Poverty and Social Exclusion
of Romany People in Slovakia

Abstract

Poverty, material need in Slovakia, and particularly among Romany population, is one of the biggest present day problems. This article deals with social exclusion and poverty of Romany people, its expression in selected areas of their life including the value of labour. Theoretical analysis is illustrated by the results of regional and Slovak-wide research.

Key words: Romany people, social exclusion, poverty, material needs, employment, unemployment, education, social policy.

Romany people represent an ethnic community that, besides others, is characterized by their peculiarities in social and demographic behaviour. Standing inability to rationally use their financial means as well as widely spread alcoholism in prevailing part of the most backward Romany population, often living in socially and morally devastated environment, on the verge of human dignity, all that make out a human group of these people that requires a special attention of the state.

The goal of this article is to quantitatively analyze, and illustrate selected aspects of poverty\(^1\) (of social exclusion) of Romany people in Slovakia by research results.

\(^1\) In the Slovak terminology, the term “poverty” stopped existing after 1948. Groups of people who, according to the criteria generally recognized in industrially developed countries, would be placed in the group of the poor, are marked as "socially weaker", "low income", "persons socially dependent", "persons in material need"."
1. Definition of poverty

Poverty as a social phenomenon has become a social problem at a certain level of development of society. There is no absolute and generally recognized definition or limit that denotes who is considered to be poor. It is especially obvious when defining poverty within economically developed countries where the saturation of basic needs for living, such as food, clothing, home, is guaranteed. With regard to this fact it becomes clear that poverty, seen in this way, is always defined in relation to the standards of given society.

As for this article, we incline to the definition of poverty by P. Townsend (1979, p. 13), who understands it as a lack of means for such nourishment, such activities and life conditions that are usual in the society to which people belong. If people do not have, or are denied access to, the means of regular food, services and activities that are usual or generally accessible in that society, or they do not have means to fulfill the responsibilities they are expected to fulfill in their social roles and relationships thus fulfilling their role in society, we can say that they live in poverty.

2. Social exclusion

Out of the quantity of poverty undesirable social contexts at society level in the context of social work, the most important one is social exclusion of an individual, a group, or the whole communities. The social (or social-psychological) dimension of poverty is linked to differentiated accessibility of a basic prerequisite indispensable for dignified existence of individuals as well as groups in a given community. The level and process of social exclusion is connected with this social reality. In recent years a substitution of the notion "poverty" by the notion "social exclusion" is applied in the European political discourse, especially following the formation of the second programme of European Community's combat against poverty from 1988, in the EC conceptions related to poverty this notion alternates the old poverty concept. Social exclusion tends to be considered not an outcome of individual failure, but an outcome of the failure of some systems that provide for (Mareš, 1999, p. 165):

- citizen integration (a system of a democratic and legislative character),
- social integration (a system of a social state),
- personal integration (a family and community system).

Out of the aspect of the said areas of individual integration, poverty profoundly concerns the following social aspects of the poor:
• identity of the poor,
• human dignity of the poor,
• their affiliation with the social entity.

The poverty of the poor limits their possibility to take respectable roles in society as well as to take part in social activities. It limits: education, free time, a possibility to carry out their roles through work, it limits social contacts as well as their possibility to take part in political decisions; it also limits their possibility to consume goods and services offered, it limits their access to health care, to arts, to their membership in interest groups, it also limits the formation of their own identity as well as a possibility to become value creators and to be a value for others.

Subsequently it means limitation for possibilities to fulfill one's own responsibilities and to exercise one's own rights given to an individual by his/her citizen's status. The limitation of the said social activities is a result of the following facts:

1. Limited leeway and access to:
   • social activities themselves,
   • development of skills that are required by these activities (e.g. education).

2. The loss of motivation for an individual to take part in broader community activities (the goals of those activities do not say anything to the poor) while closing themselves into their own subculture. (Mareš, 1999, p. 166).

Poverty therefore often assumes the character of social isolation, which can lead on one hand to an anomic situation of these people (cf. Merton, 1977, Ondrejković, 2001), which on the part of the poor results in tension arising between society culture goals and society values, and the impossibility to reach them in a legal way. In certain areas there can appear poverty concentration, and gradually also resignation from the activities and values of the society mainstream. Such an environment can create insecurity about individual fate, and consequently, it can show attributes that might be considered deviant. Poverty does not mean that man has nothing or little. It is not little property; it is not a disproportion between aspirations and accessible means to fulfill them. It is principally the relationship with other people, a social status (Sahlins, 1974, p. 37, in Mareš. 1999, p. 168).

3. Ethnic aspects of poverty

While analyzing poverty on the basis of groups of the people that are most endangered by this phenomenon it is possible to set apart groups from various view categories: according to age, family status, affiliation to a group of population,
and others. Out of the mentioned views we abstract away and classify as the most poverty endangered groups the following ones: family in a certain period of its life or in a concrete social situation; breadwinning woman and mother; children and the youth; elderly people; physically and mentally handicapped people; homeless people; ethnic groups.

An ethnic affiliation, and generally a race, is a meaningful feature of poverty and unevenness structure in the European population. Poverty among ethnic group members is more common than among majority population. In Slovak population, ethnic poverty is a domain of Romany people. Romany people generally have a low level of qualification as well as a reputation of unreliable workers, which according to the theory of a line (this theory says that employers place those interested in a job into a line according to the potential benefit they bring) renders them “unreliable”. That moves them to the secondary labour market, where they are exposed to a higher danger of unemployment, thus often to “shadow or black economics” or to the dependency on social benefits. This is supported by their large families, family relations and solidarity within families as well as by worse health condition of this ethnic group. Race, cultural and often also language dissimilarity of other ethnic groups isolates them in terms of both space and culture. This isolation is usually given by the rejection of mutual living with ethnic minority by the majority part of population; that mostly happens on the basis of their different life style and family relation character in an ethnic group. The majority population partly does not understand, their dissimilarity, partly considers it immoral, and partly considers it unjustified. (Mareš, 1999, p. 55).

Based on either acceptance of or disagreement with the mentioned facts, the majority population socially expels ethnic minorities to the margin of society; it gives them access to the secondary labour market only (if any), which together with other disadvantages is a ticket to the groups of the poor.

4. Poverty and social exclusion of Romany people in Slovakia

Social exclusion of an individual from a community can be most distinctively perceived and identified through both economic and cultural consequences. In the forthcoming part of this contribution we will pay attention to the economic exclu-

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2) Working out this part of the article, we come out of the empirical data and their interpretation provided by the World Bank, the Foundation S.P.A.C.E, INEKO, and the Institute for the open society called “Poverty of Romany people and social care of them in the Slovak Republic” published at www.worldbank.sk/data/povertyinsksk, on 17.11. 2003 as well as from other sources we actually point to.
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sion of Romany population; in the area of cultural exclusion we will focus on the aspect of education and formation.

In the quoted study called *The poverty of Romany people*... we find facts speaking about different nature of poverty among Romany and non-Romany population in Slovakia. The poverty in Romany settlements is closely linked to living conditions and, even more concretely, to the level of their either integration or segregation. Poverty among Romany people is closely connected with the following four factors:

- economic conditions in the region,
- the extent and concentration of Romany population in the settlement,
- the proportion of Romany people in a village, and
- the level of geographical integration or segregation of the village as well as its distance from the nearest town or village.3)

Poverty is understood by Romany people as a new phenomenon that they did not know before 1989. According to the mentioned research, it was usual for households of segregated settlements to point to insufficiency of food as the main feature of their poverty. Romany people from segregated settlements in marginalized regions generally linked poverty to the lack of satisfaction of basic needs while Romany people from more developed regions and integrated parts understood poverty mostly in relation to the secondary needs, such as possibility to find a job, quality education, and a more inclusive society.

4.1. Economic exclusion of Romany people and their strategy to provide for the means of living

According to P. Ondrejkovič (1999, p. 32), economically seen, under poverty we understand "a social phenomenon characterized by the lack of means of living at the level of an individual or a group." In this sense, poverty is considered to be a social problem. Economic poverty of an individual or a family (a group, a community) is often closely connected with the subject's use on the labour market. Already over several years, Slovakia and its inhabitants have considered problems the questions of unemployment and poverty as the most significant. Those families where nobody works, most often fall to poverty ambush, to escape from which is difficult for further generations as well.

The labour market of Slovakia has currently suffered various severe problems that have been contributing to the high rate of unemployment and low employment. Slovakia has a very high rate of those long-run unemployed as well as a very

3) Worked out according to: Chudoba Rómov…, 2003, p. 13–14
high rate of those low qualified unemployed individuals. Labour force is little mobile, particularly among individual districts. Unemployment in the Slovak Republic is characterized by the following:

- Alarming unemployment of young people. The unemployment rate within the category under 24 years of age has dynamically grown since 1995, and in 2001 it reached 38.4 percent with 12.5 percentage over-run. Young people's unemployment in the Slovak republic is almost three times higher in comparison with the European Union's average.

- High unemployment of low qualified people. The rate of unemployed people with elementary education, that reaches 42.8 percent, is four times higher in comparison with the European Union's average. Current structural changes in the demand for labour force towards higher qualification have recently made these differences even more remarkable.

- Continuing high long-term unemployment. The number of long-term unemployed people reached 282,800. The ratio of the long-term unemployed to the total number of the unemployed has not fallen under 50% since 1995 with the exception of 1999. The parameters of long-term unemployment point to crystal hard core of those unemployed for more than 2 years (181,200 in 2001). Their share in the long-term unemployment was 64.1%. The appearance of long-term unemployment is highest among people of a low level of education. Almost 70% of long-term unemployment (68.2%) represented by those unemployed with elementary education, professionally trained and secondary trained without a final exam (Stratégie podpory..., 2003).

The are about 60 thousand registered unemployed Romany people in Slovakia, which represents approximately 12.5% of among the total number of the unemployed. (Stratégie podpory..., 2003) According to the research (Lenzová, 1998, pp. 80–11), in 1997 only 32.3% of the examined families involved any employed person with an income. The most serious problems influencing Romany high unemployment are defined by M. Vašečka (1999, p. 772) as follows:

- Low qualifications of Romany people.
- Disinterest of employers in Romany workers as a result of a lack of jobs.
- Low working morals of some members of Romany minority.
- Disinterest of part of Romany people to be employed within publicly useful working activities.
- The lack of job opportunities typically in the districts with a high number of Romany people.

A special problem in our country is represented by the unemployment of the Romany youth. According to statistics, up to a half of school children never
accomplish the school attendance in the highest grade, which means that they do not gain sufficient literacy to either further study at a secondary school or to find a place at the labour market. That is one of the reasons why the rate of the long-term unemployed young people aged 14 to 24 is represented by over 25% of the total number of the registered Romany applicants for jobs. (Koncepčné zámery..., 2003)

Romany people as unemployed young people are endangered by the loss of working habits or by their non-creation, by the destruction of their personality, by quantity of unused free time, by feelings of ineffectiveness. Following the end of school attendance they meet problems with employment, with their usefulness, with feelings of injustice, no motivation in context with their non-respected ethnic dissimilarity and discrimination when looking for and advocating for their place in society. The alumni of special schools, like mentally disabled children, find it very difficult to fit in life, they resign from further preparation for their profession and job in general, and they are often misused for criminal activities. The several-year-long social fall down of Romany families has resulted in total poverty, and many times, there appears a lack of basic means of nourishment for these families, including children. Romany people with apprentice education also belong to the biggest groups of unemployed secondary school alumni and of the long-term unemployed. This creates existential problems of young Romany families, and it can lead to the emergence of socially undesirable phenomena. (Koncepcia štátnej..., 2001, p. 28)

In the social system of the Slovak Republic, there remains a long-run rate of dependence upon social help benefits. This is especially obvious among Romany population. The ratio of the recipients of social help benefits, together with mutually gauged people, makes long-term about 10 to 11% of Slovak residents with distinctive regional differences. We may speak about a tendency of a growing number of the recipients of social help benefits from 1995 to 2002 (1995 – 100%, 2002 – 186.5%). The majority of recipients is made up by unemployed people; their share since 1995 holds an almost stable position of 90 to 92% (2002 – 90.4%).

Economic income of a Romany family according to the research (Lenzová, 1998, pp. 8–11) was in 1997 for 46.1% of families up to Sk 1200, for 42.4% ranged from Sk 1201 to 2 410, over Sk 2 401 for 9.9% of families. As to the structure of income, most of the families received family benefits (81.5%), social help benefits were received by 72.4% of families, in some settlements this rate was represented by 80 to 90%. It is obvious that these families are poor or on the verge of objectively existing poverty, on the verge of impossibility to satisfy the basic needs for survival.
4.1.1. Romany people’s strategy to satisfy basic needs and conditions for living

The results of the research Chudoba Rómov… show that the poorest respondents identified the following signs of poverty:

- insufficient nourishment,
- miserable housing conditions, and
- poor health condition.

Romany people from integrated and segregated communities exercise different strategies to get adequate nourishment. Romany people from integrated as well as from segregated areas prefer planning and savings in order to afford enough food till the end of month, notwithstanding their employment status. Those living in rural areas with the ownership of some land are able to produce vegetables for their own use during summer, and some really do it.

In contrast, Romany people from segregated settlements are more oriented upon short-term strategies of survival being less able to plan ahead. General consumption usually grows especially during few days after receiving the benefits of social help. Many Romany people from marginalized settlements as well as those from poorer integrated areas admitted that closely before the payday of social benefits their family eats just simple food (e.g. beans) over the whole week. Many of them also said they had to buy cheap foodstuff, if they are to have money for the whole month. Only very few inhabitants of segregated settlements own land which would give them chance to grow crops for their own consumption.

Many Romany people use the possibility to be employed within the informal labour market. The most common Romany activities in this area are: collecting and selling scrap metal, retailing in small and part time jobs in agriculture and building industry. One of the most widely-spread informal economic activities of Romany people from the examined settlements is musicianship. Further occasional informal work opportunities, especially for Romany men, is help to local non-Romany people, such as small building projects, house painting; women help clean, and so on.

Romany people from geographically isolated and segregated areas generally have fewer work opportunities within the informal sector because their communities are quite closed to the surrounding world; their people have limited contacts outside their settlement, which also hinders them from finding jobs. Many Romany people admitted that, in order to survive, they committed theft, including of potatoes, wood for heating, and building materials.

According to the research (Lenzová, 1988, pp. 8—11), the responding families in a bad economic situation borrow more and restrain themselves less. Up to 80% of them borrow money and 69.6% restrain themselves.
Poverty and unemployment is closely linked to the value of labour. In the research (Rómovia v roku…, 1995), the respondents (67%) said that the problem of work opportunities for Romany people is one of the most urgent ones. Seen by Romany citizens, to have a job means to have an appropriate living standard, to live a satisfying and peaceful life, to live a life of an honest citizen, to integrate into society, to cope with non-Romany people. Unemployment means the opposite: to have nothing for the coming generation, to feel a failure in a parent role, to live in poverty, to have no chance in influencing one's own future as well as one's family future, to be on the margin of society, to be underrated and disapproved of by the majority, to live a suspicious way of life. In the values of children expressed in their stylistic works, the values and their preferences were the same as for their parents. For children, however, the meaning of work was even higher: work should be interesting, should be fun for them. Unemployment is understood by children as boredom, as something negative (surely influenced by the understanding of the unemployment of their parents). In the settlements where there is a high rate of unemployment of Romany population, children miss a pattern of work, of employment, they have no idea about the world of work. Some of them could not name a job that they would like to do, and as actual forms for making money they mentioned: to play cards for money, to be a soccer player, to start a music group. (Lenzová, 1999, pp. 4–6)

4.1.2. Poverty and exclusion of Romany people in the area of education and formation

Exclusion from access to education we rank among main indicators of Romany population's cultural exclusion in Slovakia, which is manifested in the low level of education of Romany people.

This factor, among others, significantly conditions the employment of Romany population. In the education and formation of Romany children and youth there appear basic problems that are ranged by M. Lukáč (2000, p. 20) in the following way:

- A problem in the attitude of Romany parents to education; they often show disinterest in their children's school attendance, their results at school, and their after-school activities. The parents also refuse to buy school materials.
- A problem of family-school cooperation which has to do with Romany parents' attitude to education.
- A problem of psychological peculiarities of Romany children as well as the absence of social and communication skills.
- A problem of truancy: they do not start going to school at all, they irregularly attend school. Often they had bad results at school.
- A problem of a language barrier.
When approaching education Romany children, must, in addition to those already mentioned ones, overcome more difficult obstacles than children from other ethnic groups, especially in the following areas:

- **Economic limitations**, lack of money for appropriate clothing, for school materials, bad housing conditions, children helping to improve economic needs of family as well as helping in the household. In this context it a significant barrier is the fact that Romany people do not see any coherence of present investments into education and future valorization of these investments as to the position on the labour market.

- **Low education level** of parents, which consequently influences their aspirations in the area of education of their own children as well, and which will result in low education requirements in the family.

- **Space isolation**, especially among the children from the most segregated and isolated settlements, which usually are geographically far away or even isolated from school. Moreover, in segregated localities and communities, populated mostly by Romany people, homogenized schools gradually appear (non-Romany parents enroll their children to other schools), which causes that children from these schools do not have any contact with the majority and there are also no positive social models. (Čačipen…, 2002, p. 545)

- **Low expectations** of teachers and parents.

### Table 1: The Comparison of Educational Structure of the Majority and Romany Population of the Slovak Republic in 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population/education</th>
<th>Majority population of SR</th>
<th>Romany population of SR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>alumni</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary education</td>
<td>1 084 440</td>
<td>25.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprentice and professional</td>
<td>1 252 374</td>
<td>29.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>1 370 326</td>
<td>32.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University education</td>
<td>418 483</td>
<td>9.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No educ. or not specified</td>
<td>68 079</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>4 193 702</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census 2001

As already mentioned, the unfavorable educational structure of Romany population is one of the important factors of its unemployment. We assume that the meaning of education value has been transmitted in Romany families from one generation to the other through upbringing and together with the overall backwardness of Romany children, especially in social and mental development, it...
causes in them prerequisites for failure in the educational formative process in
preschool and school institutions.

Recently however, a positive trend of the development of educational structure
of Romany population can be traced; we assume that it is an outcome of the proc-
ess of self-understanding of Romany population as to their ethnic identity as well
as their endeavour to get control over their own social status and over the forma-
tion of new generations of Romany intellectuals.

Table 2: Educational structure development
of Romany population is the SR in 1980 and 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of education/year</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>1980</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary education</td>
<td>40831</td>
<td>76.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprentice and professional education</td>
<td>6942</td>
<td>13.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>1088</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University education</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No education or not specified</td>
<td>4167</td>
<td>7.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53202</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Conclusion

Social exclusion of Romany population can be perceived also in other areas, such
as, for example, strengthened space segregation, verbal refusal of Romany people,
and other areas of cultural exclusion.

The results of this exclusion according to the authors of Čačipen pal o Roma are
identified in the following areas:
- growing poverty among Romany people,
- reproduction of absolute poverty,
- growing distrust towards the majority society,
- resignation as to the morals and values of the majority society,
- loss of respect to formal authorities,
- growing aggressiveness, criminality.

In the context of the strategies of inclusiveness and Europe-wide combat against
social exclusion it is possible to say that the social exclusion of Romany population
under the Slovak Republic conditions means general disadvantage in the following areas: (Čačipen..., 2002. p. 553)
   a) education, employment, housing, health care and financial sources,
   b) possibilities to get access to chief social institutions that distribute various life chances, to social services as well as to mobility or to social networks.

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