competences that Roma acquire during formal education in Serbia somewhat correspond to the needs of the national labour market, and interestingly, they are more adapted to the labour market needs of European countries to which emigration is most common (primarily EU countries), while the educational profiles chosen by Roma are less common among the surplus occupations in the labour market;

- The competences that Roma acquire within the framework of existing projects in Serbia, which come from the international and the civil and less often from the government sector, for the most part correspond to labour market needs, especially the need for diversification of knowledge and skills, but they reach an insufficient number of users to make a statistically significant shift.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations come up as a logical course of action and represent a synthesis of the need to respond to the specific challenges faced by Roma men and women; the need to respond to labour market trends brought on by globalization and digitization; as well as the inevitable challenges that we are faced with in the process of preparing the analysis and that arise from insufficient visibility, monitoring, and recording of data on the Roma population.

1. In the year of the population and property census, the Roma community should be encouraged to identify in line with their ethnicity, so that the data on numbers, education, and living conditions can be more reliable;
2. In the process of drafting legal solutions, strategies, and action plans, financial support should be insisted on in the implementation of solutions, as well as on the principle of comprehensiveness so that the existing solutions can have an effective impact on the community, and not only on individual groups that remain the only visible ones and provide a distorted statistical impression;
3. In-depth and field studies should be conducted on the participation of the Roma community in the labour market in order to get a more accurate picture of the type of work performed, the basis of employment, and the reasons for inactivity, and they should include those groups that remain invisible to desk research methods;
4. Programmes and policies should be supported that lead to greater inclusion of Roma children in enrolling and graduating from secondary schools and colleges through scholarships, loans, and financial support for housing and living outside the place of residence;
5. Programmes and policies should be supported that lead to greater participation in the labour market through internship, employment, and business programmes through scholarships, small grants, interest-free loans, or public–private partnerships with a special focus on youth and women;
6. Programmes and policies should be supported that lead to the diversification of occupations in the Roma community through multiperspective formal and informal education;
7. Programmes and policies should be supported that lead to the improvement of foreign language skills, especially English, as well as digital literacy — this is important both for the overall labour market and traditionally existing jobs, as well as for the entire range of emerging opportunities in remote jobs that have been opened up by the pandemic;
8. Programmes and policies should be supported that lead to the reduction of poverty, social exclusion, and discrimination of the Roma community, which will in turn lead to the alignment of the proportion of the Roma unemployment rates with the general population unemployment rates in the observed country;
9. Programmes and policies should be supported that target the education and training of Roma men and women in shortage occupations that require secondary and higher education mentioned in the conclusions, as well as those that lead to education that is broader than current and assumed future shortage occupations.



## **TABLE LIST**

1. *Table 1. Unemployment of Roma in Serbia, NES 2022*
2. *Table 2. Ranking of the six economies of the Western Balkans in the 2018 PISA test*

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