



ROMA In Latvia /

Research Report 2015

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Acronyms used

CSB	Central Statistical Bureau
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoW	Ministry of Welfare
NA	No answer
SEA	State Employment Agency
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCMA	Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs
SEDA	State Education Development Agency
SCHIA	State Compulsory Health Insurance Agency

Abstract

The research “Roma in Latvia” was carried out by the market and social research centre “Latvian Facts” from July to October 2015. The aim of this research was to identify the current situation and circumstances that hinder the Roma people to get access to education, employment, health care, housing services, and to develop recommendations for action to eliminate those hindering circumstances.

During the research “Roma in Latvia”, mixed research methods were applied and multiple activities were performed: during the feasibility study documents and statistical data were analysed, at the quantitative stage the Roma population survey was carried out and 365 Roma were surveyed and at the qualitative research stage in-depth semi structured interviews with the representatives of the public sector and the non-governmental organisations, policy makers and national authorities (a total of 197 interviews) as well as focus group discussions with the Roma population and the representatives of Roma civil society took place (5 discussions).

A considerable amount of information was collected and analysed during the research – starting with the study of the current situation of the Roma community in Latvia an in-depth inquiry into the problems which encumber the Roma access to the state-guaranteed public sector and non-governmental services in four areas — education, employment, health care and housing, and ending with examining the practices used so far, practical recommendations and development of proposals for concrete action for all parties involved — from policy making to the provision of services.

Main conclusions

General characterization of the situation

In fact, no accurate information on the number of Roma residing in Latvia is available and the number given in different sources of statistical data is different. According to the CSB data, currently 5388 Roma reside in Latvia, while the OCMA Population Register gives information about **7796** Roma which constitutes **0,36%** of the total Latvian population. However, the Roma leaders and representatives of the Roma civil society consider that the Roma population in Latvia might be considerably larger – from 10 000 even up to 15 000.

Every year a gradual decrease in the number of Roma is observed – it is impacted by negative natural increase rate (since 2011 mortality rate exceeds birth rate) as well as Roma emigration abroad in search of employment. It should be noted that a great part of Roma (49,3%) choose not to indicate their ethnicity in the personal identification document which implies that actually there are more Roma in Latvia than registered in official statistics.

The research reveals that **Roma are to be considered a population group of risk-at-poverty**. A considerable part of Roma households experience financial scarcity – the monthly income of more than one third (35,6%) of the interviewed does not exceed EUR 60 per household member; and less than one third (9,4%) has accruals of over EUR 250 for covering unplanned expenses (e.g. medicine, operations); the status of low-income or needy people is officially granted to more than half (53,7%) of the interviewed. This situation is closely linked with the Roma limited opportunities to be employed – the questionnaire results show that in 40,5% households there is no legally working family member and the family mainly lives on social benefits and other financial aid.

Awareness about the services

On the whole Roma are informed where to seek assistance in everyday life situations related to education, employment, health care and housing. They are well-aware concerning everyday life situations, but there is comparatively low awareness about activities the implementation of which requires self-initiative or commitment. The research reveals that Roma are well-aware of social benefits and different material support provided by municipalities and NGOs, however, quite often **their understanding of the procedure for receiving it is superficial**. It can be explained by the relatively low education level and even illiteracy that hampers the use of written information as well as encumbers communication with the public sector employees and comprehension of the information that is explained to them. Roma prefer direct contacts in communication with municipality employees. It is largely due to limited access to means of indirect

communication – partial accessibility to the Internet and telephone communication as well as lack of e-skills. Consequently, municipality employees are recommended to communicate with Roma according to the principle “we are similar”, i.e. presenting the information in an easy, simple manner.

The research reveals that an essential role in awareness raising and organizing their lives is played by the authorities of the local communities – individuals, whom Roma trust and who quite often help with problem solving and completing formalities. Activities of mediators are positively evaluated, underlining their contribution to the area of education as well as to social problem solving and improving communication with public institutions.

Education

The Roma education policy pursued in Latvia cannot be fully assessed as there is a lack of statistical data about the attendance of educational establishments and performance at school by Roma children as well there is no information about the number of early school leavers. It should be noted that no information is gathered about attendance of kindergartens and Roma youths studying at universities.

Though the situation has slightly improved during the last ten year period, still one of the basic problems is the comparatively low education level among Roma population: 8,9% of the interviewed Roma have never attended school, 39,9% left primary school at different stages (among them almost one third (31,3%) before reaching form 7), one third (34%) have primary education, while only 17,2% have higher than primary education. Taking the above into consideration, there are grounds for the assumption that **illiteracy, especially among older people, is not a rare problem of chance character in the Roma community in Latvia and the education level of almost half of the Roma (48,8%) residing in Latvia does not meet the MoES requirement of compulsory primary education.** This, in its turn, has the most direct influence upon employment, further professional training and the attendance of the SEA courses.

Though the questionnaire reveals that **Roma are aware of the importance of education**, namely, 98,8% admit that it is important for their children to be literate and 97,5% want their children to acquire primary education, the MoES monitoring data show that 15,9% of Roma children are early school leavers and 250 children at school are in forms which are not appropriate to their age. Most of early school leavers are of the age 13-14 years when Roma adolescents choose to start a family and leave school. The questionnaire data reveal that the most essential reason for leaving school is the low income level – Roma parents cannot afford to purchase everything their children need at school and prepare them for school (49,7%). Another essential reason is the lack of motivation of Roma youth (43,2% of the interviewed Roma indicate it as a reason); parental prohibition or disinterestedness in child's performance at school (26,7%) are also important factors why school attendance is irregular or there are dropouts.

The research reveals the **positive role of Roma teacher-assistants** especially in the pre-school and primary school period – they ensure essential support to Roma children in acquiring the study material and enhance the involvement of parents in the study process by changing their understanding about the importance of education in their child’s life. Another conclusion concerns the need of **ensuring accessibility to the support team in schools, for example, social and special pedagogue, psychologist and speech therapist**. To promote raising of Roma education level, a wider understanding of this topical problem is needed on the part of policy makers. Greater support should be rendered at the ministry and municipal level to schools and NGOs for ensuring support to initiatives for raising Roma education level.

Employment

During the Roma quantitative survey, 32,4% of economically active Roma declared they were employed, which means that in comparison with 2003 when according to researchers only 10% were employed, the situation has improved. However, the analysis of the results of the Roma quantitative survey carried out within the framework of the research, the labour force survey data obtained by the Central Statistical Bureau and the unemployment indicators registered by the State Employment Agency allowed to single out three basic trends, which characterise **Roma as a marginal, socially excluded group, discriminated in the labour market whose employment opportunities are not equal to those of other ethnicities**: 1) Among the Roma population the number of employed persons is three times smaller than the national average; 2) The proportion of long-term unemployment in the group of the Roma unemployed is markedly dominant; 3) The proportion of unregistered unemployment among the Roma population exceeds the rates of official employment many times.

The Roma people do not have equal opportunities **to integrate into the labour market due to their low-level education**, which practically not only excludes more than two thirds of Latvian Roma from the labour market but also limits their access to the employment promotion support measures as only those unemployed persons qualify for the professional development courses and courses for developing skills offered by the SEA who have completed the seventh grade education programme. On 31 August 2015, according to the SEA data, the education level of **67,4% of all the registered Roma unemployed was lower than the compulsory elementary education** (in comparison, the national average is only 2,7%), about 20% of them do not have writing and reading skills.

Roma have been informed about the SEA role as a mediator in addressing employment issues. Most often social workers are involved in performing this task as for 72% of Roma whose education level does not exceed six grades and for 48% of Roma who have completed primary education the issue of unemployment is **identified at the**

same time when they are granted the status of a poor or economically disadvantaged person, that is why registering with the SEA is a basic condition for being granted social aid and benefits (e.g., allowance for ensuring the guaranteed minimum income level). This constitutes one of the essential problems of the long-term unemployed – they apply to the SEA not to find a job but to register as unemployed persons in order to qualify for social benefits.

Roma mainly avail of the SEA services for earning minimum guaranteed income doing paid temporary welfare work and attending “obligatory” career planning consultations but they lack motivation (and in many municipalities also adequate facilities as training opportunities differ) for raising their education level which in its stead is the main condition for being granted the opportunity to receive employment promotion services offered by the SEA.

There is a lack of programmes suitable for Roma who have a low education level. No regular and systematic reading and writing programmes are offered (non-formal education) for illiterate persons and persons with underdeveloped reading and writing skills. **There is also a lack of “second chance” education solutions for those Roma whose education level is lower than completed six grades** and whose knowledge in many subjects is fragmentary. There are no courses for acquiring simple practical skills (e.g., skills in shoemaking, wicker basket making) which might prove useful for persons who have difficulty in perceiving and mastering theoretical knowledge. Educational institutions (including night schools) are not suitable for people who have been out of the formal education process for a long time. There is also a lack of informal solutions, teaching methods and approaches differing from those of formal education which might be implemented by non-governmental organisations specialising in education services.

There is also a lack of programmes as well as a lack of systematic approach to **primary motivation of the Roma unemployed**, i.e., to those persons who have been out of the labour market for a long time (On 31 August 2015, according to the SEA data, the proportion of the long-term unemployed of the total number of the Roma unemployed exceeded by 20% that of the national average). It is difficult to find motivation for changing the situation but it is even more difficult to sustain it for long periods of time.

An opinion was voiced in all the surveyed groups that **the dissemination of good practice and positive examples among the employers** were the main employment promotion measures for the Roma people and it was stressed that the key barriers to the integration of Roma workers into the labour market were negative stereotypes and mistrust toward them.

Health care

The cooperation level of the Roma population with the health care specialists cannot be assessed unambiguously. The fact that **98,2% of the surveyed Roma have their own family doctor** and that during the last year, 87,8% of respondents have visited their family doctor in connection with their health problems or those of their children (almost half of them or 47,5% have done it in the last month). However, lack of knowledge and understanding about the accessibility of definite services (e.g., the consultative line of family doctors) limits their efficient use. Besides, the usual communication channels – booklets at drug stores and family doctors' receptions, advertising and social campaigns in mass media, etc., – are not effective enough. The only method which the experts consider effective is direct contact or oral information. It would be advisable for both the social workers of municipalities and family doctors to offer information on this service and its advantages. An alternative way for unburdening social workers would be extensive involvement of Roma mediators in information campaigns.

The research demonstrates the fact that **the Roma pay special attention to their children's health** and try to use all available health care services they know about – thus, for example, almost half (46,7%) of the surveyed Roma in Latvia have had their children vaccinated (only 7% of Roma had not heard about the opportunity to have their children vaccinated). Roma are more indifferent and irresponsible concerning the health of adults in their families. – only 8,5% of the surveyed Roma pensioners had received low-cost or free vaccines and 22,8% of the pensioners had heard about them for the first time.

In comparison with 2003, the situation in obstetrics has improved – the fact that **84,3% of the surveyed Roma women having children aged up to 13 years had registered their last pregnancy and had regularly visited a gynaecologist or an obstetrician is to be assessed positively**. However, one of the essential aspects of health care is women's health condition. – they often face difficulties in family planning and they lack information about contraceptives which in its stead leads to early pregnancies or abortions. Within the context of family planning and the use of contraceptives, great attention should be paid to education. It is essential for educational institutions to commence cooperation with health care specialists organising the necessary sex education lectures or health education lessons, as they may take advantage of their practical knowledge and previous work experience and turn out to be more proficient than the teacher in imparting information on the content of health education or sex education.

Housing

The provision of housing is perceived as problematic mainly among the poor persons of Roma community – as experts calculate, the average of 75%-80 % of Roma families that live in Latvia encounter difficulties in the availability of housing and its quality provision. **Low and irregular employment and insufficient income along with the absence of savings reduce Roma possibilities** not only to rent or acquire housing but also cause difficulties in the maintenance of housing and **deny them the possibility to enjoy the needed and desired living conditions in the chosen housing**. That is the reason why Roma choose cheaper housing without amenities and why a considerable part (35,6 %) of them reside in municipality-maintained housing where the quality is very poor because of the insufficient and out-dated social housing fund.

The most substantial problem in Roma housing is the availability of sanitation facilities – in 55,9% of the housing where Roma live there is no shower or bathroom, 42,1% of the housing are without flush toilets, and one-fourth of the surveyed Roma (26%) do not have access to water supply at home. Despite the findings that the impact of Roma tradition to live in the households of several generations tends to decrease, **a considerable part of Roma housing is overpopulated** (typically, a family of 4-6 persons live in one Roma household). Accordingly, the limited provision of basic hygiene needs and overpopulated housing create higher risks for health and social isolation, therefore it should be recommended to develop assistance programmes for the improvement of basic hygiene conditions in housing – primarily, the installation of water supply and sewerage.

The study concludes that among the factors that substantially restrict access to housing is also **prejudice of the society regarding Roma as undesirable tenants and neighbours**. The low skills of Roma to maintain their housing and the failure to understand that it is necessary to pay for municipal services, as well as the inability of Roma to find an apartment for rent and their lack of interest in completing the formalities are among the factors that often restrict the access to housing.

The study results convey that **Roma make an active use of the assistance the municipalities and NGOs provide in housing area**. The most frequently used possibility is to receive from the municipality an housing benefit – in the last three years more than half of the surveyed persons (53,7%) have received it. Roma also use the hygiene services that municipalities and NGOs offer (in the previous three years 14,4% of Roma have used shower services while laundry services have been used by 12,7% of Roma), however the study concludes that it is necessary to find a solution for the development of a wider access to hygiene services in the future because not all Roma households are furnished with a shower or bathroom, or have access to a washing machine. Since only 1,4% of Roma have received an allowance for housing repair, this kind of assistance should be considered as an essential necessity for the improvement of facilities and living circumstances taking into consideration the low standard of Roma housing and their limited financial resources.

/ Introduction

The “Strategy Europe 2020” envisages that Member States are to completely eliminate discrimination of Roma and that they must be treated like any other EU citizens with equal access to all fundamental rights as enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Politicians and non-governmental organisations in Latvia also pay lot of attention to the issues of minority discrimination. One of the ethnic minorities which is most often mentioned during the discussions on discrimination is Roma.

Roma living in Latvia is an old, numerically small ethnic minority (0,36%)¹ which has been living in the territory of Latvia for more than six centuries. According to the Republic of Latvia Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs data, there were 7796 Roma registered in Latvia in 2015, which is significantly less than in 2000, when, according to the population census, there were 8205 Roma living in Latvia. So significant *decrease in the number of Roma inhabitants has been determined* by two main factors – like representatives of the other nationalities, Roma also have left Latvia to look for better paid jobs, in addition many Roma *when receiving identity documents did not want to indicate their ethnicity*. To solve the lasting socioeconomic problems in Roma communities, EU member states, including Latvia, as a part of the EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, have agreed on the 4 priority areas, namely **education, employment, healthcare and housing**, where additional measures will be implemented till year 2020. The **aim** of these research is to identify the current situation and circumstances that hinder the Roma people to get access to education, employment, health care, housing services, and to develop recommendations for action to eliminate those hindering circumstances.

The research “**Roma in Latvia**” was carried out in 2015 from July to October by social and market research center “Latvian Facts”, during 365 representatives of the Roma were surveyed in different towns and cities of Latvia with permanently dwelling Roma communities. Sampling of the survey was made so that representatives from all larger regional Roma communities would be represented proportionally. Together with the Roma survey, five focus group discussions in Riga, Kraslava, Tukums, Daugavpils and Dobeles with representatives of the Roma communities were organised, as well as 197 officials, policy makers, social service employees, employees of the education, housing and healthcare institutions and representatives of non-governmental organisations were interviewed.

The report starts with providing information on the methodology used in the research (methods for data collection and their analysis); the following six sections present the results on the situation of Roma in the areas undergoing the research. Each section ends with a summary of best practice and recommendations for improving the present situation.

¹ Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. (2015). *Population Register statistics on 01.07.2015*. Retrieved 03.09.2015 from: <http://www.pmlp.gov.lv/sakums/statistika/iedzivotaju-registrs/>

Section one contains general characterization of the Roma situation, the socio-demographic indicators – Roma population in Latvia, dynamism of changes and important impacting factors, the language of everyday communication and knowledge of Latvian, the habits of declaring their place of residence as well as the economic conditions and sources of income. **Section two** analyses the awareness level concerning information about services by identifying the essential barriers for their receiving – complexity of information, lack of awareness on the procedure of receiving services, limited means of indirect communication and lack of e-skills as well as the need for community leaders in problem-solving situations. The following sections focus on in-depth study of problems which either encumber or hinder access to the services provided by the public sector and NGOs in the area of education, employment, health care and housing. **Section three** deals with problems of education, concentrating on general characterization of the area of education, the attitude of Roma towards acquiring education as well as analysing in detail the essential problems at all levels of education – pre-school, general and vocational education, special education and higher education. In **Section four**, the data of the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) and the State Employment Agency (SEA) on general employment in Latvia serve as a background for analysing employment of Roma. The Roma survey data and the opinion of experts in the area of employment are used to disclose the barriers to access and full use of services provided by the public sector and NGOs. **Section five** concentrates on issues of access to health care services. First, cooperation with health care staff (regular visiting of family doctor and evaluation of this cooperation) and disability risks are assessed, followed by an in-depth analysis of family planning and access to pre-natal and post-natal care. It ends with a comprehensive assessment of Roma regarding the aid received in different areas of health care. **Section six** presents the analysis of Roma housing issues – characterization of their living conditions, the availability of renting or buying housing as well as their access to social housing. Taking into account the opinion of Roma, the quality of their housing and accessibility to municipal services was assessed, including the plans for improving the housing as well as the available and received aid in this area.

/ Research methodology

The research “Roma in Latvia” was carried out in 2015 from July to October and it comprises three parts:

1. In-depth study of the current and actual situation of the Roma community in Latvia, investigation of the problems which encumber or hinder access to the services provided by the public sector and NGOs in four areas – education, employment, health care and housing;
2. Identifying of the used practices for ensuring services to the Roma community provided by the public sector and NGOs, opinions of experts and policy-makers and proposals of possible practical solutions;
3. Drafting conclusions, recommendations and action plans of all the involved parties, starting from policy-making up to ensuring services.

Methods used

For achieving the aim and tasks set for the research “Roma in Latvia”, the methodology was based on an integrated approach by using the strategy of mixed research methods and applying both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, thus ensuring a comprehensive insight not only in the previous and actual research of the Roma community, but also providing an in-depth study of the barriers to access in the four areas under research (education, employment, health care and housing) as well as identifying of the used practices and proposals of possible practical solutions. Thus, the following research methods were used:

- **Analysis of the available statistical data and documents** for identifying the general socio-economic situation of Roma. Mainly these were the statistical data of CSB, OCMA and SEA as well as secondary analysis of the data of previously done Latvian and international research;
- Quantitative research methods were applied for identifying the situation and opinion of Roma – a **survey** was carried out, namely, 365 Roma were interviewed by face-to-face method, as well as qualitative research methods were applied – 197 **in-depth semi-structured interviews** with representatives of the public sector and NGOs, experts and policy-makers, and five **focus group discussions** (four Roma focus groups and one focus group of representatives of the Roma civil society).

Survey of Roma inhabitants

To investigate the issues under research – identifying the situation of the Roma community in Latvia and carrying out an in-depth study of the problems which either encumber or hinder access to services provided by the public sector and NGOs in four areas – education, employment, health care and housing – in 2015 from August to October quantitative survey of Roma was carried out. Respondents in the survey were **365 Roma**: 47% were males and 53% – females.

The survey questions covered the four areas under the research – education, employment, health care and housing – and focused on accessibility, use, correspondence to the needs and satisfaction with the services. To ensure the quality of the survey, several piloting questionnaires were conducted with different socio-demographic respondents (gender, age, education). In total there were 26 piloting questionnaires, and the data of 5 were included in the analysis.

The survey was based on the *random quota sampling* principle. The sample size was calculated, when planning the minimum scope – 365 Roma older than 15 years of age, and taking into account the Roma population distribution at the region level and the density of population in the regions and administrative territorial units (cities, towns, townships). The OCMA statistical data on the distribution of the Latvian population according to nationality were used for determining the scope of information and calculating the sample size.

Table 1. Ratio of the Roma population (%) and sample size in the statistical regions of Latvia

	Ratio (%)	Sample size
Latvia	100%	365
Riga region	15%	55
Pieriga region	13%	48
Vidzeme region	7%	26
Kurzeme region	29%	104
Zemgale region	19%	71
Latgale region	17%	61

Source: calculation done on the basis of the information provided by OCMA in August, 2015

The survey was conducted as face-to-face interviews, simultaneously learning the opinion of the representatives of the public sector, different organizations, experts and policy-makers. Contacts were obtained in two ways:

1. Obtaining “involved” contacts was by using the contacts which are at the disposal of municipal institutions (including representatives of Social Services workers who monitor Roma families) and NGOs (including Day Centres and the Roma Association) and learned from the representatives of these institutions during in-depth interviews.
2. Obtaining “uninvolved” contacts was by using the Roma mediators, local Roma leaders and the already interviewed Roma (at the end of each interview the respondents were asked to help the researchers with providing contacts with other Roma, especially those, not contacting state and municipal institutions).

Recruitment of respondents was done observing the following principle – only one representative of a family, older than 15 years of age, is interviewed. Family was considered to be a group of individuals, consisting of parents and their children. One household may consist of several families simultaneously. The survey respondents received a small present – a package of tea and coffee.

Data collection was done by 17 employees (researchers and interviewers) of the research centre “Latvian Facts” and two representatives of the Roma community. Prior to starting the research, the interviewers were instructed as to the aims and methods of the research, the principles of sampling and selection of respondents, in-depth analysis of the answers to the questionnaire, conducting test interviews as well as the behaviour requirements during interviews.

In-depth interviews

To understand the opinion of the representatives of the public sector and other organizations, experts and policy-makers involved in providing services to the Roma community and to identify the used practices and proposals of possible practical solution as well as to draft recommendations according to the prior developed guidelines **197 in-depth semi-structured interviews** were conducted.

Selection of respondents was done purposefully, which implies that the most appropriate respondents were selected, based on the knowledge of the researchers and their opinion as to the appropriateness of respondents to the area of the research, namely, selecting respondents with experience in the area of the research and who might give a comprehensive response to the questionnaire. The sample size depended on the number of the Roma population in each specific locality. According to the statistical data about the density of the Roma population in regions, the samples included localities

with the Roma population exceeding 70 people (70 was decided to be the minimum as the number corresponds to 1% of the total Roma population). Alongside with it, the selection of representatives of the public sector and other organizations, experts of human rights/the Roma community and policy-makers was done during conducting the research and in-depth interviews by using the so-called snowball sampling where the present study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances.

In accordance with the sampling criteria, the in-depth interviews were conducted in the following populated areas of the regions

- Riga (**24** interviews);
- Vidzeme region (Jurmala; Valmiera; Limbazi municipality – **24** interviews);
- Kurzeme region (Ventspils, Talsi, Kuldīga, Kandava municipalities – **54** interviews);
- Zemgale region (Jelgava; Tukums; Jekabpils; Dobeles municipality – **46** interviews);
- Latgale region (Daugavpils – the city and municipality, Kraslava and Preiļi municipalities – **40** interviews);
- National level (ministries and institutions under their supervision – **9** interviews).

In each region of Latvia (Riga, Kurzeme, Zemgale, Vidzeme, Latgale) in all the researched areas there was obtained the opinion of representatives of at least 10 public sector institutions (municipality employees, doctors, teachers and other professionals), representatives of at least five NGOs or other organizations (e.g. religious organizations) as well as at least of five policy-makers (e.g. heads of municipalities).

Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions was an essential method for gathering information on the problems which either encumber or hinder access of Roma to the services provided by the public sector and NGOs in the area of education, employment, health care and housing. In the period from August to September, 2015 alongside with surveying the Roma population **four focus group discussions** were held **with the Roma population** in Daugavpils, Kraslava, Tukums and Dobeles. One focus group consisted of five to seven participants, including both socially active and socially passive Roma. Participants for the focus group discussions were found with the help of municipality Social Services, NGOs and local Roma leaders.

In the final stage of the research (October, 2015) **one focus group discussion in Riga with representatives of the Roma civil society** (seven participants) was held. Participants for the focus group discussions were selected during the research process purposefully involving leaders of the Roma community, representatives of the Roma

NGOs as well as experts on issues of the Roma community, namely, selecting people who have experience in the research area and who might have a comprehensive response to the issues under discussion.

Methods of data processing and analysis

To gather information, the questionnaires were printed in paper-form, a special data processing programme was used for the data input after receiving the filled in questionnaires. After that the data were assessed according to the statistically available data on the distribution of the Roma population in the regions as well as according to gender and age. The data collected during the quantitative research were processed and analysed by applying the programmes *IBM SPSS Statistics 21* and *MS Excel*. Full text transcription was done for the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The data analysis of the qualitative research was done by data theming which is based on data analysis of qualitative research and identifying thematic codes corresponding to the aim of the research.

The data analysis and presentation of the results was done according to mixed methods research which implies mixing data in the process of analysis, the results of quantitative research and their interpretation gains breadth and depth by mixing it with the analysis of the qualitative data and integrating the data obtained during the qualitative and quantitative research in one survey and interpreting them collectively. Analysis of the research results is done within the framework of thematic codes according to the aims and tasks of the research.

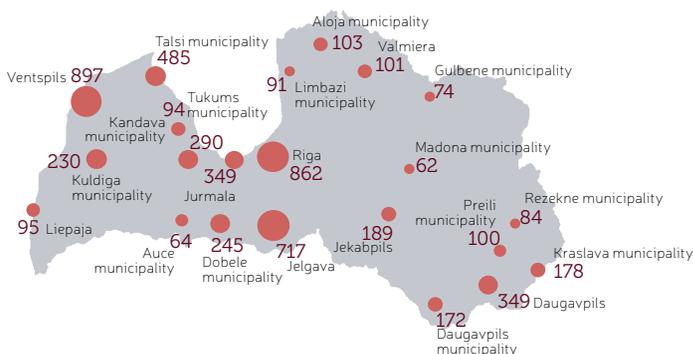
Research results

/ 1. General characterization of the Roma situation

The Roma community in Latvia is not very large, it ranks sixth after Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles and Lithuanians. There is no accurate information as to the number of the Roma population residing in Latvia, and in different sources of statistical data their number differs. According to the CSB data, currently 5388 Roma² reside in Latvia, which is considerably less than the latest available statistical data in the OCMA Population Register where **7796** Roma were registered as of 1 July, 2015, constituting **0,36%** of the total Latvian population³. These differences might be explained with the fact that, probably, many Roma have emigrated in search of employment and have not been registered in OCMA. However, as the OCMA statistical data is the latest (current) available information on the Roma population in Latvia, its data are used in this research.

The available data reveal that the largest Roma communities reside in Kurzeme and Zemgale regions – in Ventspils, Talsi municipality, Jelgava – as well as in Riga. Nevertheless, only in some towns the ratio of Roma exceed 1% of the total population of the respective municipality or town – in Ventspils 2,23%, Aloja municipality 1,9%, Talsi municipality 1,5%, Jelgava 1,16%, Vilaka municipality 1,21%, Dobele municipality 1,09%, Kandava municipality 1,02%.⁴

Figure 1.1. Number of Roma in Latvia/ 2015



Source: OCMA (2015)

² Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. (2015). *Ethnic composition of permanently residing population at the beginning of the year*. Retrieved 09.09.2015 from: http://data.csb.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/Sociala/Sociala__ikgad__iedz__iedzskaits/IS0070.px/?rxid=cdbc978c-22b0-416a-aacc-aa650d3e2ce0

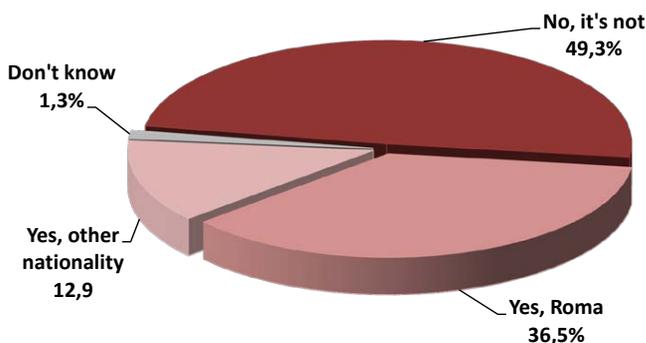
³ Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. (2015). *Population Register statistics on 01.07.2015*. Retrieved 03.09.2015 from: <http://www.pmlp.gov.lv/sakums/statistika/iedzivotaju-registrs/>

⁴ The calculation was done on the basis of OCMA data *Population Register statistics on 01.07.2015*. Retrieved 03.09.2015 from: <http://www.pmlp.gov.lv/sakums/statistika/iedzivotaju-registrs/>

However, the Roma leaders and representatives of the Roma civil society point out that the Roma population in Latvia might be considerably larger – from 10 000 even up to 15 000. They explain this essential difference mainly with the fear of Roma from possible discrimination, therefore, they are unwilling to indicate their real ethnicity in official documents. It is underlined not only by the Roma leaders and representatives of the Roma civil society, but also by several interviewed public sector employees by stating that quite often Roma choose to be either a Latvian or Russian or Pole in the passport or other official documents. Consequently, the officially available statistical data reflect only those Roma who have indicated to be of Roma ethnicity. The fact that the number of Roma might be higher is also confirmed by the questionnaire results: the answer to the question “*Is nationality stated in your passport?*” shows that almost half of the interviewed (49,3%) answered in the negative, while 12,9% admitted that another nationality is stated, and only 36,5% recognized themselves as Roma. It allows concluding that in the **Roma community there is a high ratio of people who identify themselves as Roma without admitting it officially** and the total number of Roma in Latvia might be higher than that in the official statistical data.

Figure 1.2. **Is your nationality stated in your passport?**

(Base = all respondents; N=365)

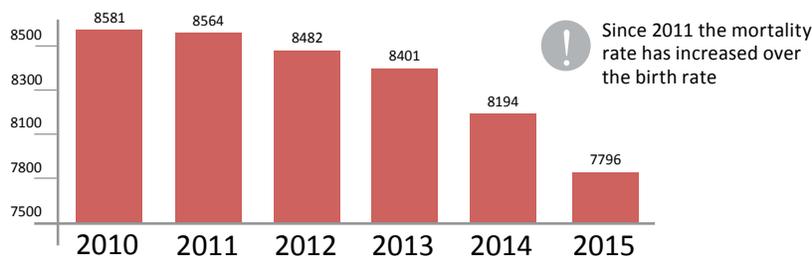


Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by “Latvian Facts” (2015)

However, it must be pointed out that **the number of Roma gradually decreases with every year** – according to the data in the OCMA Population Register during the last five years the total number of officially registered Roma in Latvia decreased by 785.⁵ Detailed dynamics in the change of the Roma number is given in Figure 1.3.

⁵Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. (2015). *Population Register statistics on 01.07.2015*. Retrieved 03.09.2015 from: <http://www.pmlp.gov.lv/sakums/statistika/iedzivotaju-registrs/>

Figure 1.3. Roma dynamic in Latvia



Source: OCMA (2015)

Changes in the number of Roma are linked with the intensive emigration abroad of economically active Roma in search of employment.

The socio-economic situation in the country impacted this process as during the period of economic crisis in Latvia, especially up to 2011, the number of long-term Roma emigrants increased – according to the CSB data in 2011 the number of registered long-term Roma emigrants was 586. However, starting with 2012 the number of long-term Roma emigrants decreased and in 2014 their number was 248.⁶ Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that the total number of the official long-term emigrants does not reflect their actual number. Both representatives of the Roma community and the interviewed representatives of the public sector pointed out that during the last years more and more economically active Roma emigrate abroad for short-time employment and return to Latvia after some time.

Changes in the number of Roma are vitally impacted by the demographic processes as well, namely, the negative natural growth.

Though traditionally Roma were the only nationality in Latvia with the highest birth-rate and the lowest mortality rate, during the last years changes have taken place and mortality rate gradually exceeded birth-rate. According to the CSB data, in 2005 there were born 114 Roma and 35 died; that year the natural growth constituted +35; in 2010 there were 83 births, while 71 died and the natural growth was +12, but **starting with 2011 the natural growth of Roma is negative** – in 2011 it was -24 (53 births, 77 deaths), in 2012 it was -12 (70 births, 82 deaths), in 2013 it was -8 (71 births, 79 deaths). In 2014 there was even more rapid decrease in birth rate and increase in mortality rate, causing a vital decrease in the natural growth indicator – in 2014 there were only 66 births, while – 94 deaths (thus, the natural growth indicator in 2014 was -28).⁷ The rapid decrease of birth rate in Latvia may be partly explained with

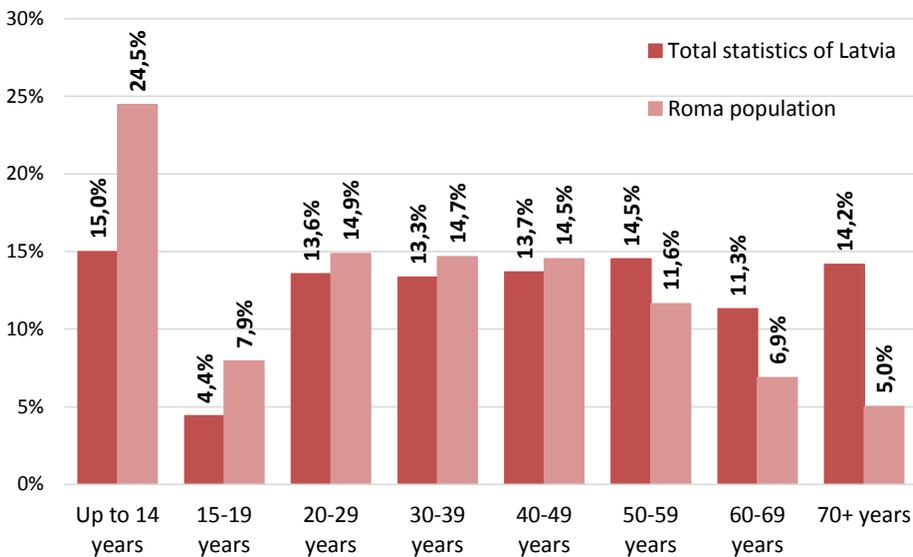
⁶ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. (2015). *Demography 2015. Statistical Data Collection*. International long-term migration by ethnicity of migrants. Riga, p.94

⁷ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. (2015). *Demography 2015. Collection of Statistical Data*. Natural increase of population by ethnicity. Riga, p. 58

emigration of Roma of reproductive age that increased during the last years and, thus, more Roma are born outside the territory of Latvia.

Analysing the 2015 data about Roma according to age groups, it can be concluded that Roma up to 14 years of age constitute the largest age group and it is almost by 10% larger than the respective total age group of the Latvian population. Such a high ratio of the Roma population can be explained by the high positive natural growth in the Roma community in the previous years contrary to considerably low birth rate and high mortality rate in other nationalities residing in Latvia (for many years Roma were the only nationality in Latvia with positive natural growth).

Figure 1.4. Distribution by age groups of Roma people living in Latvia (2015)



Source: The calculation was done on the basis of OCMA data (2015)

Though in Latvia Roma up to 15 years of age constitute 25,4% of their total population and still have a higher ratio than the whole Latvian population up to 15 years of age, the ratio of this age group is not as high as in Europe on the whole. Thus, together with the decrease in Roma natural growth in Latvia there can be observed differences in the ratio of the respective age groups in comparison with the whole European Roma community where Roma up to 15 years of age constitute 35,7% (see Figures 1.5 and 1.6).

Figure 1.5. Share of various age groups in average - total population of Latvia and Roma population of Latvia

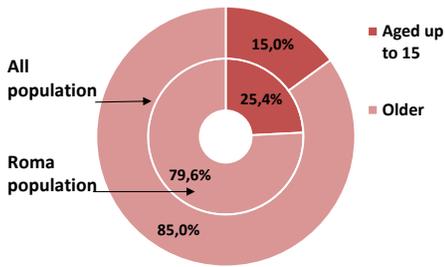
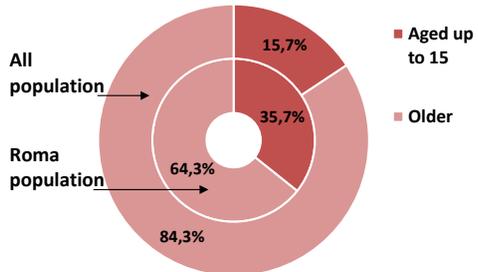


Figure 1.6. Share of various age groups in average - total population of Europe and Roma population of Europe



Source: The calculation was done on the basis of OCMA data (2015)

Most of the officially registered in Latvia Roma are citizens of Latvia – according to the OCMA data, in 2015 there lived in Latvia 7365 Roma which were citizens of Latvia, 370 Roma were non-citizens, 7 were stateless persons, 2 had refugee status and 52 were citizens of another state.⁸ The results of the quantitative survey reveal that the Latvian language is known by two thirds of the Roma population, though in everyday communication most (87,5%) of the Roma families use the Roma language, less than one tenth (6,7%) of the interviewed communicate in the family in Latvian and 5,8% - in Russian; two thirds of the interviewed (67,8%) communicate with people who do not know the Roma language mostly in Latvian, but 31,7% - in Russian (Russian is mostly used in Latgale region and Riga).

Figure 1.7. Which language do you mostly use in your family?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)

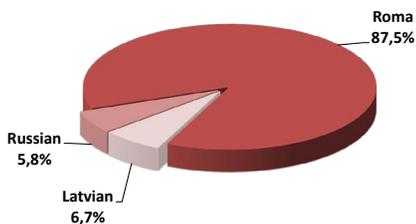
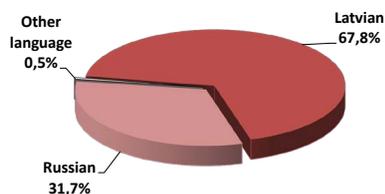


Figure 1.8. Which language do you mostly use in conversation with people who don't speak Roma?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

⁸ Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. (01. 07. 2015). *Distribution of Latvian population as to ethnicity and citizenship*. Retrieved 12.08.2015 from: <http://www.pmlp.gov.lv/sakums/statistika/iedzivotaju-registrs/>

The following analysis of the quantitative survey results deals with such socio-demographic indices as the Roma tradition of declaring their place of residence, financial and economic situation and characterization of income. The survey results show that almost all (97,1%) of the interviewed Roma have declared their place of residence. However, the ratio of those household members (family members, relatives or friends) who are not declared might actually be considerably higher – almost one fifth (18,5%) of the interviewed admitted that in their household there live people who have not been declared (see Figures 1.9. and 1.10.).

Figure 1.9. Are you declared in your place of residence?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)

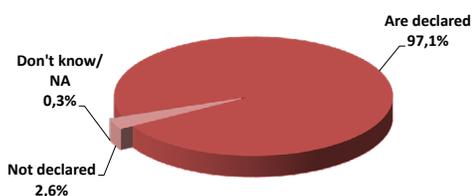
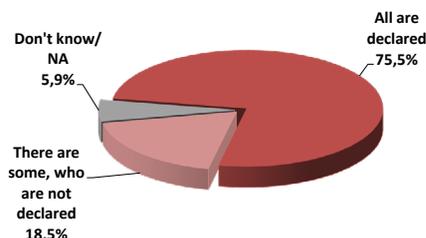


Figure 1.10. Do any family members, relatives or friends who are not declared there, live in your household?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

The quantitative survey results show that most households experience financial scarcity – the monthly income of more than one third (35,6%) of the interviewed does not exceed EUR 60 per household member; the monthly income of 33% is between EUR 61 to 136 per household member and only for 14,2% it is over EUR 137.

Figure 1.11. Average income per household member in previous month?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)

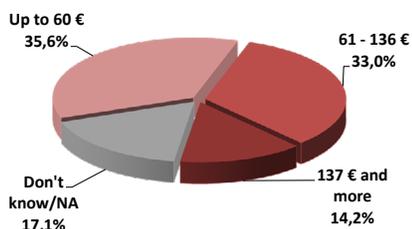
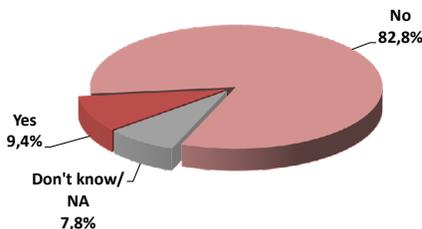


Figure 1.12. Are there any savings in your household for unplanned expenses (e.g. medication, surgery), which are more than 250 EUR?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



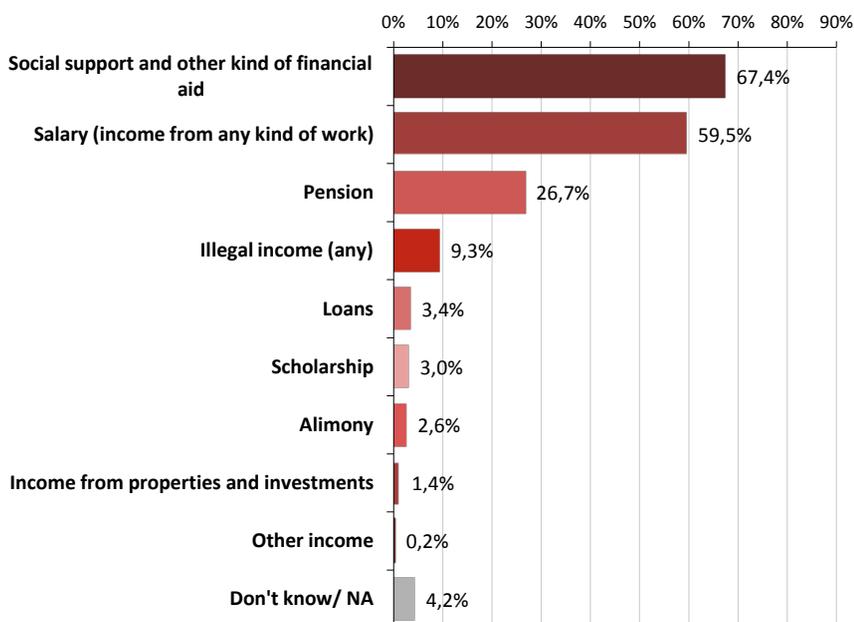
Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

The status of low-income or needy people is officially granted to more than half (53,7%) of the interviewed. The ratio of those households who have accruals higher than EUR 250 for covering unplanned expenses (e.g. medicine, operations) is low; only 9,4% of the interviewed admitted of having such accruals.

The analysis of income sources of Roma households reveal that during the last 12 months only 59,5% of the households had income from any kind of labour (wages) which allows concluding that in 40,5% of Roma households there is no legally working family member (see Figure 1.13.).

Figure 1.13. Which were the income sources of your household during the last 12 months?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

The ratio of beneficiaries of different social transfers (state, municipal pensions and benefits, subsistence allowances, scholarships) is high among Roma – during the last 12 months more than two thirds (67,4%) of the interviewed Roma households received different benefits or other financial aid.

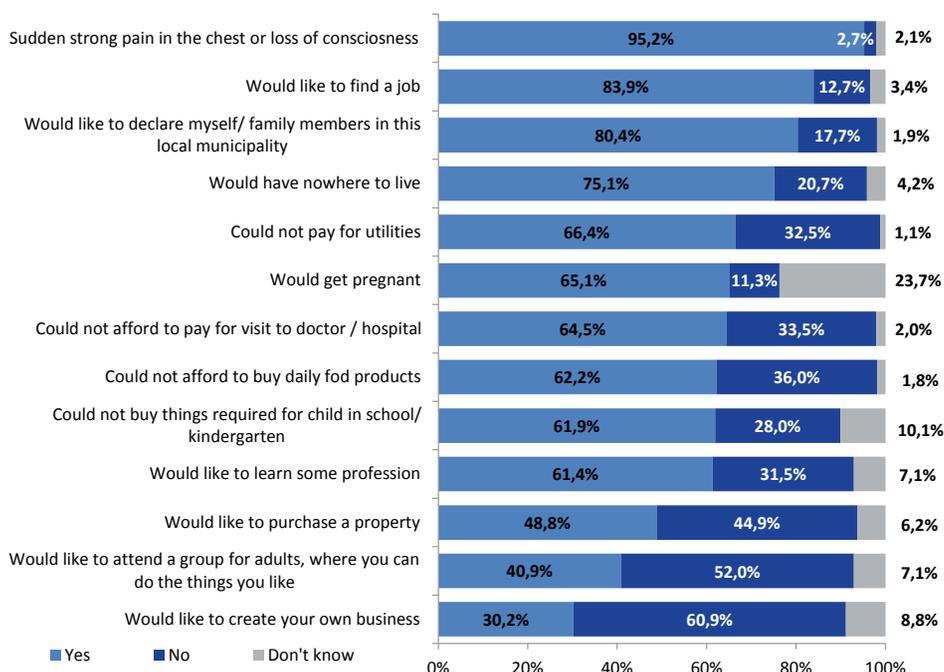
/ 2. Awareness about the services

One of the preconditions for using public services and ensuring access to them is population awareness and understanding the granting procedure. The research results reveal that **on the whole Roma are informed where to apply for assistance** in different life situations related to education, employment, health care and housing.

The quantitative survey analysis reveals that Roma are well-informed where to seek assistance in everyday life situations, for example, in case of serious health problems such as sudden severe pain in the chest or loss of consciousness (95,2%), the need to find a job (83,9%) or solving housing problems (e.g. wish to declare the place of residence (80,4%) or finding accommodation (75,1%)).

Figure 2.1. Would you know where to apply for assistance if you or your family members would face the following situation...?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

The awareness level concerning unusual situations in everyday life is average and these are situations affecting definite target groups, for example, families with children, young mothers or the unemployed. Almost two thirds of the interviewed Roma would

know where to seek assistance if the person herself or a family member became pregnant (65,1%) or would not be able to pay for health care services (64,5%), slightly more than three fifth – if they could not buy daily foodstuffs (62,2%) or the things a child needs at school or kindergarten (61,9%). However, it should be pointed out that there is a comparatively low awareness level about activities the implementation of which requires self-initiative or entrepreneurship – only 30,2% of the interviewed Roma would know where to seek assistance if they wanted to establish an enterprise, 40,9% – in case they wanted to join an adult hobby-group, less than half (48,8%) – in case they wanted to purchase property.

The interviewed public sector representatives confirm that **Roma are mostly well-informed about different material support provided by the state and NGOs** – social benefits and different material aid, for example, the possibility to receive packs of food and hygiene items and humanitarian aid (clothing). Several interviewed experts (altogether 11) pointed out that quite often *“Roma are even better informed about the available support than other people”* (Social worker in Kurzeme region). Seven interviewed representatives of municipality Social Services stated that Roma differ from other ethnic groups in respect that they come themselves and show interest in the possibility to receive some form of aid if only they have heard of such an opportunity – *“They know what they are eligible to. And if they don’t know they will ask for ten times while they learn about it”*. (Social worker in Latgale region). A Social Services worker in Kurzeme region stated that *“maybe he even doesn’t need any aid, but knowing what can be got he will come for it only because he is eligible”*. Roma have well-developed reciprocal communication, and information usually spreads by word of mouth. A great part of the interviewed experts pointed out that information about different kinds of aid provided by municipalities and organizations spreads very quickly within the Roma community:

“Roma represent a nation which has its own “radio” – if one learns anything about benefits, others will come and ask about it. Information spreads like wildfire!” (Social worker in Latgale region).

“It is a nation which communicates among themselves, and, thus, they are informed. It spreads very quickly by word of mouth. (Municipality employee in Pierīga region).

“They are well-informed about the services. [...] For example, they know about free apartments and which will be vacated. They know about it even before us who died and where anything will take place. They know about everything themselves. They are on the move and always ask me if they need anything.” (Housing expert in Zemgale region.)

Nevertheless, the specialists turn attention to the following – though Roma are well-informed about different available aid on the whole, still their **understanding of the procedure for receiving it is superficial, namely, Roma know that they are eligible to some benefit but they are not informed about the required documentation and**

formalities to get it. It can be explained by the relatively low education level and even illiteracy that hampers the use of written information as well as encumbers communication with the public sector employees and comprehension of the information that is explained to them. As Social Services provide different kind of social assistance, these are Social Services workers who come across it most often:

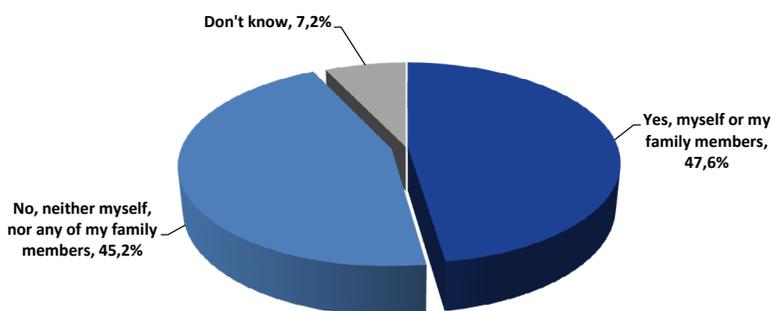
“It is difficult with Roma. There are some who even don’t understand to which room he should go as he can’t read the door sign. Then we draw a scheme and try to explain where he should go and what to do.” (Social Services worker in Kurzeme region).

“Most of our clients can’t read the documents. It’s great, if they can sign them. Sometimes children accompany them so that they can help. We try to be understanding, we explain everything in simple words. But it takes much effort as the level of understanding is limited.” (Social Services worker in Kurzeme region).

Though comprehensible information is considered an essential indicator of communication quality of state and municipal institutions, the quantitative survey data confirm that the complicated language used by employees of public institutions is a serious barrier for receiving assistance – almost half (47.6%) of the interviewed Roma admitted that during the last three years either he or she or a family member **had experienced a situation when employees of public institutions did not inform them about social benefits (benefits, discounts, etc.) they are eligible to in understandable language.**

Figure 2.2. Have you or some of your family members, during the last 3 years, had experienced a situation when employees of public institutions did not inform Roma people about the social benefits (support, discounts etc.) in an easy and understandable language?

Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by “Latvian Facts” (2015)

Several essential differences among various socio-demographic groups are observed. Most often in a situation when employees of public institutions do not tell about social benefits (benefits, discounts, etc.) in understandable language are Roma who have

primary education up to grade 6 (56,4%) as well as respondents in the 30-39 age group (60,3%) and older than 50 years (54%). Differences are also observed among regions – more frequently than average in the above situation have been Roma in Zemgale (59,6%) and Latgale (54,8%) regions while easier and more understandable communication with employees of public institutions has been in Pierīga and Vidzeme regions (respectively 39,5% and 39,7% of the interviewed Roma faced a situation when information was not communicated in an understandable way).

Roma participants in focus group discussions also pointed out some cases when employees of public institutions or Social Services workers had presented information in a way that was not comprehensible to them:

“Well, as if the worker told me what I should do. But, you know, I didn’t understand much about all these papers. What do I know what I signed!” (Focus group discussion in Dobele).

“I wanted to be registered for queuing up for an apartment. Went to the Office to speak. When I went next time, they told me that these were not the proper documents. So, I went there several times before it was accepted. It was difficult. The workers were not eager to explain to me and help.” (Focus group discussion in Daugavpils).

Roma prefer direct contacts in communication with municipality employees. It is largely due to limited means of indirect communication – partial accessibility to the Internet and telephone communication as well as lack of e-skills. The quantitative survey results reveal that 12,5% of the respondents have no access to a mobile phone with an active SMS card (for making calls) and more than one third have no access to a computer (33,6%) and the Internet (34,7%) either at home or anywhere else (at friends’ place, at the working place, library, etc.).

Figure 2.3. Do you have access to... ?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



*Respondents could mention several answers, that's why total number of answers >100%

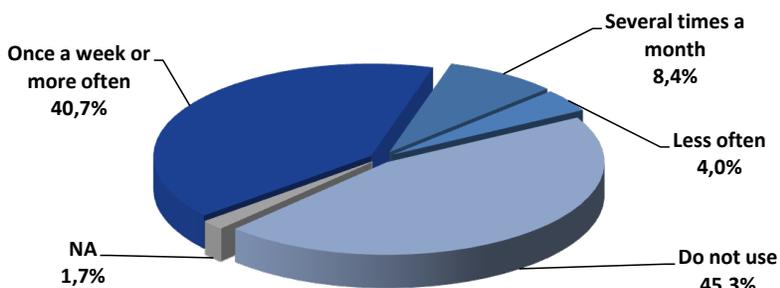
Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by “Latvian Facts” (2015)

Nevertheless, the analysis of the quantitative survey results about the habits of the Internet use leads to the conclusion that the intensity of its usage is lower and it is used rarer than accessible – answering to the question “How often do you use the Internet?” **almost half (45,3%) of the interviewed Roma stated that they do not use the Internet**, 40,7% use it once a week or more often, 8,4% – several times a month and 4% - even less frequently.

It should be noted that on the average the Internet is used less frequently or not used at all by women, Roma with very low income (up to EUR 60 per family member) and primary education up to from 6. The data analysis reveals the following tendency – the older the Roma, the less he uses the Internet.

Figure 2.4. **How often do you use internet?**

(Base = all respondents; N=365)

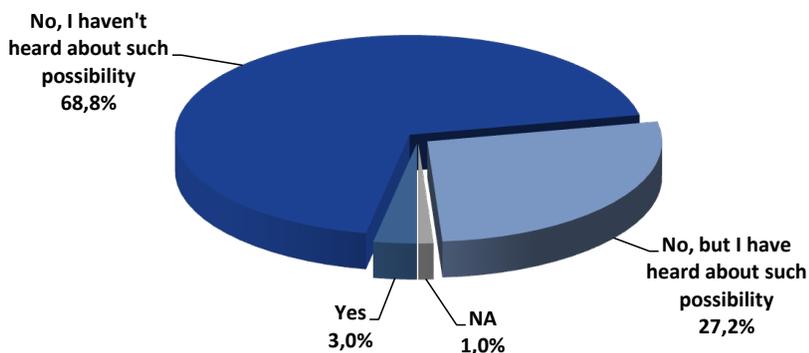


Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

The Roma awareness level regarding the available e-services is low – **only 3% of the Roma respondents had completed formalities remotely** by using the possibility to apply for services electronically in the unified state and municipality portal www.latvija.lv which has information about more than 1500 services provided by the state and municipalities. Moreover, 69,8% of the interviewed Roma had never heard of such a possibility.

Figure 2.5. **Have you ever used web site www.latvija.lv to apply for services electronically?**

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

Out of the Roma who had ever used the portal www.latvija.lv, three interviewed Roma had applied for studies at a university, two – for housing support, one respondent – for a place in a kindergarten, one – registered the payroll tax book, one – declared the place of residence and one – expressed the wish to live in a municipality maintained place. In the focus group discussions the participants mentioned that they were not informed about the possibility to complete formalities remotely and underlined that applying for services that way was of no great relevance for them. Mainly it was attributed to the lack of computer skills as well as limited access to information technologies (computers, the Internet). Several Roma considered the main reason to be the complicated use of technological means:

“They tried to show me in the Service, but it is too complicated for me. It was really difficult to understand.” (Focus group discussion in Tukums.)

Five participants in focus groups pointed out that such remote communication with institutions seemed strange and they underlined the need for personal contacts:

“We better go there – discuss everything and then understand. Everything is told to us. I am not going to mess with these computers.” (Focus group discussion in Kraslava.)

“If I need anything, I go to the Service. They tell me everything. The girls are kind there, they always help.” (Focus group discussion in Tukums.)

The interviewed public sector employees also spoke about the need for direct communication with Roma population, underlining that Roma live in a closed community and the confidence level between the organiser of their life and the community as well as empathy in relationships is vital:

“They don’t confide in others, only in their own people. Therefore, to learn anything from them demands much effort. They don’t speak about their traditions, family. If you want to know more, you have to earn trust of one of their people. They have strong “community” feeling – we, Latvians, don’t have it.” (Social worker in Kurzeme region.)

“I have learned to find common language with them. It is important for successful cooperation [...] To cooperate successfully you must speak at their level.” (Social Services worker in Latgale region.)

Several research projects implemented up to now in Europe and Latvia testify to the vital importance of local Roma community authorities in organizing their life. These are individuals whom Roma trust and who quite often help in solving problem situations and with completing formalities. The fact whether Roma in Latvia have such local leaders and whether, in their opinion, they are needed is revealed by the quantitative survey results – almost for two fifth (38,1%) of the respondents there are people in their neighbourhood who organize their life and to whom they may turn to for help; mostly these are people from among Roma themselves – leaders of the community

or mediators (25,8%), less frequently the organizers of their life are Latvians or people of another nationality (11,6%). However, **more than half (55,8%) stated that in their neighbourhood there were no such people who organized the life of Roma and to whom they might turn for advice in problem situations** – a great part of them admitted that they feel a need for such a person (55,4%).

Figure 2.6. Is there a person in your neighbourhood - one or more, who organizes the life of Roma and to whom you might turn for advice in a situation if you needed any help?
(Base = all respondents; N=365)

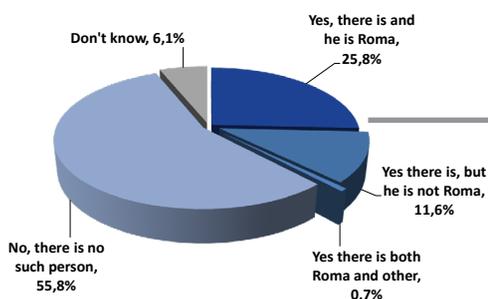
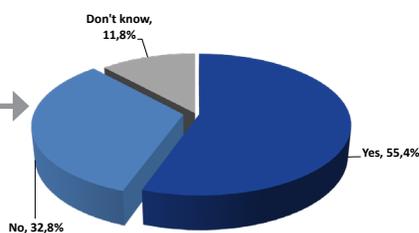


Figure 2.7. Would you need a person - who organizes the life of Roma and to whom you might turn for advice in a situation if you needed any help?
(Base = respondents, who don't have such person; N=226)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by “Latvian Facts” (2015)

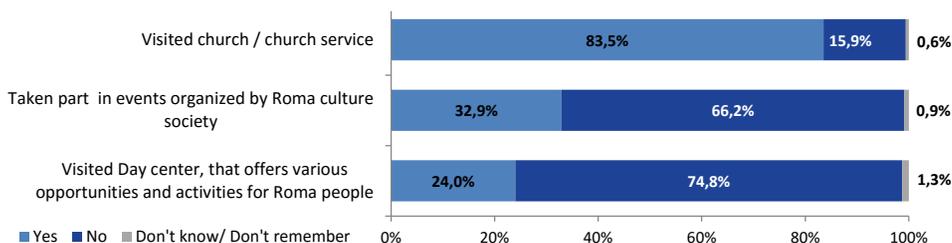
The interviews with experts in different areas confirm that a local authority – a confidant – plays an important role in organizing the life of Roma. The interviewed experts from Jelgava, Valmiera and Daugavpils and also from other municipalities and ministries assessed positively the initiative implemented by the association “Centre for Initiatives in Education”, namely, on Roma mediator activities, underlying their contribution into the area of education as well as to solving different social issues and improving communication with public institutions. It should be noted that the result of Roma mediator activities and organization of life in the neighbourhood largely depends upon successful cooperation with the responsible municipality employees. Though 14 Latvian municipalities have joined the Regional Expert (Municipality) Network developed by the Ministry of Culture since 2014, during the in-depth interviews the researchers came to the conclusion that in part of the municipalities there is superficial and formal understanding about the actual problems of Roma which is largely due to the lack of interest in improving the Roma situation and lack of positive mutual sharing of experience.

Awareness raising about different public services and spreading of information can be ensured not only by those institutions which provide services and support in problem solving, but also by different organizations, for example, associations, societies, NGOs,

religious organizations. Participation in the activities of these organizations give an opportunity to receive different information in formal and informal way about the services and support provided by municipalities and organizations. The quantitative survey results reveal that **Roma find it more essential to participate in religious rituals and they are far less interested in attending activities organized by the societies of the Roma community and Day Centres.**

Figure 2.8. During the last 3 years, have you personally ...?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

The research shows that church plays an essential part in the life of Roma and the formation of their life perception – during the last three years the greatest part (83,5%) of the interviewed Roma have attended service or been at church; mostly these are the Roma who reside in Pieriga (92,2%) and Vidzeme (88%) regions. In the interviews several of the public sector employees (altogether 8) also stressed the role of church and religious belief by stating *“that Roma are very religious and priest is their greatest authority”*. (Public sector employee in Kurzeme region.) Consequently, priest may be regarded as a potential information provider about different available services and support as well as the person who builds understanding and forms attitude towards separate issues of education, employment, health care and housing. Thus, it may be recommended to the employees of public sector and municipalities to develop closer links with the representatives of the local religious organizations (priests) regarding different problem solving issues.

Roma are less eager to participate in different activities, organized especially for them. According to the quantitative survey results, during the last three years one fourth (24%) of the interviewed Roma visited Day Centres which offer different opportunities and activities to Roma, while 32,9% of the interviewed participated in the activities of Roma culture societies. The Roma of Pieriga region and adolescents of 15-19 years were more active participants in these events. It may be accounted for by the role of Jurmala Day Centre and the positive impact it has upon the local Roma community as well as by higher social activity of young people as a socio-demographic group. The Roma of

Vidzeme region were less active – during the last three years only 3% of the interviewed Roma visited Day Centres and 16,9% participated in the activities of Roma culture societies. The above situation may be accounted for by insufficient number of Day Centres in the region and the likely inactivity of Roma themselves and their unwillingness to attend Day Centres and cultural events.

Samples of best practice

Project “*Integration incubator to support Roma children and youth*” implemented by “Centre for education initiatives” has trained **10 Roma mediators** in 4 regions of Latvia (Kurzeme, Zemgale, Latgale, Vidzeme) **to promote link and cooperation between Roma community and various municipal and state institutions** as well as local community. Project was implemented with financial support of European Economic Area (EEA) grant for two years (2013 to 2015), and involved municipalities of Daugavpils, Jelgava and Valmiera towns as well as municipality of Talsi region. Both by evaluation of the results of the project done by “Centre for Education Initiatives”, and **positive opinion about Roma mediators** expressed by experts surveyed in the research confirmed effectiveness of the project: cooperation of Roma families and education institutions had been advanced in the area of education and involvement of the families in the education of children had increased, changes had been achieved in the social sphere, help had been provided for members of the Roma community in receiving social aid and solving of other social issues, as well as help in solving of issues associated with housing and employment and support with healthcare.

Significant step towards the integration of Roma was made by Ministry of Culture which in 2014 created network of the Regional (municipal) experts, involving specialists from 14 municipalities (Daugavpils, Jelgava, Jekabpils, Jurmala, Riga, Valmiera, Ventspils, Dobeles region, Kandava region, Limbazi region, Madona region, Rujiena region, Talsi region and Tukums region). Basic activities of the expert network are aimed to promote and facilitate regular exchange of information and experience among specialists of the municipalities responsible for integration of Roma, as well as to build up cooperation between Ministry of Culture, municipal institutions and Roma community to implement Roma integration policy more efficiently.

Having encountered Roma, who is illiterate or have poor reading and writing skills, an employee of the Sabile social service always reads aloud document that has been drawn up to make sure that her Roma client has understood contents of the document and agrees with them, as well as to avoid possible further manipulations by the client. This form of communication has developed into closer trust between Roma and representatives of the social service.

Recommendations for raising awareness

/ Recommendations for the Ministry of Culture

Taking into account the positive influence of the Roma mediators on various issues associated with the employment, education and housing as well as on the solving of social issues of Roma, it is necessary, using the sources of finances available for state or municipalities (state budget, EU funds), to find funding for further work of the existing Roma mediators in Valmiera, Jelgava and Daugavpils, improvement of the work of mediators in Talsi and for providing Roma mediator in Riga, as well as, where necessary, to increase number of the mediators in the regions of Latvia. Being from Roma community need not be put forward as compulsory requirement during the recruitment of the mediators, however it is necessary to identify persons trusted by majority of the Roma community living in the respective municipality, persons who are able to establish relations both with the community and municipal institutions. It is recommended to develop training of the new mediators together with the experts of the Regional networks and in cooperation with the existing Roma mediators.

It is recommended to proceed with the education of the representatives included in the network of the Regional (municipality) experts and awareness raising on the issues of Roma integration, as well as promote regular exchange of information and popularisation of the best practice and initiatives among municipalities in Latvia. It is recommended during the development of the expert network to identify those persons, who are familiar with the local situation of the Roma inhabitants and to replenish the network of the Regional experts with representatives from other municipalities, like Preili and Vilaka.

/ Recommendations for local municipalities

It is recommended to local municipality employees when communicating with Roma community representatives on solving their social issues, to apply principle “we are similar”, namely, communication and circulation of information will be more efficient if it is provided in an easy understandable manner.

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States (2013/C 378/01) (9 December 2013) Section 2.9: **“Where appropriate to local approaches to integration, promote the training and employment of qualified mediators dedicated to Roma and use mediation as one of the measures to tackle the inequalities Roma face in terms of access to quality education, employment, healthcare and housing”.**

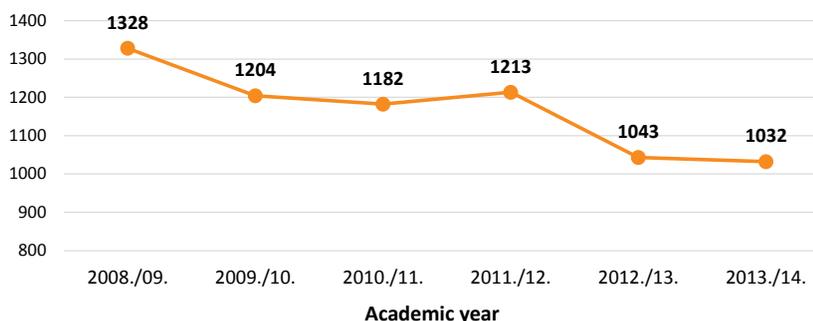
/ 3. Education

Successful integration into modern society is determined not only by social but also cognitive skills based on experience and knowledge. Education can be considered one of the most significant preconditions in acquiring these processes. In Latvia, the low education level of the Roma is a topical problem for several decades. Despite the fact that a lot of programmes, development plans and other Roma support initiatives have been worked out, real measures are necessary to implement not only the Roma children's but also adults' rights to qualitative education.

3.1. Characterization of the situation in education and attitude towards acquiring education

The data of monitoring, done by the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and comprise a summary of the information provided by all municipalities, reveal that **the number of Roma who should attend school fluctuates since the school year 2008/2009, however, the general tendency is towards decrease in the number of Roma pupils at general-education establishments.** It cannot be asserted that Roma have started to avoid attending school on mass scale as the CSB data show general decrease of population (Roma including) in the country⁹. Besides, as an additional influencing factor may be regarded the intensive emigration¹⁰ because Roma of different age groups leave Latvia like people of any other nationality. The MoES monitoring data reveal that 1032 Roma children attended 140 general-education establishments in the school year 2013/2014. The dynamics of changes in the number of Roma pupils is given in Figure 3.1.1.

Figure 3.1.1. Number of Roma pupils in educational institutions



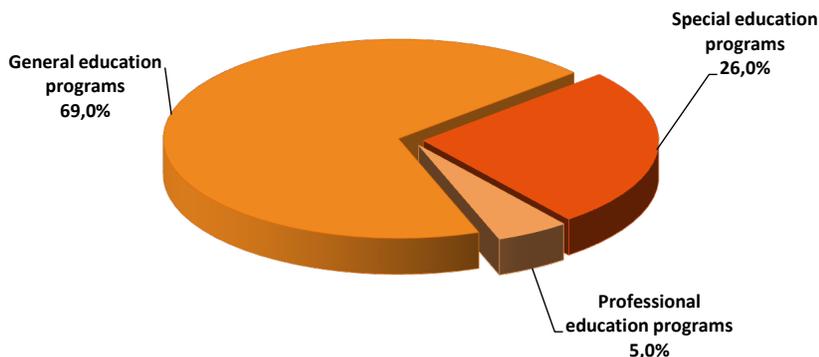
Source: MoES (2015)

⁹Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. (2015). *Population change and influencing factors*. Retrieved 14.09.2015. from: http://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/nr_11_demografija_2015_15_00_lv_en.pdf

¹⁰ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. (2015). *Long-term international migration*. Retrieved 14. 09. 2015. from: http://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/nr_11_demografija_2015_15_00_lv_en.pdf

In the school year 2013/2014 most or 69% of Roma pupils studied according to the programme of general education which consists of three stages – pre-school education, primary education and general secondary education.¹¹ According to special education programmes developed for children with special needs and which is an adaptation of general and vocational programmes 26% of Roma children were trained. Besides, 5% attended vocational schools, acquiring different professional skills (see Figure 3.1.2.).

Figure 3.1.2. Number of Roma pupils in 2013/2014 academic year



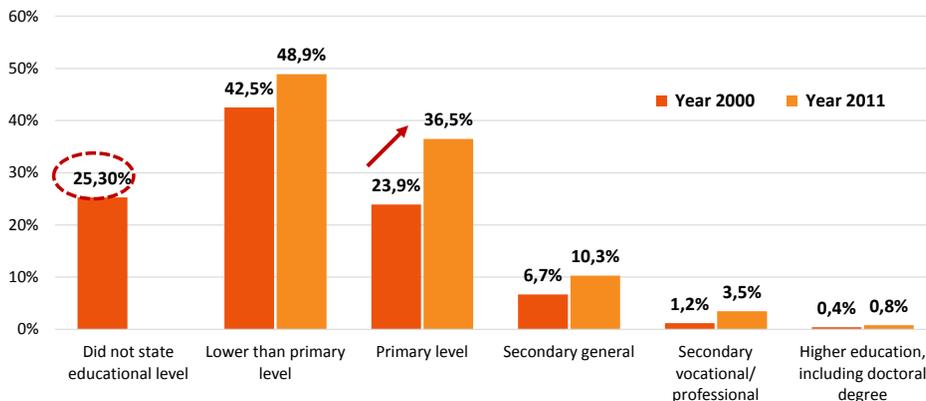
Source: MoES (2015)

Comparing the 2000 and 2011 Census data (see Figure 3.1.3.) an improvement in the Roma education level can be observed – **in 2011 primary education as the highest acquired level was indicated by 12.6% more than in 2000.** The number of Roma with general secondary education had increased by 3,6%, vocational secondary or vocational education – by 2,3%. The number of Roma with higher education had inconsiderable increase – 0,4%, however, even that is to be evaluated positively. Increase by 6,4% can also be observed of Roma who stated their education level to be lower than primary. Nevertheless, these data cannot have an unambiguous evaluation as 25,3% did not indicate their education level in 2000 (a safe assumption can be made that part of those who did not indicate it had lower than primary level of education).¹²

¹¹ National Centre for Education. (2015). *Mācību priekšmetu standarti*. Retrieved 04.09.2015. from: <http://visc.gov.lv/vispizglitiba/saturs/standarti.shtml>

¹² The calculation was done on the following basis: Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. (2015). *Permanent residents of Latvia of 15 years and older according to the statistical regions, cities (towns) and regions depending on the education level successfully acquired, nationality, gender and age groups as of 1 March, 2011*. Retrieved 04.09.2015. from: http://data.csb.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/tautassk_11/tautassk_11__tsk2011/TSG11-19.px/?rxid=cdbc978c-22b0-416a-aacc-aa650d3e2ce0

Figure 3.1.3 Roma education level comparison (year 2000 and 2011)

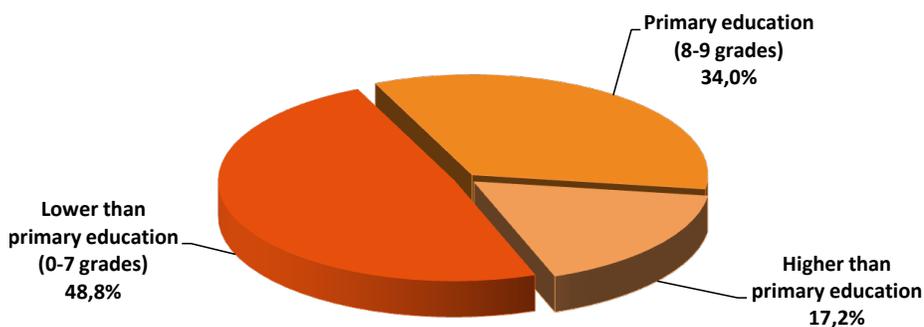


Source: CSB (2015)

The survey results confirm the 2011 Census data: the education level of almost half or 48,8% of the interviewed Roma is lower than primary, slightly more than one third (34%) have primary education, while higher than primary education – only 17,2% (see Figure 3.1.4.).

Figure 3.1.4. What is your education level?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)

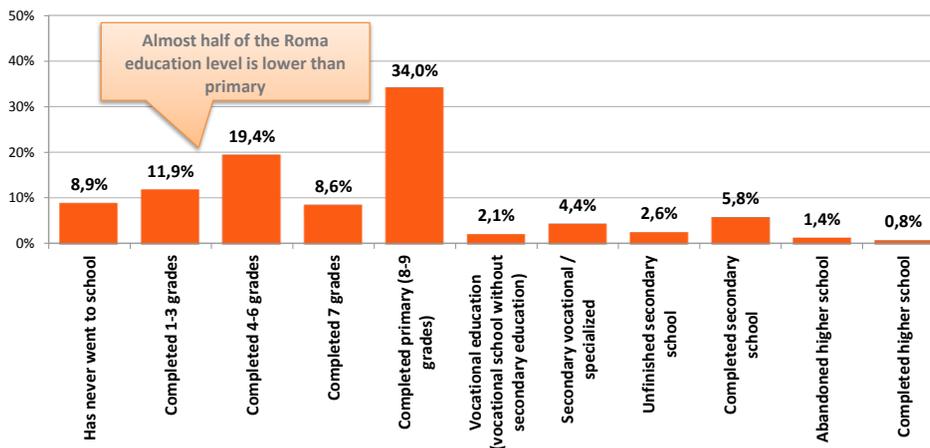


Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

Detailed analysis of Roma education level reveals that 8,9% of the respondents never attended school, slightly more than one tenth (11,9%) indicated that their education is the first three grades at primary school and one fifth (19,4%) finished grades 4-6 (see Figure 3.1.5.).

Figure 3.1.5. What is your education level?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

Taking into account that 8,9% of the respondents never attended school and 39,9% left school at different stages of primary education (among them almost one third (31,3%) before reaching form 7), there are grounds for the assumption that **the education level of almost half of the Roma residing in Latvia does not meet the MoES requirement of compulsory primary education**. This fact directly influences Roma opportunities of employment, vocational education and attending courses of further education as people with education level lower than grade 7 are practically excluded from further acquiring vocational skills because the State Employment Agency does not accept for training people with such a low education level.

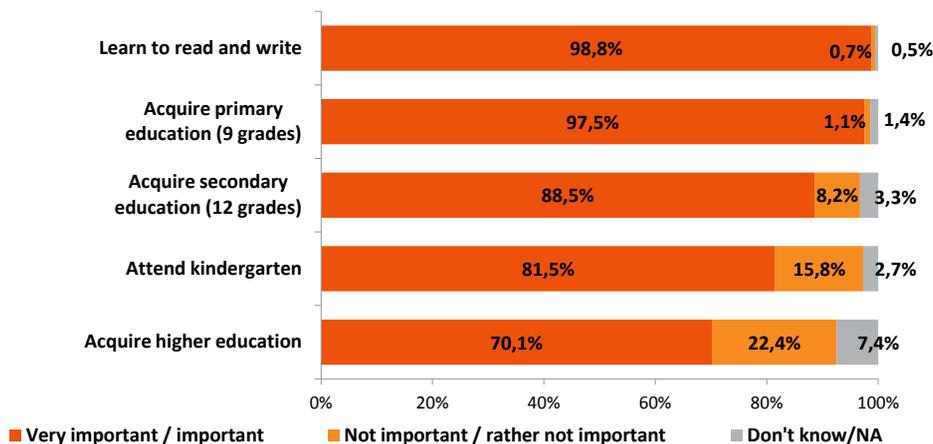
The research data allow assuming that **illiteracy, especially among older people, is not a rare problem of chance character in the Roma community in Latvia**. The fact that the national education system treats this problem as not topical enough and the programmes of teaching reading and writing skills to adults have not been implemented sufficiently enough can be explained by the relatively small ratio of Roma inhabitants in municipalities as well as by social exclusion and withdrawal on the part of Roma themselves (i.e. in problem situations that require literacy, other family or community members are involved and therefore illiteracy of the respective person might pass unnoticed or remain in the background, and after solving of the problem the fact is not registered and, thus, accurate data are missing). Schools have had to tackle situations

when parents are not able to write an application; also there are cases when young Roma do not acquire reading and/or writing skills at school due to lack of motivation.

Nevertheless, the attitude of Roma towards literacy can be assessed positively – **98,8% of the interviewed admitted that it is important for them that their children are literate.**

Figure 3.1.6. Thinking about education level of your children and grandchildren, do you think it is important, that they...?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

The research results reveal a positive change in the Roma attitude as regards acquiring education at other levels as well. Almost as many (**97,5%**) consider that **acquiring primary education is important for their children.** It is vital that the greatest part (81,5%) is also aware of the importance of going to kindergarten for further effective acquiring of education, including learning the Latvian language. Acquiring of secondary and higher education is considered important enough (88,5% consider secondary education important, 70,1% - higher education). However, opinions voiced in the focus groups testify to the view of primary education as a necessity, while secondary and higher education as desirable (in case a child has the appropriate abilities and wish):

"It's important that children finish those 9 forms and have some profession. If they decide to go on with learning further, I'll, of course, be glad. But they themselves will decide. Who would not like their child to be either a doctor or teacher?" (Focus group discussion in Tukums.)

"Primary education is needed by all means. You can't do without education today – no work, no money. It is compulsory – to know how to read and write, to have some skills, so that you can live comfortably later on. As to a university – let them decide themselves –

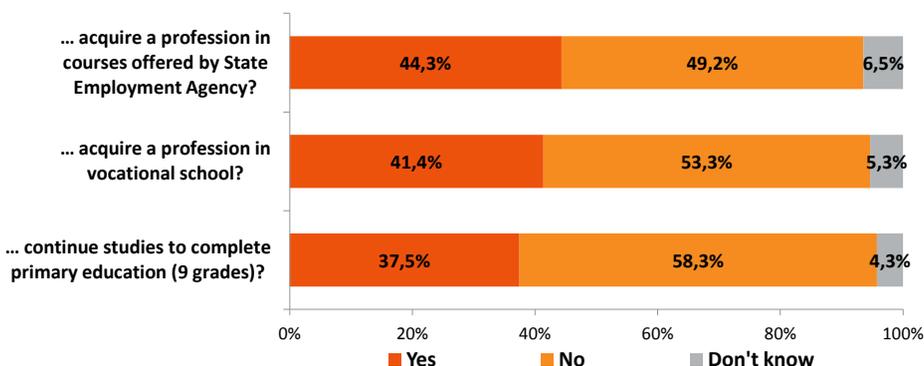
whether they want it and are capable. It's not for us to decide; let them think for themselves." (Focus group discussion in Daugavpils.)

"You know, formerly it was really so that Roma didn't attend school, but now all the children I know go to school. And it's good! If I could choose I should have been more diligent at school, at least I would have some document now that will let me start something. [...] Children must learn and get a document for finishing at least form 9." (Focus group discussion in Dobele.)

The quantitative survey results also reveal the wish of Roma to acquire education – 37,5% of the respondents with lower education level than primary would like to complete primary education, 41,1% would like to acquire skills at vocational school, while 44,3% - to attend SEA courses (see Figure 3.1.7.).

Figure 3.1.7. **Would you currently like to... ?**

(Base = respondents, with lower than primary education; N=178)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

Though the research results reveal a positive change in the Roma attitude to the need of acquiring education, the statistical data show that still the general education level of Roma is low and the rate of early school leaving is high. The reasons of it for each stage of education are discussed in the following subsections by summarising the available statistical data, the recorded responses of the interviewed experts and Roma themselves.

3.2. Accessibility to general and vocational education

Access to general education is discussed at four levels – pre-school education, primary education, secondary education and vocational education. Barriers to access in each of them are analysed.

Pre-school education

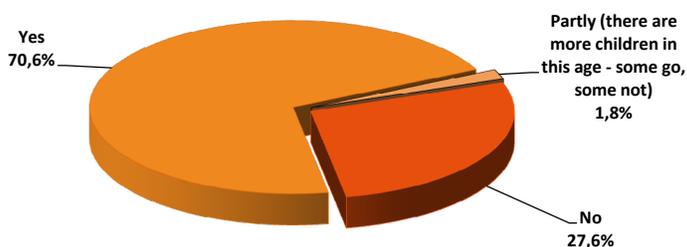
In Latvia today there are no available accurate data about the total number of Roma children in pre-school educational establishments. According to the MoES information, the compulsory programme for children starting from five years of age to prepare them for attending primary school was acquired by 77 Roma children in the school year 2013/2014 (it makes 7,6% of the total number of the school-age group of Roma children). No information about Roma children who acquire not only the compulsory pre-school education but also go to kindergarten up to the age of five does not allow evaluating the dynamics of attendance, creating a need for a **systematic and regular summarizing of information to reflect accurately the efforts of municipalities concerning the attendance of Roma children of pre-school educational establishments which consequently would help to react more efficiently to the needs of Roma children**. In long-term such information might serve as a basis for conclusions about the contribution of kindergartens for further acquiring of education, and thus to learn whether the skills acquired at pre-school level foster more successful integration in the study processes.

Most of the interviewed education experts (altogether 24) point out essential positive differences in the behaviour of those Roma children who have attended kindergarten – they have a lower barrier as to the Latvian language, higher level of general development and readiness to start primary education. Moreover, in the in-depth interviews almost all education experts underlined the importance of pre-school education by stating that pre-school education forms the basis for successful further education: *“It should be started from the very basis, from kindergartens. If the education level increases, then probably this generation might change.”* (Education expert in Latgale region.)

The survey results show the following – though **most of the interviewed Roma (81,5%) find it important that their children and grandchildren go to kindergarten, they are not always taking them there** – slightly more than two thirds (70,6%) of the respondents’ children of 3 to 7 years of age attend kindergarten.

Figure 3.2.1. Is your child (or children), who is between 3 and 7 years old, currently attending kindergarten?

(Base = respondents with children aged 3 to 7 years old; N = 110)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

The interviewed education experts see a number of influencing factors why Roma children do not attend pre-school educational establishments or attend less than children of other nationalities:

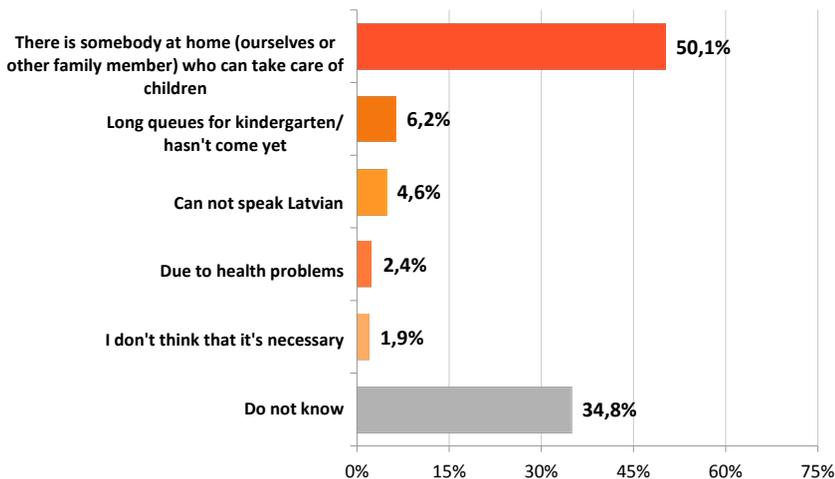
“It is not so simple with Roma children. Roma have not got used to it that a child must go to kindergarten, they haven’t got such a tradition and don’t see the need for it. A great part does not work and therefore look after their children at home. But most of them even can’t afford to send them to kindergarten as they have no money to pay for meals there, clothes and other things they need there.” (Municipality employee from Kurzeme region.)

“Not all parents send their children to kindergarten. I know several families with children of pre-school age, but they are not registered at any pre-school educational establishment. It is very likely that the parents themselves didn’t attend kindergarten or simply don’t see the need for it.” (Education expert in Kurzeme region.)

The quantitative survey results give a detailed insight into the problem of Roma children not attending pre-school educational establishments. According to the survey data slightly more than half or 50% of the Roma with children of 3 to 7 years of age do not consider it important to send a child to kindergarten as they spend the day together doing household chores and looking after their children themselves (see Figure 3.2.2.). It was also stressed that *“Roma males consider it a responsibility of mother to bring up children of such age at home and instil in them the Roma traditions and language.”* (Education expert in Zemgale region.)

Figure 3.2.2. Why your child (children) does not attend kindergarten / isn’t placed in kindergarten?

(Base = respondents with children aged 3 to 7 years old, who do not attend kindergarten; N = 32)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by “Latvian Facts” (2015)

As the second reason for not attending kindergarten Roma most often mentioned the long waiting lists (6,2%). It is a national problem encumbering access to pre-school education. The language barrier was given as the third reason – stated by 4.6% of the Roma respondents with children of the respective age. This research reflects the actual situation in Roma families where **everyday communication for 87,5% is in their own language, and only 6,7% communicate in Latvian and 5,8% - in Russian**. It allows assuming that it is exactly not knowing the Latvian language that hampers Roma children to feel comfortable in a new environment and acquiring new knowledge which is necessary for starting primary education. The language barrier as a vital encumbrance is also mentioned by a participant in a focus group discussion:

“I would really like it that my granddaughter goes to kindergarten, but she would understand nothing there and won't feel well as she knows only our language, neither Latvian nor Russian.” (Focus group discussion in Kraslava.)

The interviewed experts of different areas (altogether 23) pointed out that a positive effect upon the reasons why Roma children do not attend pre-school educational establishments might be the employment of Roma teacher-assistants. Their work is considered to be especially significant in the pre-school period and in the municipalities with high ratio of Roma inhabitants. The Roma teacher-assistant knows the Roma language and helps with communication between the teacher and the child during the adaptation period. The importance of this person to be a confidant is stressed as *“Roma are very cautious on issues relating to children upbringing.”* (Education expert in Vidzeme region.) It means that a Roma teacher-assistant in a pre-school educational establishment needs to know about the peculiarities of Roma culture.

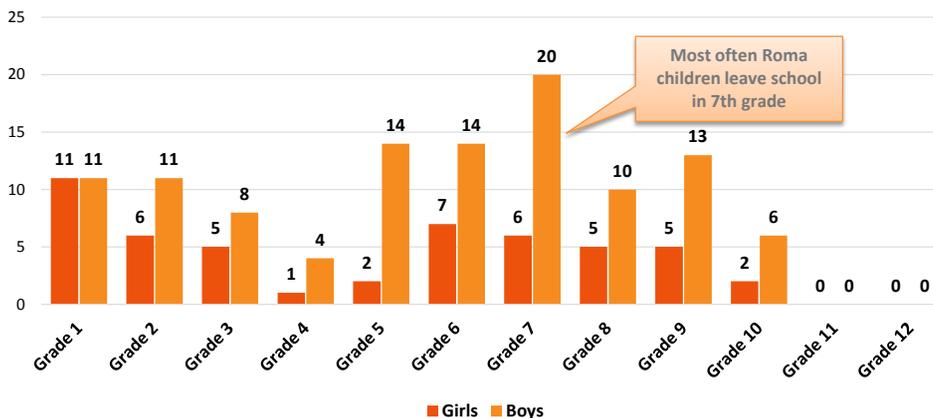
To inform parents about the importance and opportunities of pre-school education (the compulsory acquiring of pre-school education in kindergartens and schools), some of the interviewed education experts (altogether 3) underlined the need to open special consultative centres. The employees of these centres would identify the parents of children potentially attending pre-school educational establishments and give them the latest information.

Primary education

Though most of the interviewed Roma (97,5%) admitted that it was important for them that their children acquire primary education, in reality the children are reluctant to go to school. The latest available MoES data show that in the school year 2012/2013 there were 15,9% Roma children who dropped out of school without completing primary education – the greatest number from grade 7 (6 girls and 20 boys); a great number of dropouts are already from grade 1 (11 boys and as many girls); also in grade 6 there is quite a big number of dropouts (7 girls and 14 boys). A positive tendency is observed at the level of secondary education as there are no dropouts from forms 11

and 12; it allows assuming that educational establishments pay a special attention that Roma children graduate from secondary school. The reasons for early school leaving are various, but very often they are linked with the socio-economic conditions, low performance, attraction of the labour market (the wish to start working), the family emigration abroad in search of employment, early marriage, adolescent pregnancy and the lack of inner motivation.

Figure 3.2.3. Number of education leavers of Roma pupils in school year 2012/2013(15,9%)



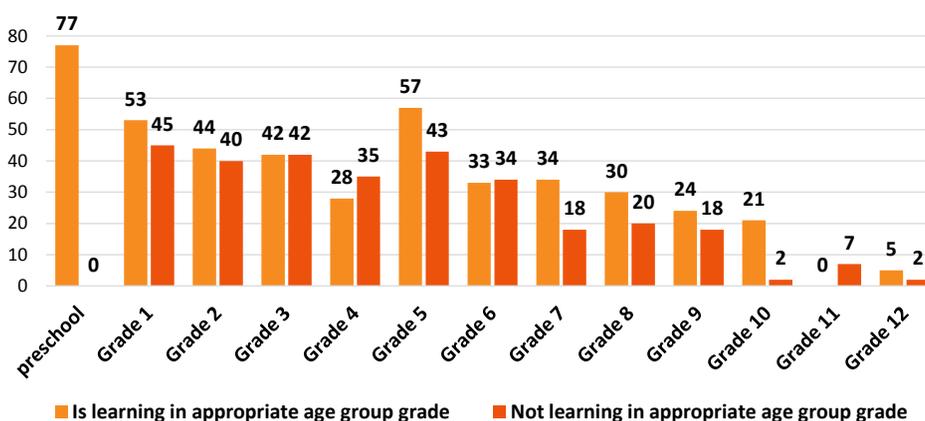
Source: MoES (2015)

In 2014 the Baltic Institute of Social Sciences carried out a research about the reasons of early school leaving and risks of adolescents of 13 to 18 years of age.¹³ The research data reveal that in the school year 2013/2014 out of all identified youth-dropouts 1,1% was Roma. Early school leaving among Roma is also topical in the period when different programmes and events for improving the education system and further education are implemented (support personnel, municipal support etc.), therefore this issue needs a complex approach, taking into account the most often mentioned reasons – insufficient involvement of parents and monitoring of the learning process of their children, low performance at school, possible emigration – and the requirement to acquire compulsory education up to the age of 18 years. To solve the problem that affects young people of all nationalities of 13 to 18 years of age, within the framework of the EU Investment Fund 2014–2020 there is to be developed the project “Support to Reducing Early School Leaving” which is to be implemented by the year 2022. It envisages involving all municipalities by working in two directions – compensating and preventing, thus eliminating the encumbering financial factors (catering, transport, accommodation, lack of scholarships) and on the whole reducing early school leaving and the low level of education.

¹³ Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. (2014). *Pētījums par priekšlaicīgas mācību pamešanas iemesliem un riskiem jauniešiem vecumā no 13 līdz 18 gadiem*. Retrieved 08.09.2015. from: <http://www.izm.gov.lv/images/statistika/petijumi/41.pdf>

In addition to early school leaving there is another vital factor as regards accessibility to primary education – at school Roma children are in forms that are not appropriate for their age. The available MoES data show that 250 Roma children were in forms not appropriate for their age in the school year 2013/2014. A negative tendency starts already in grade 1, and in grades 4 and 6 most of Roma children did not correspond to the appropriate age group (see Figure 3.2.4.). Studying in grades which do not correspond to the appropriate age creates the risk of early school leaving without completing primary education.

Figure 3.2.4. Number of Roma pupils in school year 2013/ 2014 who are learning in age group appropriate and inappropriate class



Source: MoES (2015)

Reasons for studying in forms which do not correspond to the appropriate age should be considered in their complexity with school leaving. Most often **it takes place at the age of 13-14, when most Roma adolescents start a family and decide to leave school; as additional reasons are also given moving abroad and changing the place of residence.** When reaching certain age, Roma pupils choose to leave school and start doing simple jobs that do not require a definite level of education. This is also the tradition of the Roma community:

“Both girls and boys start leaving school at 13-14 years of age. They fall in love and start planning their family which is one of the greatest treasures of Roma. Most girls leave school because of pregnancy. Boys fall in love and start a family and therefore many Roma pupils leave school.” (Education expert in Kurzeme region.)

“As soon as they [Roma girls] weigh 30 kilograms, that’s the end of it. They start preening and their mind is full of other things. Also boys’ eyes are shining. It’s in their nature, and school is left. They don’t consider it a priority—they need to marry and start working. Usually it is in form 6 or 7 when most of them leave.” (NGO representative in Pierīga region.)

The research data analysis shows a positive tendency – 99,4% of the interviewed Roma with children of 7 to 16 years of age stated that at present their children attend school. Also the interviewed experts of different areas concluded that there is **growth in the attendance of primary school by Roma children and in comparison with previous years – a reduction in the number of children who do not start attending school at all.** The reasons for growth in the number are the following:

- **Initiative of the school management.** At the beginning of the school year the school management identifies all the Roma families in its town/village and encourages them to start attending school. This activity is mostly spread in smaller local municipalities (e.g. Kandava, Sabile, Limbazi municipality, Kraslava, Valmiera). Thus, also those Roma children who under other conditions would not attend school get involved in the process.
- **The Roma teacher-assistant** ensures more successful integration of Roma children into the education system. Their task is to help Roma children to overcome difficulties created by being in a new cultural environment, to develop cooperation between the school and the family and to facilitate the inclusion of Roma children in a new social environment.¹⁴
- **Access to information about being absent from school** by municipality institutions reduces the number of cut classes. Since 2010 the State Education Quality Service monitors the cutting of classes as the Population Register is compared with the register of schools and each of 119 municipalities receives information about the difference in the number of children. The interviewed experts stated that due to the successful monitoring the attendance of schools by Roma children had improved. The Social Services also have access to this information and, thus, Roma children are monitored and being disciplined.
- In all municipalities **social pedagogues regularly survey home conditions.** Social Services workers and municipal police work with these children who cut classes as well. They also survey home conditions and explain the importance of acquiring full study programme and attendance of classes.

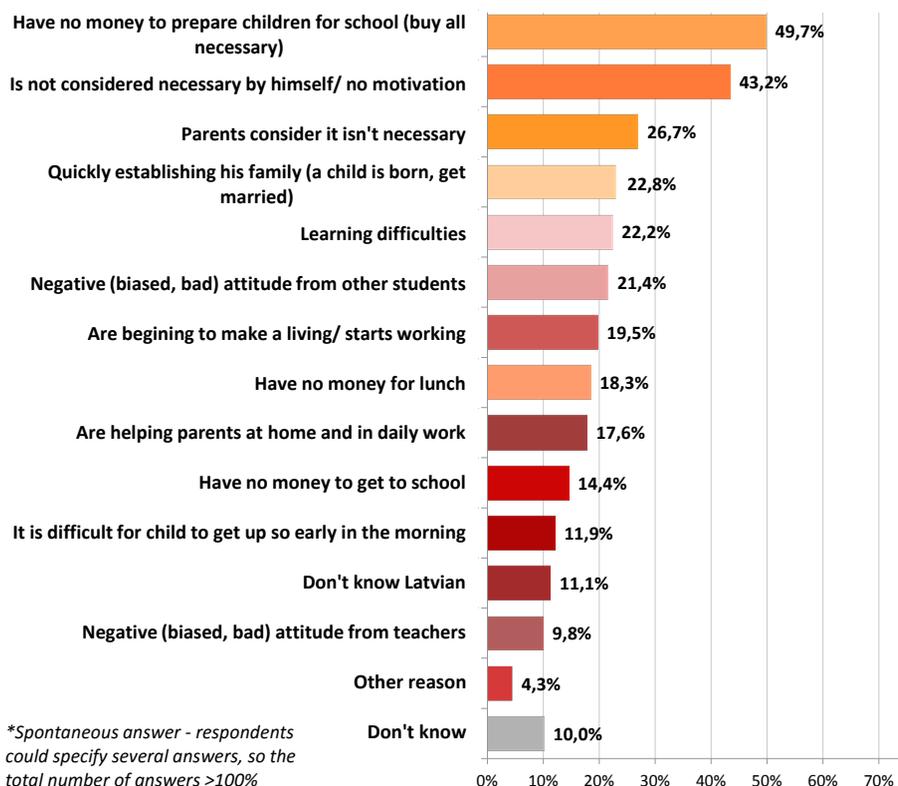
¹⁴ Society Integration Foundation. (2012). *Skolotāja palīgi – čigāni*. Retrieved 03.09.2015. from: http://www.iic.lv/_old_www/iic/lv/projekti/skola_sabiedriba_paligi.pdf

- **Parent initiative and interest** in their children performance at school and other out of class activities boost the determination of Roma children. During the last years school started to be attended also by those children whose parents have finished only some forms at school and are uncompetitive in the labour market. The quantitative survey data show that most of the respondents (97.5%) consider that acquiring primary education is very important. It allows concluding that parents are aware of their lack of education and in what way lack of education will influence the future of their children's life, for example, to find employment. So, the importance of education is explained to families.
- **Motivating and support events for Roma children and parents** are organized, for example, informing parents about the skills of their children in different areas. It is very important for parents that their children are commended for their skills. *"If a child is not good at math, it is important to stress his/her achievements, for example, in sports. Roma are very proud of their children and, therefore, it is important to develop and improve their skills,"* underlined experts from Dobele and Kalupe.
- **Intercultural study programmes** are available to teachers. They mostly are ensured and financed within the framework of different EU programmes and they also give an insight into the Roma culture, thus, widening the perception of teachers regarding the presentation of the study material. These programmes are available in all municipalities of Latvia, however, acquiring additional knowledge fully depends upon how much teachers themselves are interested in it as well as the initiative and financial possibilities of school management and municipalities to organize acquiring of these programmes on the spot or ensure the attendance in another municipality.

Nevertheless, alongside with the above improvements in primary education the system of primary education requires essential changes. To diminish the gap in acquiring education, the factors that encourage Roma children to either avoid attending school or leaving it early should be eliminated. The quantitative survey data reveal these reasons as well (see Figure 3.2.3.). According to the survey data half (49,7%) of the respondents pointed out as an essential factor for Roma children not attending school or leaving it early the financial conditions, stating that **Roma parents cannot afford to purchase everything their children need at school and prepare them for school** (see Figure 3.2.5.).

Figure 3.2.5. How do you think why Roma children are attending school LESS than non-Roma children/ leaving school without completing basic education?*

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

Self-motivation is also important in the process of acquiring education – 43,2% of the interviewed Roma mentioned that one of the important reasons for not attending school is the unwillingness of children themselves and lack of motivation. The interviewed education experts pay attention to it as well by stating that in motivation building a wide reflection of different positive examples is necessary both at schools and mass media and the difference between the education system levels and their mutual interaction should be explained to children (the fact that primary education is the basis for choosing further education):

"Positive example is needed; the child should see what the benefit of education is and what importance it has. Parents won't manage it as most of them have finished only some forms at primary school. The best way if Roma representatives, leaders of their community, do it as they have education and have achieved something in life. Such positive examples should be brought out and popularized not only at schools, but also in the TV and the press." (Education expert in Zemgale region.)

“If a boy has said that he won’t go to school, the mother has no say in it as the man is the main in a family. Therefore it’s very important to motivate the child, develop a conviction that it is necessary for him/her. It demands much explanation and developing an attitude as motivation does not come out of the blue – it has to be built gradually and it is formed by numerous trifles. Already in the first forms explaining should start in what way they’ll benefit from primary or secondary education, what each implies and what the importance is. There should be found motivation for each education level by trying to discover the hidden wishes.” (Education expert in Riga.)

The third most widespread identified reason for not attending school is **parental prohibition or disinterestedness in child’s performance at school**. Slightly more than one fourth (26,7%) of the interviewed Roma consider that it is exactly the opinion and actions of parents that influence the attendance – there are parents who believe that attending school is unnecessary. Such an opinion was also voiced by the interviewed experts:

“Everything starts from the attitude in a family. If parents have no education and all through their lives they have managed without it, the child inherits this view and thinks it to be proper and that he/she doesn’t need it either. They [parents] even don’t know that it can be different and also don’t want it to be different.” (Social Services worker in Riga.)

“How many times we go to a Roma home at 11 a.m. because the child is not at school and we find all the family still asleep – both the children and parents. What attendance of school may be discussed there? How can a child get up and go to school if the parents don’t mind?” (Education expert in Kurzeme region.)

The Roma survey data reveal also other reasons for Roma children not attending school or leaving school early. Slightly less than one fourth (22,8%) of the interviewed pointed out the Roma tradition to start a family early as well as difficulties in the study process (22,2%). Slightly more than one fifth (21,4%) mentioned the negative and prejudiced attitude at school on the part of other pupils. It is underlined also by some of the interviewed experts:

“Roma children find it difficult to brace themselves for studying if they experience bad attitude from others. They take it to heart and it reflects in their performance. A child chooses better not to go to school than have moral suffering because of his/her nationality. And parents also don’t insist on the child going to school.” (Education expert in Riga region.)

“It’s quite often that nobody makes friends with the Roma child, sometimes even won’t give a hand. As it is among children, mocking takes place as well. The child suffers and a moment comes when he/she can’t stand it any longer and stops going to school.” (Education expert in Riga region.)

The wish of Roma children to attend school is also hampered by the material conditions in the family – one fifth (19,5%) of the respondents give as a reason for not attending the need to start working to earn some money, 18,3% - lack of money for meals, 14,4% - lack of money to pay the fare to school (see Figure 3.2.5.). The importance of organized transport free of charge to school and back is also stressed:

“A great problem is also public transport as it is not free of charge; taking into account the material condition of Roma families, they can’t afford to pay the fare to go to school. Busses to take children to school and back should be organized; then, probably, more Roma children might attend school if they don’t need to pay the fare in public transport.” (Education expert in Pieriga region.)

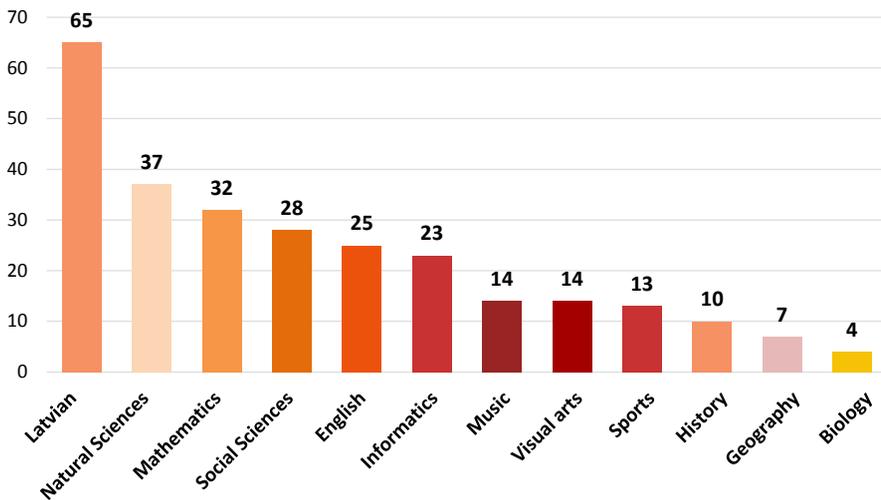
Several interviewed experts of different areas (altogether 12) indicated that school attendance should be more linked with different social benefits the family receives and different material support should be granted depending on the regularity of school attendance:

“School attendance would improve if the amount of benefits were directly depending on school attendance; it should be settled on a national, not municipal level.” (Education expert in Latgale region.)

“It’s quite often that the Social Services have information about the cut classes of Roma children, but they only reprimand verbally. No other sanctions follow. But if parents knew that they won’t get the benefit if the child doesn’t go to school, I believe, there might be considerably more Roma children at school.” (Education expert in Kurzeme region.)

Slightly more than one tenth (11,1%) of the interviewed Roma indicated as one of the reasons for not attending school to be the barrier of not knowing the state language (see Figure 3.2.5.). It is confirmed by the MoES data – in the school year 2012/2013 additional activities for mastering the Latvian language were organized for Roma children at schools (see Figure 3.2.6.).

Figure 3.2.6. Number of Roma pupils in school year 2012/ 2013 to whom were assigned additional training measures (26,8%)



Source: MoES (2015)

The former examples of good practice show that a Roma teacher-assistant is required for eliminating the problem. Since the school year 2008/2009 Roma teacher-assistants working in pre-school groups and the first forms of primary school successfully ensure the required assistance in the study process as well as promote cooperation between the educational establishment (school) and the Roma community in the respective municipality. The interviewed experts consider as an especially successful example the performance of the Roma teacher-assistant at Jelgava Primary School No. 4 and Lādezers primary school. To continue with good practice, the number of these assistants should grow. In the school year 2013/2014 four Roma teacher-assistants worked, though since 2003 there have been trained 25 Roma teacher-assistants. **The work of Roma teacher-assistants directly depends upon the attitude of municipalities as their remuneration is financed from the municipal budget.**

Several interviewed education experts and policy makers speak about the necessity to eliminate drawbacks in the performance of Roma teacher-assistants which are due to their education level. At present a Roma teacher-assistant may be a person who has at least primary education, still some experts point out the need for Roma teacher-assistants to further their education, for example, in courses, first level higher education, etc. It will be qualification raising and improving their knowledge. When improving the education level, it is important to change the remuneration system. At present the services of a Roma teacher-assistant are brought down to the job description of technical staff, but in reality they provide pedagogical assistance to a child in mastering the study material.¹⁵ In order to keep the now working Roma teacher-assistants at school and attract new ones, it is needed to offer wider privileges and change in their status by bringing it closer to the status of teacher and thus ensuring remuneration which is more motivating, and annual leave. When taking up the duties, the requirements to Roma teacher-assistants are to be maintained – having at least primary education (up to grade 9) and gradually starting further education. Though the MoES plans to train 45 people in the nearest future (15 each year) in order to ensure in long-term the necessary number of Roma teacher-assistants, the issue of their remuneration is still topical – it is within the competence of the municipality to decide whether the financial support is possible. Taking into account the topicality of the issue as well as evidence gained from practice and research¹⁶ about the role of Roma teacher-assistants in problem solving, there is a need to find possibilities of regular financing from state funded sources (state budget, EU funds etc.).

Taking account of the limited number of Roma teacher-assistants, **it is important to ensure accessibility to the support team in schools, for example, social and special**

¹⁵ Legislative acts of the Republic of Latvia. (2010). *Regulations on the profession classifier, appropriate core tasks for professions and basic requirements for professions and Use and procedure of updating of professions classifier*. Retrieved 10.09.2015. from: <http://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=210806>

¹⁶ Society Integration Foundation. (2013). *Romu kopiena Latvijā: situācija un labā prakse izglītībā*. Retrieved 11.09.2015. from: <http://www.sif.gov.lv/images/atteli/SIF/progress/Buklets-romi-izglitiba-2013.pdf>

pedagogue, psychologist and speech therapist. Such support teams work already in most municipalities (e.g. in Riga, Jelgava, Ventspils, Jekabpils, Daugavpils, Kraslava, Preili, Valmiera, Dobele), however, there is shortage of financial means to help all Roma children with acquiring the study material, to identify and timely eliminate perception and other psychological problems as well as develop cooperation with parents. The interviewed experts point out that an important precondition for successful inclusion of Roma children in the study process is the involvement of parents.

A study system that is designed especially for Roma children can be ensured only by teachers who are trained for working with children of different nationalities. Though different intercultural courses are available, it is the school responsibility how many teachers get an insight into the Roma peculiarities, their traditions, needs and character disposition. Also the interviewed education experts agree that the present situation is far from the ideal – though different courses on tolerance are available, schools are too passive and teachers themselves do not show initiative to invite lecturers and acquire new programmes and technologies:

“They [Roma] have a different way of thinking. Only nonstandard approach may rouse their interest in learning.” (Education expert in Latgale region.)

“We are afraid of modern technologies, but why can’t be even mobile phone used in study process? Teachers should revise their stale ideas in all areas, also when teaching Roma children.” (Education expert in Kurzeme region.)

It is also necessary to improve the study materials for teaching reading and writing and which are adapted for the needs of Roma who reside in Latvia. As a failure may be considered the efforts of Ventspils night secondary school which ordered special study materials – textbooks and workbooks, but in their preparation the peculiarities of the language of Roma, residing in Latvia, were not taken into account. These books were written in Russia, where the peculiarities and dialect of the Roma language are different from those in Latvia. Still, the interviewed experts consider as a positive example the multicultural class opened in Daugavpils where Roma children learn the Latvian language by means of a computer programme.

Roma young people need assistance also during the summer period. When Roma children are away from school for a longer period of time, for example, during summer holidays, it is necessary to ensure communication and direct contact with teachers as it is observed that over a longer period of time the Roma determination and interest in studying diminishes. The interviewed experts point out that Roma need monitoring to start the school year in time:

“When the new school year is approaching, we start identifying and visiting Roma families, reminding them that school will start soon. It is a peculiarity of Roma and we need to be aware of it and accept it.” (Education expert in Vidzeme region.)

General secondary education

Comparing the 2000 and 2011 Census data, the number of Roma with general secondary education has increased: in 2000 there were 401 against 533 Roma in 2011. Though a considerable part (88,5%) of the interviewed Roma consider that acquiring secondary education is important (see Figure 3.1.6.), in reality only 29 Roma children attended secondary school in the school year 2013/2014. However, it should be noted that several of the interviewed education experts (altogether 8) pointed out a positive tendency as regards acquiring secondary education, underlying that more and more Roma young people choose to attend secondary school with the aim to study further at a university. Positive cases were identified as well, for example, in Kuldīga a Roma girl graduated from secondary school with distinction in the school year 2014/2015.

In the in-depth interviews the experts brought out several initiatives which should be implemented to increase the number of Roma at secondary schools:

“It is necessary to inform about opportunities secondary education opens and the importance of it as a step closer to higher education. Roma young people lack information about the advantages of secondary education and prefer to start working without going on with their education.” (Education expert in Zemgale region.)

Some of the interviewed municipality employees (altogether 5) and Roma leaders (altogether 3) pointed out that municipalities could support capable Roma pupils by granting scholarships. This would work as an additional stimulus for continuing education and have a good performance at secondary school with a perspective of studying at a university. At present such financial support to the most capable and active pupils is provided by Ozolnieki, Rundale, Kekava and some other municipalities.

Vocational education

Since Census 2000, the number of Roma who acquired their education at secondary special needs/secondary vocational or vocational school has grown. Those who indicated this to be their level of education in 2000 were 72 Roma, but in 2011 – already 200. During an 11 year period it is not a big number, however, it may be regarded as a positive tendency. Vocational schools are considered as the most popular schools among Roma after finishing a primary school. In the school year 2013/2014 there were 165 Roma at vocational schools which constitutes 5% of all Roma who acquire education (see Figure 3.1.3.). The quantitative survey data confirm that education acquired at vocational schools is desired as more than 41% of the interviewed Roma admitted of their wish to be acquiring some profession at a vocational school (see Figure 3.1.7.). However, quite often the programmes these schools offer do not suit Roma and, thus, Roma with completed primary education have no great options:

“They [Roma] don’t have technical knowledge; cars and wood-processing is not their area. They would like to be trained as cooks or anything in connection with horses and animal husbandry.” (Education expert in Latgale region.)

A wider choice of professions is offered by vocational schools in bigger towns and cities, therefore, there is a need to support the capable Roma pupils financially (travelling expenses, accommodation costs, scholarships). This kind of support should be given to those who acquire a profession in another town, however, *“the decision on financial support should be taken by municipality employees in cooperation with the Roma community and by assessing the needs of each applicant.”* (Education expert in Latgale region.)

Another opportunity of acquiring vocational education is related with the project *Youth Guarantee*. Its implementation takes place in Latvia since 2014. The aim is to help young people to either return at school or integrate into the labour market, thus, reducing youth unemployment and raising their competitiveness in the labour market.¹⁷ *Youth Guarantee* refers to the age group 15-29 years (inclusive), to youth who neither study nor work. After registration at the State Employment Agency or receiving *Youth Guarantee* client status within a four months period the young person is offered opportunities of work, apprenticeship or training as well as education programmes, the completion of which grants professional qualification.

The State Education Development Agency (SEDA) offers twice a year, in winter and summer, to enter one of the vocational educational establishments in Latvia where within the period of one year or a year-and-a half it is possible to acquire a profession. Under the SEDA project *“Implementation of the Programmes of Initial Vocational Education”* a profession can also be acquired by the young people who study, but are not full-time students, and those who have some profession. In the period of acquiring a profession, scholarship of EUR 70-115 is granted. A profession can be acquired also by youths in places of confinement.

3.3. Special needs education (including home education)

The interviewed education experts do not have a common opinion on the benefits of home education. Part of the experts (altogether 8) believe that home education is a good solution for Roma children to learn the Latvian language. The other part (altogether 7) consider that this kind of education has a risk of affecting education quality and isolation of a child. All the experts agree that home education is necessary in the cases when a child has serious health problems which exclude other ways of acquiring education. Advocates for home education consider that it is appropriate for children during their first study year or half a year if they do not have the adequate knowledge of

¹⁷ Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia. (2015). *Jauniešu garantija*. Retrieved 07.09.2015. from: <http://www.lm.gov.lv/text/2607>

Latvian. But for the children not to be isolated, they should attend as much as possible events at school, group work, out of class activities, etc. Home education may also be appropriate for young Roma mothers who cannot attend school in the post-natal period. In addition to the above, all the interviewed education experts underline that **there are no unambiguous criteria regarding the cases when home education might be permissible, therefore, each case is to be considered separately.**

The available MoES data show that in the school year 2013/2014 out of all the Roma children of school age 26% studied according to special needs programmes (see Figure 3.1.2.) which ensure that Roma children with different mental and physical disabilities can be incorporated into society. The decision whether a Roma child will acquire the compulsory primary education according to a special needs programme is taken by a municipal or national level commission consisting of pedagogues and doctors. However, the commission decision is argued and not always supported by part of the interviewed experts who underline that in separate cases the decision on studying according to a special needs programme has no reasonable grounds:

“A special needs programme would not be needed as they [Roma children] are capable of good performance at school, but nobody works with them at school, parents are not involved.” (Municipality employee in Daugavpils.)

“I have noticed that children are referred to a special needs school not only because there is a need for it, but often the commission takes this decision because it is a Rom and without trying to understand the essence. We had a mom who went to the commission for three times and only then a decision was taken that the child can attend general school.” (Education expert in Pieriga region.)

Several interviewed education experts (altogether 5) paid attention to the fact that quite often Roma parents themselves want to send their children to special needs schools – *“they try to find ways how to get a medical certificate from the pedagogical medical commission they want”* (Education expert in Pieriga region.) – and in this way to a large extent solve the social and material problems of the family: *“All want to get accepted into this boarding school, especially Roma, as staying and catering is free of charge, as well as the travelling expenses and the study materials are paid for, thus financially everything is covered.”* (Education expert in Pieriga region.)

The interviewed policy makers also pay attention to the high ratio of Roma children in special needs education programmes and state that their number should be reduced by accepting into these programmes only children with health problems, not those who have learning disabilities. To achieve this aim, also teachers need additional support for their professional growth by educating them on intercultural aspects and, thus, enhancing their understanding about differences between nationalities and using different approaches to Roma children.

3.4. Accessibility to higher education

Roma with higher education are regarded as positive exceptions as most often, after graduating from primary school, education is either continued at vocational schools or not at all. It is interesting that the Roma survey results show that 70,1% of Roma, thinking about their children education consider higher education to be important. However, the last Census data (2011) reveal that **in Latvia only 41 Roma or 0,8% have higher education, including Doctor's degree, and during the last 10 years the number has not changed** – in 2001 Roma with higher education constituted 0,4% (see Figure 3.1.3.).

Unambiguous conclusions are impossible about the change in the situation as there is no data collection about those Roma youths who enter universities. The interviewed education experts admit that they know 1-2 Roma who either study or have studied at a university. As reasons for not acquiring higher education Roma mention the financial aspect (in the focus group discussions Roma themselves said: *“it's time to start working and maintaining the family”*; *“not enough money for studying”*), lack of motivation as well as the opinion that higher education is not necessary which roots in the Roma traditions and life perception that does not treat education as value.

Several experts (altogether 4) of different areas pointed out that a good encouragement for studying at a university might be special scholarship programmes within the framework of grants of the EU, municipalities and enterprises, thus financially supporting the most capable Roma youths by covering or partly covering their tuition fee as well travel expenses and accommodation costs.

Two of the interviewed (an education expert and a municipality employee) pointed out that acquiring higher education is not popular with Roma because they lack information about the location of universities, the offered programmes and entrance requirements. Consequently, the MoES and municipalities in cooperation with universities are recommended to have informative campaigns for attracting Roma youth to acquire higher education.

3.5. Accessibility to the “Second Chance Programme”

One of the opportunities to acquire the compulsory primary education is evening schools. Their advantage is the offer to acquire primary education after a person has come of age. These schools do not have age limitations and there is encouraging attitude towards these Roma youths who have become parents, started working or went abroad in search of employment. Evening school is a place where to catch up with what has been missed. However, **negatively is evaluated the fact that not all evening schools can ensure holding classes that fully comply with the Roma needs, for example, grade 1**. Most evening schools offer continuation of studies with form 7, but taking

into account that a great part of Roma leave school before grade 7 (see Figure 3.2.3.), evening schools should be more flexible with their offer.

The interviewed experts consider as advantages of evening schools the opportunity to offer short-term services of child care or nurseries while parents attend classes. This service might ensure that in the future more Roma acquire primary or secondary education, especially girls who have not completed primary education. Such a service is offered at Riga Secondary (Shift) Night School No.14 where a child care room was arranged with the financial help of the Education, Culture and Sports Department of Riga City Council.

Flexible and individual approach to Roma youths who wish to start/finish at different time as is the set start and finish time of the school year allows increasing the number of those Roma who acquire primary or secondary education. In order to ensure that the study material is mastered at an adequate level, an individual study plan is to be developed for the time period when the Roma youth attends school:

“Many Roma work abroad in the summer period and can’t return by the beginning of the school year and, therefore, their wish to learn should be supported by allowing them to start or finish the school year at a time that is convenient for them, but ensuring mastering of the study material to the full extent.” (Education expert in Latgale region.)

The interviewed education experts consider that it is necessary to eliminate the lack of information regarding the operation of evening schools, study process and education levels that can be acquired. In smaller localities information travels by word of mouth, but it is essential to provide information also at municipality level through Social Services and SEA. Mass media should focus on the advantages of evening schools and break the negative stereotypes which exist among Roma. *“The young people who are aware that they are not of pre-school or primary school age feel more comfortable at night schools which are attended by people of different ages.* (Social worker in Riga.) Social Services should work with Roma youth on individual basis, encouraging them to continue or start attending night schools as quite often Roma admit the lack of self-confidence: *“I am already 30, I am ashamed to go there as I don’t know anything.”* (Roma male in Kurzeme region.) In smaller inhabited areas the distance to a night school and the possibility to get there is of vital importance. The target audience of night schools are adults who mostly work and have a family and due to the lack of time getting to a night school in some other larger area is physically impossible: *“The nearest night school is 30 km away, I have no car and I can’t go by bus. If the municipality helped, I might start thinking about it.”* (Roma male in Kurzeme region.)

The advantages offered by Education Centres also ensure accessibility to the “Second Chance Programme”. Such Centres are in larger municipalities (e.g. in Kuldīga, Ventspils, Jelgava, Dobeles, Jekabpils, Daugavpils, Preiļi and Talsi municipality), and the opportunity to acquire new skills and professions are offered without taking into

account the acquired education level and age. Still, **the number of Roma who make use of the opportunities offered by Education Centres is small.** In in-depth interviews with education experts only some examples of success stories were mentioned, for example, in Kuldīga a Roma woman had attended the second level computer courses and the English language and the German language courses; in 2014 and 2015 the project of teaching reading and writing skills to Roma adults, developed by “ADRA Latvija”, was executed in Sabīle.¹⁸ The seclusion of Roma community should be taken into account when involving Roma in different educational or self-improvement activities – to involve them, the mutual trust level between the teacher (pedagogue) and the Roma is important. The research shows that **trust is most essential at the lower lever when reading and writing skills are acquired** as *“a Roma would not come to anybody he doesn’t know. He must have respect and trust in you if you want him to come to you. You must go to him and motivate him, tell him why it is needed. He won’t come of his own accord.”* (NGO representative in Kurzeme region.) Also an education expert in Kurzeme region pointed out the importance of the competencies of the one who teaches reading and writing, underlying that *“capable teachers are needed to teach illiterates successfully; they should be able to work with absolutely different approaches; time that is convenient for them is as important.”* The implementation of the “Second Chance Programme” is also hampered by Roma character disposition and life perception. It is pointed out that Roma are impatient, they find it difficult to concentrate for a long time and they quickly lose interest in new things, therefore, the teaching process should be organized so as taking into account the national character. *“All the time you should think what that “carrot” will be to attract them.”* (NGO representative in Vidzeme region.) Several experts of different areas paid attention to the relatively low skills Roma have for coping with everyday bureaucracy and pointed out that Education Centres should offer opportunities to adult Roma to learn how to write an application, explain laws, etc. Such knowledge would make them better prepared for everyday life and widen their understanding of things.

Samples of best practice

Since school year 2008/2009, **Roma teacher assistants** who work in pre-school groups and elementary school classes successfully create cooperation between Roma children, their daily environment and educational system. Children receive the necessary assistance in the learning process, and also cooperation is facilitated between the educational institution (school) and Roma community in the respective municipality. A sample of very successful activities of Roma teacher assistants are those in Jelgava Elementary school No. 4 and Ladezers.

¹⁸ Detailed information on the project implementation: http://adra.lv/lv/page/romu_projekts

Primary school. In Daugavpils, Jelgava, Valdemarpils and Valmiera in 2014, **resource centres or multicultural classes** for Roma children, youngsters and their parents to facilitate inclusion of children and youngsters in uniform educational system were opened. Within the framework of the initiative, different intercultural communication measures are organised to get acquainted with Roma culture and culture of other ethnic groups. Roma children are offered a possibility to master different skills and knowledge in innovative form, for instance, by using computer for mastering Latvian language skills. Thus an interactive approach to learning process is being ensured.

Recommendations

/ Recommendations for the Ministry of Education and Science

Find a possibility to ensure training of new Roma teacher assistants for work in pre-school groups and elementary school classes since their total number is insufficient to be present in all the educational institutions where the presence of Roma teacher assistants would be needed. Roma teacher assistant is a link between a Roma child and teacher, performs function of an interpreter, and also teaches Latvian since the lack of knowledge of the Latvian language is one of the key hindrances in perceiving and understanding the learning process.

Where possible, to improve training system of Roma teacher assistants by establishing higher educational standards for these specialists. Alongside with facilitating professional development, it is necessary to change the status of the Roma teacher assistant by upgrading it closer to the teacher's status and thus increasing the currently low work pay.

Initiate and summarise information about the number of Roma children on all the levels of educational system thus obtaining complete characterisation of Roma situation. Lack of data is especially topical on the pre-school and university level, and there are no sufficiently precise data about the percentage of illiterate Roma as well.

/ Recommendations for local municipalities

Find a possibility to support financially Roma teacher assistants, by providing finances for work pay and improving their skills. It is important to ensure availability of Roma teacher assistants on the pre-school and elementary school level.

Ensure support personnel to Roma children at schools by offering services of psychologist, speech therapist and social pedagogue. Assistance of these specialists would make learning process for Roma children easier, by establishing in due time perception problems and other psychological problems, as well as creating closer cooperation with their parents.

/ Recommendations for non-governmental organizations

Implement Find a possibility to develop consultative centres for Roma inhabitants with the following functions:

- identify parents of the potential pre-schoolers and ensure them with actual information;
 - offer possibilities to acquire practical skills (basis of writing different applications, explanation of laws and regulations, etc.);
 - organize teaching of illiterates by applying completely different and innovative ways of teaching, by attracting talented teachers and offering good timing for studies.
-

Implement intercultural communication activities in cooperation with schools and organize educating and explanatory work with children and adults. Involvement of children and adults of different nationalities, their informing and involvement would reduce expansion of stereotypes and prejudices.

/ Recommendations for teachers

Increase involvement of parents of Roma children in learning process since education and purposeful inclusion in the learning processes would ensure positive feedback; parents' perception about the significance of education in their children's lives would change and that would motivate children to study. School administration, class teachers and also psychologists and social pedagogues should be involved in work with parents. Wider range of specialists ensures cooperation of all the involved parties and improves solving of problematic situations.

Find a possibility to adjust training materials to the needs of Roma children by applying interactive approach and different methods for mastering the subject. For Roma children to have more interest in mastering new subjects, non-standard approaches and solutions are needed, as well as interactive materials.

Where possible, to organise explanatory lectures about sex education and contraceptives by involving guest lecturers – doctors. Roma youngsters create families and give birth to children comparatively early (at the age of 13-15). Opinion of guest lecturers-doctors about the need to use contraceptives could reduce the number of youngsters who leave school because of the pregnancy.

To prepare and educate educational staff in the sphere of intercultural issues with an aim to change the perception and attitude of non-Roma pedagogues towards Roma children. Awareness of school administration and pedagogues about the possibilities to master learning materials and solving problematic situations would help Roma children to improve learning process and to eliminate to large extent the potential exclusion during the educational process.

EU programme regarding state strategies of the Roma integration till 2020 (European Commission, Brussels, 5.4.2011, COM (2011): **“Member States should, as a minimum, ensure primary school completion. They should also widen access to quality early childhood education and care and reduce the number of early school leavers from secondary education pursuant to the Europe 2020 strategy. Roma youngsters should be strongly encouraged to participate also in secondary and tertiary education.”**

/ 4. Employment

Employment as one of the key factors influencing inhabitants' standard of living, has the most essential role not only in improving socio-economic situation of Roma as the group most exposed to the risk of poverty and social exclusion, but also in their inclusion process in the Latvian society.

In general, **82,3%** of the surveyed Roma when answering the question whether they or their family members within the last three years have experienced a situation when **employers refuse to employ them due to the Roma nationality**, have answered in affirmative way, besides more than a half (56,7%) of the surveyed Roma stated that they have such experience, while 43,2% admitted that their family members have experienced discriminating attitude from the potential employers during staff selection. The results of the quantitative Roma survey are approved by all the focus group discussions and also by opinions expressed during in-depth interviews with State Employment Agency employees about the formal hidden but in reality existing negative attitude and prejudice of employers towards the candidates with darker skin colour or other features in appearance that would testify their Roma origin.

In all the focus group discussions, participants mentioned real cases when the potential employers during the interviews have promised to call back to the candidate of Roma origin to inform about the results of staff selection process but in reality had not called.

„...I graduated State Employment Agency courses, had hope when participating in interviews but there was no luck – nobody offered at least to try... promised to call back after a week, but didn't call ... Now, when I hear a promise to call back, it is clear that they won't call...” (Roma woman at focus group discussion in Daugavpils).

“As soon as they saw me and noticed that I am a Roma, I immediately felt that they had lost interest in me. [...] They did not say anything, they promised to give me a call, yet they never called me...” (Roma man at a focus group discussion in Tukums.)

“During the interview you feel that it will come to nothing. They give you a smile and do not say to your face, that they won't give you a chance, but it is clear as day that they won't call you back... As soon as they see that I am a Rom, everything is over...” (Roma man at a focus group discussion in Dobele.)

“...I was working there before leaving for England... When I returned I went to them, but another person had been already hired. They said I had to wait at least for half a year. They promised to call me when something turned up...Yet I have to eat something in the meanwhile...” (Roma man at a focus group discussion in Dobele.)

The relatively positive Roma experience of working abroad was mentioned as an aspect increasing the feeling of discrimination. All focus groups voiced a widely shared opinion that in countries with a large proportion of immigrant labour force (as for example Great Britain and Germany), where the relatives and acquaintances of the people participating in the discussion resided and worked, there was no discrimination of Roma in the labour market as the employers' main requirement was the quality of work and the ethnicity factor seemed to be of little importance. Therefore in these countries Roma feel equal to other workers:

"Many of my relatives live in England, people are not differentiated there so much as here. Nobody is interested in your ethnic background there if you work well, and Roma people work there as well as all the rest, and nobody calls them lazy. Here they are not given the chance to try..." (Roma woman at a focus group discussion in Tukums.)

"That is why all Roma people leave for foreign countries, for it is not so difficult to find work there, we are equal to other people there, nobody cares whether you are a Russian, a Rom or an Arab. If you work, everything is OK. I was working there, too, and I was satisfied, now I have returned to Latvia, and nobody needs me..." (Roma man at a focus group discussion in Dobele.)

"They are coming and complaining that nobody takes them on, we do not check on it (and it is not our duty to do so) and we do not know whether what they say is true but very often at the moment when we offer them a vacancy they say, "Why are you offering me anything, nobody will hire Roma!"..." (SEA employee in Kurzeme region.)

As the duties of the SEA do not include the establishment of facts or checking on the results during a job interview, it is impossible to find out the number of cases when Roma job seekers have been turned down with an excuse that the open vacancy has been suddenly filled or to prove that the respective person has been rejected due to discrimination, or to find out to what extent these stories reflect the prejudices and allegations rooted in their previous experience.

Employment is one of the four EU "Europe 2020" basic strategy areas targeted at raising the employment rate of the population aged 24-64 to 75%, at the same time decreasing the differences among various population groups, including between the Roma and non-Roma population of the respective Member State.

In order to find out the dimension and depth of these differences, data on the general employment situation in the country collected by the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) and the State Employment Agency (SEA) and the results obtained within the framework of Roma quantitative survey as well as Roma employment indicators for August and September 2015 (which coincides with the period when the survey was performed) at the disposal of the SEA were analysed but in order to identify the causal relationships and problems and illustrate the barriers which limit the accessibility and comprehensive use of the services offered by state authorities and non-governmental organisations, the Roma survey data and the opinions of the professionals of the employment sector were used.

As the statistical data about the size of the Roma community are not precise and as according to the assumptions of the municipality and the Roma non-governmental organisation representatives, quite a large part of Roma (no precise data have been obtained) pass themselves officially off (according to the passport data) as Latvians, Russians or Poles in order to avoid a discriminating treatment, it means that the data offered by the State Employment Agency do not exactly reflect the actual situation though they are representative enough for identifying the trend. It is important to note that the data of the State Employment Agency broken down by any collected information set reflect only the situation of the unemployed registered by the SEA at a definite period of time.

For indicator benchmarking, the survey data of the labour force¹⁹ obtained by the Central Statistical Bureau will be used. Due to the above mentioned circumstances, these data are not very accurate but they are based on the only regular monitoring of the employment situation, including both registered and unregistered unemployment. As the problem of unregistered unemployment is extremely urgent for the population groups subjected to the poverty and social exclusion risk, this statistical background of the problem is essential.

It is also very important to define more exactly the key indicators:

Working-age population – population aged 15 to 64 (internationally most often used standard applied, for example, by the Statistical Office of the European Union – Eurostat – and the International Labour Organization – ILO);

The unemployed – persons (aged 15 to 74 – according to Eurostat approach – and aged 15 to 64 – according to the SEA approach), who do not work at the time when the survey is performed (and are not temporarily absent from work either) and are actively looking for a job and in case of finding a job are ready to start working within the nearest two weeks;

Economically active population – the employed and the unemployed (both, persons registered by the State Employment Agency and unregistered persons), who are looking for a job;

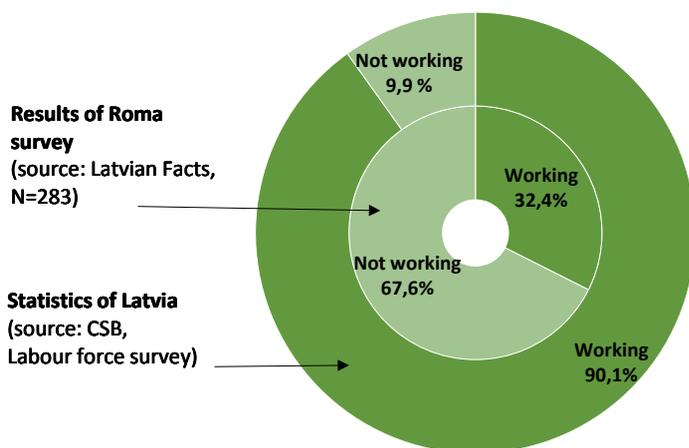
Unemployment rate – the percentage of the unemployed of the total number of economically active population of the respective age group.

¹⁹ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. (2015). *Labour Force Sample Survey of Latvia*. Retrieved: 12.09.2015. from: <http://www.csb.gov.lv/statistikas-temas/metodologija/nodarbinatiba-un-bezdarbs-36895.html>

Compared to the situation of 2003, when, according to the authors of the research “The Situation of Roma in Latvia”, 90–95% of the able-bodied Roma were registered or unregistered unemployed²⁰, quantitative survey of 365 Roma done in August–October of 2015 demonstrates **positive changes in the area of Roma employment and indicates that ratio of the employed has increased** from 5–10% in 2003 to 32,4% of the economically active Roma in 2015.

Figure 4.1. Ratio of the unemployed (both registered and unregistered) among economically active inhabitants (aged 15-74):

Comparison of the data by CSB labour force market survey and results of Latvian Facts Roma survey (August/ September 2015)



Source: CSB, “Labour Force Sample Survey of Latvia” (2015) and Survey of Roma inhabitants by “Latvian Facts” (2015)

Though the situation tends to improve, it has to be admitted that the differences between the Roma working and non-working population and that of the total Latvian population are considerable – **among the Roma population the number of employed persons is three times smaller than the national average.** According to the information published by the State Employment Agency, the proportion of the registered unemployed among the total number of economically active population in Latvia at the end of August 2015 was 8,5%²¹. Among the Roma ethnic minority, the proportion of the unemployed registered by the SEA was similar – 8,7%.

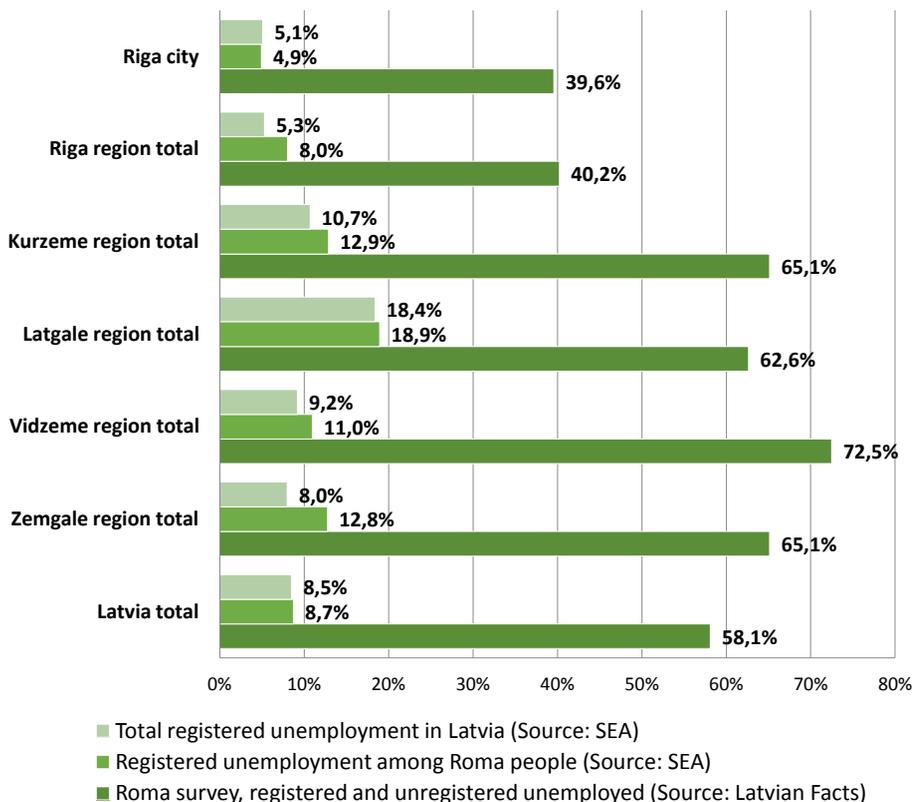
However, calculating and benchmarking the proportion of Roma registered unemployment broken down by regions and cities, a marked tendency can be observed – at places with a relatively large concentration of Roma ethnic minority (as in Ventspils, Jurmala, Jelgava, Jekabpils) the unemployment rate of the Roma people is higher than

²⁰ Latvian Centre for Human Rights (2003). *Čigānu stāvoklis Latvijā*. Rīga, p.37.

²¹ State Employment Agency. (2015). Retrieved: 12.09.2015. from: http://m.nva.gov.lv/LV/aktuala_informacija/aktualitates/4070registreta_bezdarba_limenis_valsti_pazeminajies_lidz_85.html

the total unemployment rate in the municipality, and we have a good reason to assume that the position of different nationalities in the labour market varies and that the position of Roma is not very strong or stable.

Figure 4.2. **Main unemployment numbers in regions, aged 15-64** (on July 31, 2015): Comparison of SEA indicators of registered unemployment and Latvian Facts Roma survey



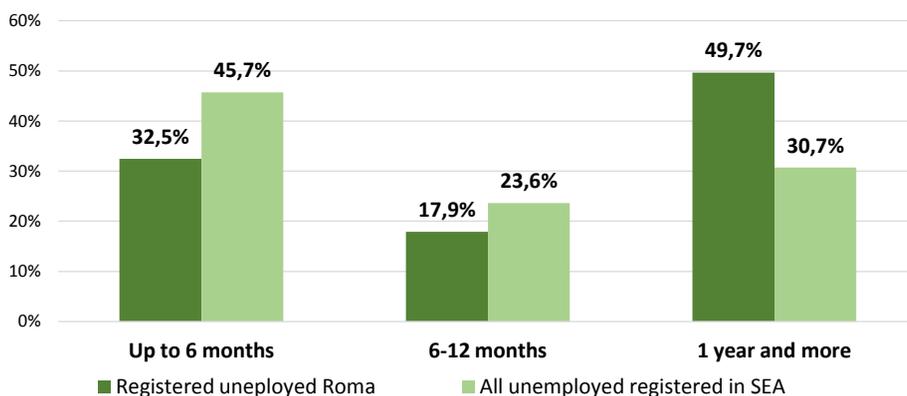
Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

Though in Riga, which forms the centre of state economic development, and Riga region where higher opportunities for employment are ensured by its proximity to Riga, the Roma employment situation is relatively better, however the proportion of unofficial unemployment which exceeds the indicators of official unemployment many times, reveals the essential weaknesses of grey economy – the dependency, disadvantages and social vulnerability of low-income and undereducated population groups.

It is important to note that in comparison with the general situation in the Latvian labour market, the proportion of long-term unemployment in the group of the Roma unemployed is markedly dominant, which illustrates the social aspect of Roma employment issues and proves the status of Roma as a marginal, socially excluded group. It provides sufficient grounds for including the Roma people into programmes envisaged for special risk groups (at least in territories with a large Roma population).

Figure 4.3. Distribution of registered unemployed Roma by length of unemployment period

compared to total unemployed registered in SEA on August 31, 2015

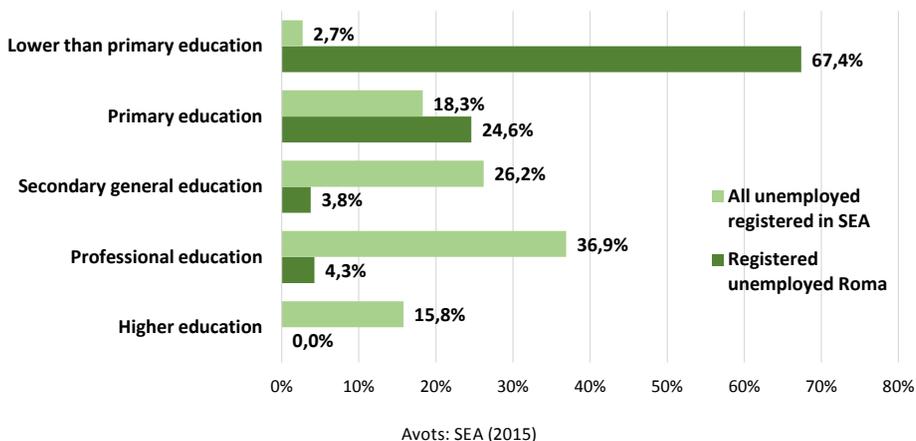


Source: SEA (2015)

The Roma people do not have equal opportunities to integrate into the labour market due to their low-level education which practically not only excludes two thirds of Latvian Roma from the labour market but also limits their access to the employment promotion support measures, as only those unemployed persons qualify for the professional development courses and courses for developing skills offered by the SEA who have completed the seventh grade education programme.

On 31 August 2015, according to the SEA data, **the education level of 67,4% of all the registered Roma unemployed was lower than the compulsory elementary education** (in comparison, the national average is only 2,7%), about 20% of them do not have writing and reading skills.

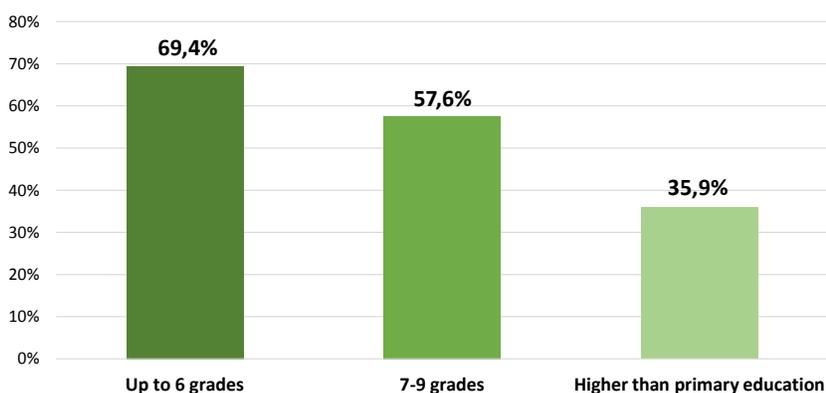
Figure 4.4. **Distribution of registered unemployed Roma by completed level of education** compared to total unemployment registered in SEA on August 31, 2015



Quantitative Roma surveys also testify to a larger proportion of the unemployed in respondent groups with a comparatively low level of education: two thirds of Roma whose level of education does not exceed six grades and 58% of Roma with 7–9 grade education were unemployed when the survey was conducted.

Figure 4.5. **Unemployment rate (registered and unregistered) among Roma people by educational level**

(Base = registered, unregistered unemployed and housewives; N=191)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by “Latvian Facts” (2015)

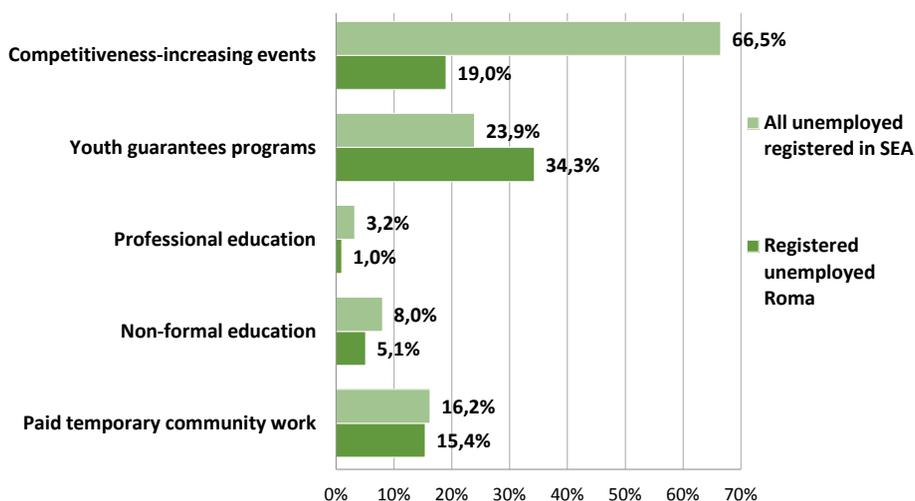
About two thirds of the economically active Roma who participated in the quantitative survey (64,6%) had been actively seeking job some time during the last three years.

In job search, as in case of other services, Roma prefer direct communication, prefer direct communication – two thirds (65%) of the jobseekers had personally contacted potential employers, but slightly more than a half (56%) had made use of the help by relatives and friends. The third most often mentioned way of looking for jobs was sending of CV and motivation letter to the employers and looking through the job offers provided by SEA this was mentioned by slightly more than 40% of jobseekers. Although the number of registered unemployed Roma who have found job is not big (according to the SEA data, during the first eight months of 2015 there were 98 of them) and attitudes of SEA employees dominate by opinion that Roma have poor understanding and knowledge of the SEA services and opportunities they provide, however answers of the respondents confirm that for a certain part of Roma inhabitants SEA plays role of significant mediator in the practical manifestations of their job seeking.

Roma actively using SEA services are:

- Poor or low-income persons – they are offered by SEA four month long source of subsistence – paid temporary social works;
- Young people aged 15 to 29, who are not either working or studying, and who have completed basic education, are participating in the activities of “Youth Guarantees”;
- Motivated Roma with positive previous employment experience and employment ambitions that correspond to their level of education and skills (regarding type of the job and remuneration).

Figure 4.6. Percentage of Roma people, who have taken part in SEA activities compared to total participation in SEA activities in August 2015



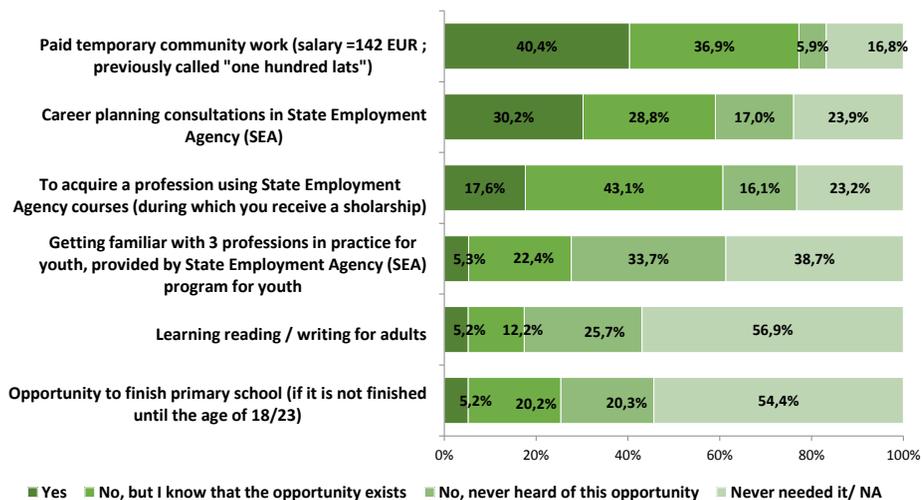
Source: NVA (2015)

Both the opinions of service providers heard during interviews and results of the Roma survey show that Roma are informed about SEA (although they recognise it as “Job exchange”) as mediator for solution of the employment issues. Most often it happens with help of the social workers, since in the group of Roma with education up to 6 grades and Roma with completed basic education (72% and 48%, respectively) **problem of unemployment is identified together with the granting of the status of low-income or poor person**, thus registration with SEA is defined for these persons as one of the main preconditions for receiving of the social aid and benefits (e.g., benefit for ensuring the guaranteed minimum income level, GMI). This reveals one of the most significant problems of the long-term unemployed (which equally applies to Roma and representatives of other nationalities) – **unemployed goes to SEA not to find job, but to register and qualify for social benefits**. This limits full use of the choice of employment promotion measures, but this implies learning about SEA services, understanding them and identifying as appropriate for own needs – SEA involves the unemployed in the activities, for which they apply during the consultations. One of the reasons why Roma use relatively few employment services (mainly paid temporary public works and youth guarantee programme), is that Roma do not apply for other services, for instance, professional training and courses (even in cases, when level of education allows it), they offer as excuses unsolved social issues (“*There is nobody to look after the child*”; “*I won’t be able to com-mute regularly*” etc.) and lack of faith in being able find job afterwards.

Use of the SEA services among Roma is usually limited with earning minimal guaranteed means of the subsistence in the paid temporary public works and “mandatory” career planning consultations, how-ever they lack motivation (and it is not possible in many municipalities, since opportunities for education are different) to improve level of education, which is the main condition for unemployed to become fully eligible to utilise SEA employment pro-motion services and benefit from opportunities offered by them.

Figure 4.7. During the last 3 years, have you or any of your family members received any help from local municipality, state institution or some organization concerning employment?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

One fourth (25,2%) of Roma participating in the quantitative survey maintained that they currently had a job (including temporary work). The low education level destabilizes and submits to risk the position in the labour market also of those Roma who have employment – lack of knowledge and qualification prevents them from applying for stable and well-paid jobs and Roma also find it difficult to adapt to new situations. Due to the low incomes, they lack the necessary financial means (travel expenses and food) to apply for jobs at distant places, they have difficulty in advancing up the career ladder which in its stead causes dissatisfaction with their jobs and lack of motivation for work:

"Initially my wife and I worked at a fish processing and smoking factory in Talsi. Both of us had to commute. In order to save money, I went home once a week, but finally it became unprofitable, as my wife had to regularly go home because of our child, but being away from home, I had to buy food, and at times the transport was not available when I needed it and I had to pay somebody to take me home, and after all I did not earn enough money, so I quit my job. It had no sense. Now my wife picks berries in the forest and I receive benefits, it is more profitable." (Roma man in Sabile.)

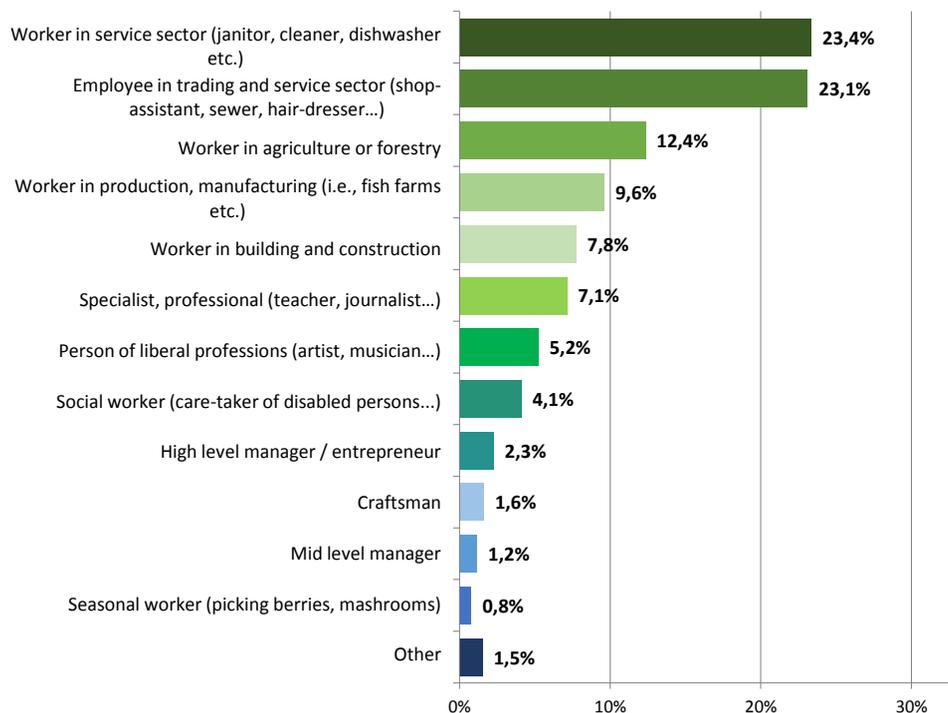
The interviewed employers mentioned lack of education as the main barrier to employing Roma:

“The greatest problem is the low level of education of these people, as many of them lack reading and writing skills. Actually these people can perform only low-skilled work. They are ready to do physical work. We cannot offer them such low-skilled work. Initially we were not aware of it and only later we understood that illiteracy was a big problem among them. We noticed that they had difficulty filling in various forms, that they were helping each other to do it. In general, it prevents them from doing their work properly since it is connected with prepacking chicken meat and they have to understand how many kilograms and grams are necessary in the respective package, they have to be able to read the instructions and weigh the necessary amount of meat. Very few of them can do this job. They have a great wish to work, but their competence is not adequate – very few of them are qualified enough to do this job.” (Head of the Personnel Department at a manufacturing company in Riga region.)

The relatively low level of education is the main reason why the Roma people are predominantly occupied in low-skilled professions.

Figure 4.8. What is your current main occupation?

(Base = employed respondents; N=92)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by “Latvian Facts” (2015)

Opinions of the surveyed education and employment professionals reveal the lack of programmes appropriate for disastrous low education level of the Roma (illiteracy is often encountered even in persons with documents confirming education of six, seven or eight grades). No regular and systematic courses for acquiring reading and writing skills (informal education) are offered for illiterate persons and persons with poor abovementioned skills. There are also needed **“Second chance” education solutions for those with level of education below six completed grades** and rather fragmentary knowledge in many basic subjects, as well as courses for acquiring basic practical skills (e.g., of shoemaker, wicker basket maker, etc.), which could become a solution for persons who cannot easily perceive and learn theoretical knowledge. Education establishments (including evening schools) are not the best option for persons who have for long remained outside process of the formal education. Informal solutions are also needed, supply of methods and approaches should differ from programmes of the formal education – these could be implemented by non-governmental organisations involved in providing of education services.

There are no programmes (systematic approach) at the level of primary motivation of the Roma unemployed, i.e. aimed at persons who have existed outside labour market for long periods (according to SEA data, ratio of the long-term unemployed (more than a year) among Roma exceeds Latvia’s average by approximately 20% (as of 31 August, 2015) – 50% Roma vs 31% of the national average), it is difficult to find self-motivation to change the situation and the most difficult is to maintain it active for longer periods. This leads to apathy and *“general lack of trust”* as well as the so called *“vicious circle”* which can be broken by slow and systematic, individual *“step by step”* work with respective person, to develop motivation for *“wanting to live different way”*, *“wanting to work”* and *“wanting to integrate in the society”*, thus preparing person for further work with SEA experts who, in their turn, will deal with next level of motivation with aim to develop intention *“to do some specific job or acquire specific profession”*.

The surveyed employees of the State Employment Agency, the policy makers of various levels, and the employers mentioned the promulgation of good practice and positive examples among the employers as the main employment promotion measure for the Roma people maintaining that the key barriers to the integration of Roma workers into the labour market were negative stereotypes and mistrust toward them:

“Bringing good practice/examples to light is the first step which does not require large financial resources. We have to look for channels leading to the key target audience. In this case they are the employers/businessmen. We have seen cases when such campaigns ‘open the eyes of employers’. They had never looked at their employees from such an angle.” (Policy maker in Riga.)

“There are clubs of local businessmen who willingly listen to the SEA employees. The main question is whether there is anybody who informs the businessmen about these issues. In regions this work has to be expanded. The national level is important, but to my mind,

greater emphasis has to be placed on local activities, for example, local job fairs, where the received information is put to good use. " (Policy maker in Riga.)

"It has to be properly presented to the businessmen, explaining to them why it would be advantageous for them to hire Roma and it is equally important to present the idea properly to the Roma people. Maybe the Roma people have to be addressed in a special way. We have to look for proper ways to convey this information to them ... as Roma practically do not participate in the job fairs. They may not know about them or they think that they are somewhat exclusive..." (Policy maker in Riga.)

"We need more information on positive examples as the negative stereotype is deeply rooted. What we – I as the Head of the Personnel Department, my colleagues and the workers themselves – are all doing now is attempting to convince the management of the company that Roma are not what they think they are, that they may achieve good results, as otherwise the management won't be interested in employing them and even less in financing their transport from home to the workplace. It would be good to see and hear of positive experience, as in our everyday lives we seldom see these people. I saw a Roma salesman in the SKY supermarket and at the beginning I was somewhat shocked, but then I decided that it was a prestigious store and decided to trust the salesman ... and finally I understood that I was served not worse than if I had been served by a Latvian. Roma need such positive experience and good references. Such references could be placed into the internet. If I had read any and had known that other people too had had good experience and that Roma could work well and could be trusted it might have motivated me to try and hire them. They could be placed also into the home page of the State Employment Agency or into any other home pages. Many of them have been working at meat processing plants abroad, thus they have some experience in this kind of work, but we do not know it. That is why exchange of information is very important, and another thing that we have to take into account is that we have to change our thinking, our conceptions and stereotypes." (Head of the Personnel Department at a manufacturing company in Riga region).

Diametrically opposed views were expressed at a discussion on the opportunity for the companies which employ the Roma people to receive State financial support. Specialists in the area of employment and policy makers seemed to be sceptical:

"So many groups demand subsidised jobs and tax exemption but taking into account the large extent of grey economy it would not solve anything. The current tax exemptions are large enough." (Policy maker in Riga.)

"I am opposed to subsidised jobs, as they do not promote employment – if an employer does not wish to hire Roma he will fire them anyway after the end of subsidised financing, hence it does not solve anything. Actually it creates even greater inequality. Subsidised jobs may be introduced in order to promote employment for people with disabilities as due to the poor condition of their health they are often ill and take often sick-lists causing losses to the employer. In such a case, job subsidy is a kind of a 'compensation mechanism for the losses', but there is no point in applying it to Roma." (Employment specialist in Riga.)

Subsidised jobs are not a successful solution since they involve bureaucratic procedures and are not profitable for small companies with one or two job vacancies.” (Employment specialist in Riga region.)

“Subsidised jobs for Roma would mean discrimination of Latvians in the labour market!” (Policy maker in Zemgale region; employment specialist in Latgale region.)

In their stead, the surveyed employers and Roma themselves held the view that national co-financing (or subsidised jobs) would be a great support to the employers and would enhance the chances of the Roma people in the labour market offering them equal opportunities with other social groups:

“If some financial support was given to the employers who employ Roma, there would certainly be a greater interest in employing them. If the state supported it even in the amount of minimum wages, it would be sufficient as we pay them for commuting, and these costs are not small. We have told them that our attitude to them does not differ from our attitude to workers of other nationalities, and Roma receive the same wages as the rest, and besides, we compensate for their transport which makes quite a large sum. In our case, the actual costs in comparison with other workers are higher. That is why financial support from the state would relieve us as employers. Co-financing should be granted at least for six months since this is the time during which they acquire basic skills necessary for this kind of work. Some time should be devoted also to acquiring basic reading and writing skills. Their situation would be more stable then.” (Head of the Personnel Department at a manufacturing company in Riga region.)

“Subsidised jobs would motivate the employers to hire Roma, as employment is the key area in which we are being discriminated and we are not in an equal situation with the applicants for jobs of other nationalities. Very often we are not given the chance to try. The few months during which the company would not have to pay our wages would motivate it to hire a Roma and let him prove his aptitude.” (Roma woman in Jelgava.)

Due to the low level of Roma education and their lack of skills as well as to the staff turnover (among them there is a relatively higher proportion of applicants for jobs who cannot adapt themselves to the requirements of the employers – they fail to do monotonous work for a lengthy period of time, to have long working hours, they manipulate with sick-lists when there is no ground for using them – these were the problems which after two months of work the Personnel Department specialists of poultry factory „Kekava” had to solve increasingly often) the employer has to invest more human resources (and also financial resources) in the education process, as well as to have additional communication with the staff in order to “break the stereotypes” (2 respondents, who had hired some Roma had encountered racket on the part of the staff: *“I won’t work together with a Gypsy... I’d rather leave”*), the employment of Roma poses higher risks and additional costs to the employer. That is why new opportunities have to be considered and new programmes elaborated for motivating the employers and giving them financial relief by employing long-term Roma unemployed persons as well as Roma who have not completed elementary education and have no previous work experience.

Samples of best practice

Companies with majority of the employees being Roma. Experience shows that Roma feel comfortable when working together, eagerness to compete and motivation develops, productivity of the work increases.

- There is a company washing freight cars that operate in the port of Ventspils. It employs mostly Roma and is known as “Roma company”. Thanks to its quality of work and speed, it has managed to outdo all possible rivals.
- JSC “Ventspils zivju konservu kombināts” mainly employs Roma women. Taking into account that personnel also earn living by gathering berries and mushrooms, management of the company stops production at the end of the summer and beginning of the autumn and do renovation of the equipment.

Positive example of mentoring is functioning in Jurmala – Director of Roma Day centre and Personnel department of JSC “Putnu fabrika Ķekava” initiated cooperation project, within which employment opportunities for 17 Roma inhabitants from Jurmala were provided. Employees are provided with transport for commuting from Jurmala to Kekava.

Recommendations for facilitating employment

/ Recommendations for the Ministry of Welfare and Ministry of Economics

Both statistical data and data of the Roma survey demonstrate that Roma experience social rejection, discrimination and inequality in the field of employment, as well as identify Roma as social group subjected to the risk of unemployment and, accordingly, poverty, thus special programmes should be developed and customised for this group to stimulate interest of the employers in employing Roma *on par* with other people, as well as developing their skills and capabilities, thus enhancing their integration in the labour market:

Since long-lasting social exclusion has resulted in the lack of primary level motivation characteristic for majority of the Roma community, it is important to develop and implement **individual programmes of motivation for social integration**, first of all associated with the employment since it provides access to the means of subsistence. Thus in the present situation project that is being developed by SEA – Activation programme of the long-term unemployed, which will be financed by the European Social fund can be regarded as urgently needed and promising. This includes mentoring (involvement of individualised mediator) of SEA registered long-term unemployed, with aim to develop and maintain long-lasting and stable motivation for integration in the labour market,

as well as help solve everyday situation and problems, which for unemployed, who are lacking information or education, either seem insurmountable or require so much time, that motivation is lost for activity as such. Recommendations for development and implementation of the above mentioned programme, based on the results of the research:

- To make cooperation with Roma efficient, mentor will have to establish successful contact with the potential unemployed. In case of Roma, emotional contacts are especially significant, thus it is important for mentor to understand social and cultural singularities of Roma as well as characteristic models of behaviour. The above mentioned substantiates recommendation that **procurement of the mentoring services and involvement of mentors should be made as local as possible**, thus ensuring selection of mentors that are as qualified and appropriate for particular community as possible.
- If, according to the SEA statics of the registered unemployed, ratio of the Roma long-term unemployed exceeds medium value, municipalities, to stabilise situation and provide equal opportunities, should define quota of Roma for mentoring programme. If number of Roma long-term unemployed during one year constantly exceeds 20 persons, municipality should employ for selection of mentors at least one expert who has worked with Roma inhabitants.
- It is important that duties of the mentor should also include work to establish contacts with the potential employees, as well as to develop and maintain a link with the potential and current employers, which could help to identify cases and signs of discrimination in situations of the suddenly filled vacancies as well as during the initial period of the employment.

Since cases of illiteracy (8% in Roma community) as well as persons with poor reading and writing skills (according to SEA calculations – approx. 400 persons in total by September 2015, 12% of all Roma) have been identified in the population of SEA registered unemployed, Ministry of Welfare Training Committee should be recommended to **consider including teaching of reading and writing skills in the choice of informal education programmes offered by SEA**, simultaneously promoting development of appropriate programmes in the non-governmental sector, reducing bureaucratic requirements and not applying result-based approach (unit costs) in the implementation of these programmes (that is requiring certain minimal number of persons who have acquired writing/ reading skills, which is difficult to predict because of the complex target group and thus such number on its own would hinder development of programmes. Efficiency should instead be achieved, where possible, by applying to the mentoring programme an efficiency promoting bonus programme – it is currently being developed).

Taking into account that by the end of August 2015, population of the SEA registered unemployed included 2166 unemployed with incomplete basic education (40,3% of the registered Roma had not completed seven grades), Ministry of Welfare Training commission should consider including **training of practical skills** (shoemaker, basket maker etc.) **in the choice of the programmes offered by SEA for acquiring informal education and skills**, simultaneously promoting development of appropriate programmes in the non-governmental sector, reducing bureaucratic load for providers of the programmes and avoiding result-based approach to enhance efficiency of the programme, but instead, where possible, applying to the mentoring programme an efficiency promoting bonus programme – it is currently being developed).

Cooperate with Ministry of Economics and social partners (e.g., Employers' Confederation of Latvia) **to implement measures for reducing stereotypes about Roma employees, by promoting the best practice in Roma employment**, as well as by educating HR specialists about specific issues and solutions, when employing persons subjected to risk of social rejection. Knowledge alleviates fear of risk and improves chance for trying.

Develop support mechanisms, including financial incentives to motivate employers recruit unemployed of Roma origin during the research conflicting opinions were expressed on whether to provide subsidised jobs functioning for 3 to 6 months if a Roma is employed – this way employers could be encouraged to allow potential Roma candidate prove his/her skills, attitude towards the job and ability to respect working time as well as internal regulations set by the employer. During the focus group discussions introduction of the subsidised jobs was most actively supported by Roma themselves, who insisted that they were discriminated and employees did not trust representatives of their nation. Since existence of the problem was also confirmed by SEA experts, who could not offer any practical solution, it is recommended to study experience of other countries, to find the most appropriate solution for Roma in Latvia.

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States (2013/C 378/01) (9 December 2013) Section 1.4: **“Take effective measures to ensure equal treatment of Roma in access to the labour market and to employment opportunities.”**

/ 5. Health care

Article 111 of the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia establishes that *“The State shall protect human health and guarantee a basic level of medical assistance for everyone”*. However, it is access to health care services that makes us speak about the availability of quality health care.

5.1. Accessibility of health care services and cooperation with the health care staff

One of the basic indicators characterising the accessibility of the population of a country to health care services as well as the general level of cooperation with health care specialists and staff is registration with a family doctor. The results of the Roma quantitative survey show that **to the question, “Do you have your own family doctor?” almost all or 98,2% Roma respondents answered in the affirmative** and only 7 Roma or 1,8% of the surveyed respondents did not have their own family doctor. The Roma survey data differ very little from the information on the whole population of Latvia obtained within the framework of a research carried out in 2008 by the State Agency for Compulsory Health Insurance and the company “Data Serviss”. The objective of the research was to find out the opinion of the population of Latvia about the opportunity to receive publicly funded health care as well as about their awareness of services guaranteed to patients and paid from the state budget – answering the question whether they were informed who their family doctor was 1,2% of the research participants said they did not have a family doctor²².

In its last publication “Prevention of Discrimination in Latvia II” prepared in 2011 by the Latvian Centre for Human Rights it has been pointed out that according to the information provided by the Health Inspectorate, up to August 2011 no claim or complaint about any case of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, disability or sexual orientation has been received²³, which means that formally the ethnic origin and belonging to Roma cannot be considered a barrier to access to the services of a family doctor – it has been emphasized also by several health care specialists at the in-depth interviews:

“Our task is to help everybody, without regard to ethnicity [...] We certainly have an equal attitude to everyone. We do not differentiate between patients. If you have turned to us for help, we have to help you.” (Head Doctor of a hospital in Zemgale region.)

²² State Agency for Compulsory Health Insurance and “Data Serviss”. (2008). *Pētījums par iedzīvotāju apmierinātību ar veselības aprūpes pakalpojumiem un to saņemšanas iespējām.*, p. 102.

²³ Latvian Centre for Human Rights (2011). *Diskriminācijas novēršana Latvijā II.*, p. 30.

“We ensure an equal attitude concerning the accessibility to our services and we render our services equally to all persons who have the right to them irrespective of their ethnicity. [...] A different attitude can be allowed only due to medical indications.” (Head Doctor of a hospital in Kurzeme region.)

Though the legislation of the Republic of Latvia does not provide for special privileges to any nationality in the process of re-rendering health care services, neither does it demand recording a person’s nationality in medical documents and though all the health care specialists interviewed within the framework of the research declared that they guaranteed an equal attitude in ensuring accessibility to health care services irrespective of the patients’ nationality and ethnicity, actually the situation is different. At an in-depth interview a case of hidden discrimination was mentioned, when ethnicity had been a direct barrier to registering a Roma child with a family doctor:

“I had prepared all the necessary documents, had called a family doctor and arranged an appointment but unfortunately as soon as they understood I was a Gypsy they found an excuse not to register a two months old baby – they said that too many people had registered with the doctor I had chosen, though previously they had said nothing of the kind.” (Social worker in Riga.)

It was established in the research that not all health care specialists were free from prejudices or stereotypes – even in case a discriminating attitude was not directly expressed or shown some health care specialists avoided contact with the Roma population:

“There is a tradition that if you have once rendered health care services to a Gypsy then next time when another Rom comes to get registered my colleagues urge me – go and examine her, you get on well with them, you have greater experience. Partly I understand my colleagues – Gypsies are likely to give you more trouble. They are loud. A woman in labour is often accompanied by a crowd of relatives.” (Obstetrician in Riga).

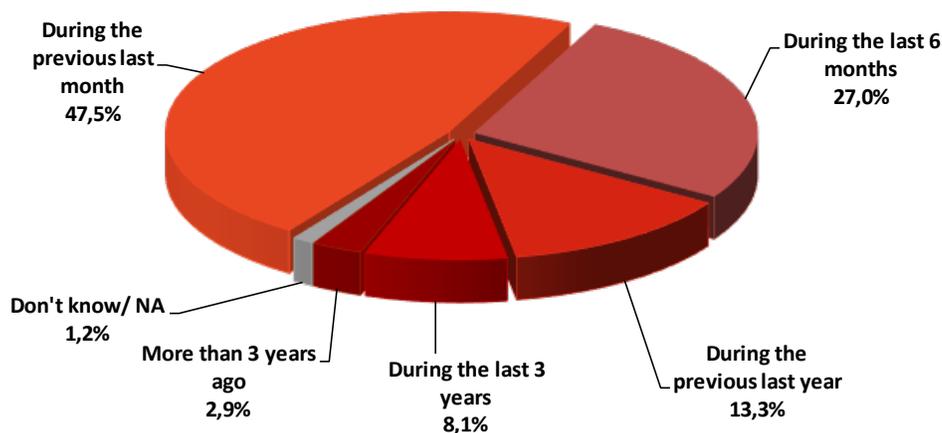
As primary health care at which the first contact between the patient and the health care specialist takes place and at which the key health problems of the population are addressed is mainly provided by family doctors, one of the essential indicators characterising the cooperation of the population with the health care specialists is the frequency of visits to the family doctor. The data of a quantitative Roma survey show that **during the last year, 87,8% of respondents have visited their family doctor in connection with their health problems or those of their children** – besides, almost half of them or 47,5% have done it in the last month.

In the last month, women (54,4%), and survey participants aged 30 to 39 (56,4%) and people who are 60 and over (61,8%), as well as respondents having children (49,1%) have visited their family doctor relatively more often. The data obtained in the research confirm that elderly respondents visit the family doctor more often, because with age their general health condition deteriorates. The fact that Roma women have visited

their family doctor relatively often within the last month can be explained firstly by a higher proportion of women (51,71 %) among the Roma population and secondly by their traditional lifestyle, according to which mainly women take care of their children (including contacts with health care specialists) instead of men.

Figure 5.1.1. When did you visit last time your family doctor (with issues related to your or your children's health)?

(Base = respondents, who have their own family doctor; N=358)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

In general, the Roma people visit their family doctor not less often than the majority population. For comparison – in 2008, the results of a research conducted by the State Agency for Compulsory Health Insurance and the company "Data Serviss" shows that 27% of the surveyed population of Latvia had not visited the family doctor a single time in the last year²⁴, and this amount is about 2,5 times higher (!) than that of the Roma community.

Slightly more than a year ago, only 11% of the surveyed Roma or 39 respondents had visited their family doctor. Among them 18,8% were men and respondents aged 20 to 29 (19,2%). Their small number can be explained by the fact that due to their young age they are likely to have less health problems and they usually try to avoid visiting a health specialist. This has been confirmed also by the analysis of in-depth interview data:

"Usually it is women who visit the family doctor more often – when their children get sick or when they need some medicine – mothers and grandmothers come to us, but men are seldom seen here. They are not used to it." (Family doctor in Kurzeme region.)

"If any of the Gypsies needs a prescription it would usually be his wife who comes to get it and not vice versa." (Doctor in Kurzeme region.)

²⁴ State Agency for Compulsory Health Insurance and "Data Serviss". (2008). *Pētījums par iedzīvotāju apmierinātību ar veselības aprūpes pakalpojumiem un to saņemšanas iespējām.*, p. 102.

Though the fact that almost all Roma have their own family doctor (98,2%) and though in the last year the majority or 87,8% of the respondents visited their family doctor in connection with their health problems or those of their children can be considered positive, however, their different notion of the rules of conduct, their lack of conformity to traditional models of interaction accepted by society, and their lack of definite skills – inability to organize time, being chaotic, their irresponsible attitude to deadlines and timetables – create additional problems that hinder their integration into the general health care system and do not allow them to make full use of the available services and invite an intolerant attitude on the part of other members of society:

“The Gypsies do not understand how to book an appointment with a doctor or how the health care system operates. If they have booked an appointment for today at 2:00 p.m. they may appear tomorrow morning. They don’t do it out of malice but due to carelessness, lack of knowledge and inability to go to the heart of the matter.” (Family doctor in Kurzeme region.)

“I remember a case when a Gypsy girl, after she had given birth to a child, was visited in the common ward by her relatives. The Gypsies seated themselves on the vacant beds disregarding the fact that they had been just made for the arrival of new expectant mothers. They spoke loudly, emotionally jesticulating. I understood that they did not do it on purpose in order to annoy anyone, but the other young mothers may have wanted to have a rest. And then they get angry or intolerant.” (Obstetrician in Riga.)

At in-depth interviews, the health care specialists however admitted that notwithstanding the above mentioned difficulties the Roma pay special attention to their children’s health which unlike the health condition of other community members seems to be a priority with them.

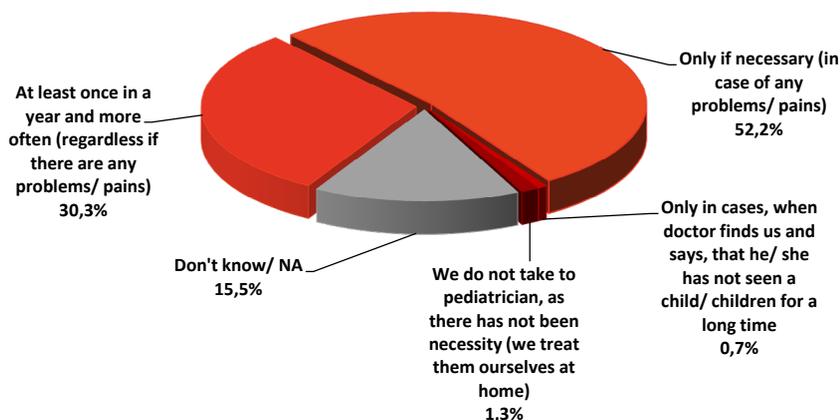
“Gypsies may not frequent an out-patient clinic, but as soon as something happens with their children, they immediately rush to the doctor. Roma don’t risk when their children’s health is concerned. Sooner the Latvians who are carried away with “green thinking” would try homeopathic or popular folk remedies, while a Gypsy would visit a family doctor.” (Family doctor in Kurzeme region.)

“Yes, they (Roma) take good care of children. Children are more important to them than their own health. They may turn to self-medication when they fall ill but they would take their children to a doctor when they are not well or catch a cold or when they are coughing or when they need an inoculation. They take utmost care of their children.” (Family doctor in Latgale region.)

Though half (52,2%) of the Roma population pointed out during the survey that they took their children to a paediatrician only in cases of utmost need, almost one third (30,3%) of the surveyed Roma said they visited a paediatrician at least once a year regardless of whether the child had pains or any other problems.

Figure 5.1.2. How often do you take your child/ children to pediatrician (children’s doctor)?

(Base = respondents having children aged up to 18 years in their families; N=251)

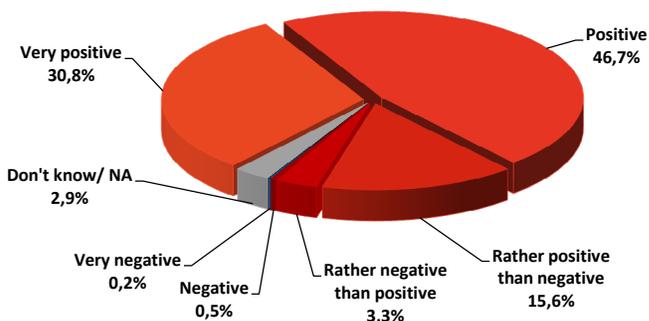


Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by “Latvian Facts” (2015)

The analysis of the quantitative Roma survey reveals that more than three fourths or 77,5% of the surveyed Roma have a positive attitude to cooperation with their family doctor (“very positive” – 30,8%, “positive” – 46,7%). A significant statistic difference in various social demographic groups (taking into account their gender, age, education and income level) has not been noticed.

Figure 5.1.3. How do you evaluate your cooperation with your family doctor? It is....

(Base = respondents, who have their own family doctor; N=358)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by “Latvian Facts” (2015)

It has to be noted that the data obtained in the research which was carried out in 2008 by the State Agency for Compulsory Health Insurance and the company “Data Serviss” are similar – 35% of the surveyed Latvian population were fully satisfied with their family doctor and his or her work, 42% were rather satisfied. However, it has to

be noted that there is a larger proportion of dissatisfied people among the Latvian population than among the Roma community – in 2008, 16% of the surveyed persons were dissatisfied (fully or rather dissatisfied) with the work of their family doctor, but the results of the Roma quantitative survey show that only 4% of the surveyed Roma assessed cooperation with their family doctor as more or less negative. The positive assessment of this cooperation is rooted in the positive attitude of the doctor towards his or her patients. The analysis of the in-depth interviews shows that if a doctor benevolently listens to and pays full attention to a Roma patient, it is worth positive assessment. In other words, Roma appreciate an ordinary visit to a family doctor, whereas the representatives of other nationalities hold the view that the doctor is doing his or her regular job. In general, Roma have lower self-confidence and fewer complaints than persons belonging to other nationalities and it can be explained by their low education level, lack of information about ordinary everyday matters, as well as the general long-time discriminating attitude toward them:

“Sometimes it seems that they are masking complexes behind their loud behaviour. They don’t like long queues. They are afraid of them because they are not used to wait long for anything. They distrust examinations and you have to explain in detail why they are necessary to them. If the sick person is not a child, they would leave altogether.” (Family doctor in Kurzeme region.)

“If you are kind to them (Roma), they appreciate it and would remember it for a long time. A Latvian would think that consideration was due to her and she would complain to authorities if she did not like anything. [...] Roma do not complain. On the one hand, they expect a negative attitude to them beforehand and, on the other hand, they are proud. If they don’t like something they would leave without saying anything.” (Obstetrician in Riga.)

At in-depth interviews with social workers and health care specialists, a view was voiced that Roma were especially sensitive to how they were treated:

“There have been cases when they were late for a visit or the doctor could not see them, and the Gypsies who were in the waiting room simply turned their backs and left. Moreover, they paid a pretty sum to another specialist who was ready to see them without delay.” (Social worker in Kurzeme region.)

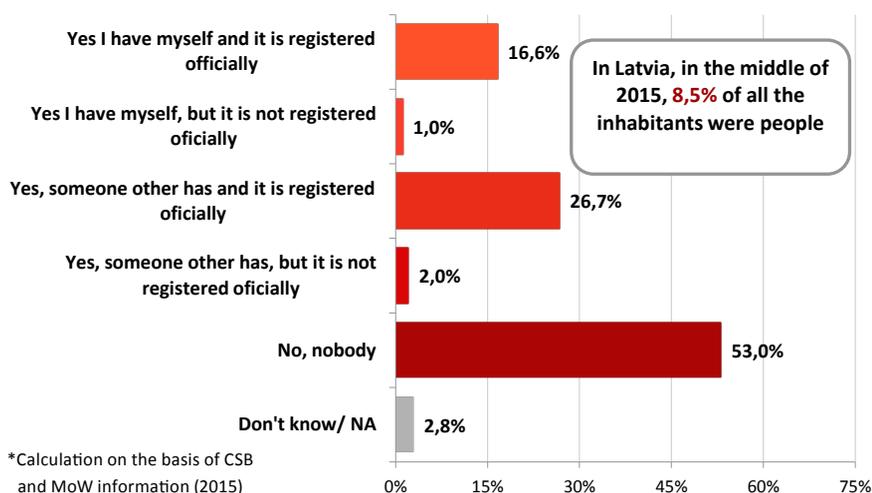
“You have to be very patient with Roma. Yes, they are loud and noisy. You hear at once that they have come for a visit. Besides, you expect one person, a mother with her child, but she is accompanied by her relatives and friends. And if you ask them to quiet down, they take offence. In the first place, a Russian or a Latvian would not behave like that and secondly, they would not take offence. [...] You have to treat them with velvet gloves when you reproach them. Then it works.” (Family doctor in Latgale region.)

5.2. Disability risks

One of the negative Roma health care aspects in Latvia is the disproportionately high number of Roma with disabilities. In the middle of 2015, 8,5% of the population of Latvia were persons with disabilities²⁵, whereas the data obtained in a quantitative Roma survey show that **16,6% of the surveyed Roma have been officially registered as people with disabilities**, and 26,7% of respondents said that some other family member had been officially acknowledged to be a person with disabilities.

Figure 5.2.1. Do you or any of your family members have disability?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015);

The data obtained in a quantitative Roma survey confirm the unofficial information voiced during the research carried out in 2003 by the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies that the proportion of Roma with disabilities is higher than that of the whole country. The Head of the Tukums branch of the Roma association "Gloss" Anatolijs Berezovskis maintained that 20–25% of Gypsies were with disabilities.²⁶

The disproportion between the statistical data on the population of Latvia and the Roma research results can be explained by Roma being more interested in obtaining the status of a person with disabilities as it involves benefits which may serve as an additional source of income for a household and sometimes even as one of the main income sources.

²⁵ The calculation is based on 2015 CSB data and information on the number of disabled people in 2015 published in the home page of the MoW: <http://www.lm.gov.lv/news/id/6627>

²⁶ Latvian Centre for Human Rights. (2003). *Čigānu stāvoklis Latvijā*. Rīga., p. 43.

“They (Roma) are not ashamed of the status of a person with disabilities, they use it as a pretext for receiving benefits.” (Head of the Social Department in Latgale Region.)

“The Gypsies are quick to grasp all matters and aspects connected with getting benefits and other advantages. [...] They don’t worry about being called persons with disabilities – for them it is the main possibility to get benefits because they have families for whom it would be difficult to survive without them.” (Social worker in Kurzeme region.)

In this they essentially differ from other nationalities who have an opposite tendency – they do not want to have their documents processed or face the Health and Work Expert Physicians’ Commission in order to be granted the status of a person with disabilities even in cases where they are legally entitled to it, being apprehensive of problems with potential employers.

Experts of various fields participating in the in-depth interviews (altogether 11), attribute heightened disability risks to potential genetic inheritance, an unhealthy lifestyle and unfavourable living conditions:

“Roma children have a greater likelihood to have hereditary disabilities as sexual intercourse often takes place between close relatives. Even if Gypsy women are informed about it, their attitude to it is not serious enough. They think, “What will be, will be.”” (Head of an Orphans’ Court in Kurzeme region.)

“Nobody speaks about it openly, yet it is clear to everybody why Roma often have vision problems, disabilities or other disorders. They have a tradition to intermarry but their community is not very large and sometimes they marry close relatives. And this is the result.” (Policy maker in Latgale region.)

“The general attitude of Roma to themselves and their health is rather irresponsible. You may warn an expectant mother that smoking is harmful. She will listen to you but she won’t take it into account. [...] They do not think of the future. The same refers to early sex or sexual relations between close relatives [...] you may tell them that it is dangerous and that the child may have a hereditary illness but they don’t take it into consideration.” (Obstetrician in Zemgale region.)

5.3. Family planning, accessibility of pre-natal and post-natal care

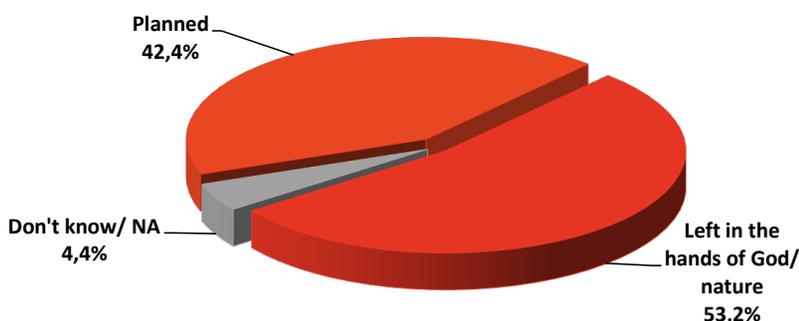
One of the essential aspects of health care is women’s health condition. Roma women often have difficulties in family planning and they lack information on contraceptives, which often causes early pregnancy. Though Roma fertility rate in Latvia is decreasing, yet Roma women tend to have more births in comparison with women of other nationalities as well as births at the age of 15–17:

“Yes, very young Gypsy girls come to us. [...] Sometimes right after school. They are not the only ones who come to us. Latvian and Russian girls also happen to have early pregnancies but more often than not it is Gypsy girls who get pregnant early.” (Obstetrician in Kurzeme region.)

In general, more than a half or 53,2% of the surveyed Roma of both sexes consider that their family does not have to plan the number of children and to the question, “Should the number of children in the family be left in the hands of God or nature – *if you are blessed by God with children, they have to be born and raised*” they answered in the affirmative. 66,4% of the respondents were older than 60 years of age (other significant statistic differences in various social demographic groups – taking into account their gender, age, education and income level – have not been noticed).

Figure 5.3.1. Do you think the number of children in the family should be planned or left in the hands of God/ nature – “as many are given by God, as many you should bear and raise”?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)

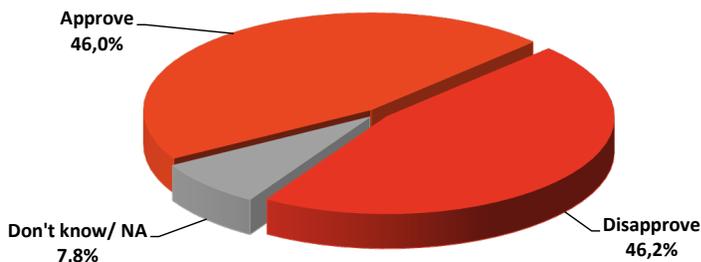


Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by “Latvian Facts” (2015)

However, the above mentioned issue has an emotional and subjective character. Giving answers in a general way, Roma express a view on things and processes as they should be, a view rooted in Roma traditions, customs, religion and general wisdom. As soon as the issue concerns concrete conduct or support to concrete activities, the situation changes – Roma often act guided by practical considerations. This discrepancy between “theory” and “practice” is revealed in the analysis of the Roma quantitative survey data – though only 42,4% of the surveyed Roma consider that the number of children has to be planned, the use of contraceptives is supported by a larger number of Roma – 46%.

Figure 5.3.2. Do you approve or disapprove the usage of contraceptives (means, that allow to avoid from pregnancy - such as birth control pills, condoms, intrauterine device (coil)...)?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



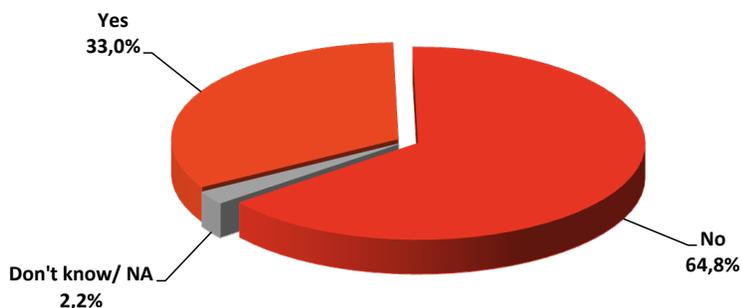
Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

Rather often support to the use of contraceptives has been expressed by survey participants aged 20-29 (63,7%), women (50,9%), respondents from Kurzeme and Zemgale regions (respectively 66,9% and 47,8%), as well as those Roma whose average income per family member exceeds EUR 137 per month (60,9%). There is a significant statistic link between Roma attitude to the use of contraceptives expressed by the respondents and their age – the older is the respondent the more conservative is his or her attitude, only four of the surveyed Roma older than 70 years of age support the use of contraceptives.

Only one third or 33% of the surveyed Roma women answered in the affirmative to the question whether any contraceptives, such as birth control pills, condoms or spirals had been used.

Figure 5.3.3. Have you used any of the contraceptives, such as birth control pills, condoms, intrauterine device (coil)...?

(Base = women; N=194)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

Women up to 40 years of age (45,6%) have used contraceptives relatively more often. Besides, there is a marked tendency – **the younger the respondent the more often she uses contraceptives**. The surveyed Roma women from Zemgale and Kurzeme regions gave an affirmative answer more often than the respondents from other regions (respectively 47,6% and 39%). Such views and action models of women from the above mentioned regions can be explained by a more liberal attitude than, for example, that of women in Latgale region who have a more conservative attitude due to their religious beliefs.

In family planning and the use of contraceptives great attention should be paid to the educational aspect. Roma often lack basic knowledge and understanding of the nature of contraceptives, their use and consequences. At a focus group discussion with the representatives of Roma civil society, a view was even voiced that „*the use of hormonal pills was a sin [...], as it could be compared to killing your own child*”. (Roma mediator at a focus group discussion in Riga.) This statement clearly demonstrates the necessity to introduce health education and sex education at schools. Besides, the lessons about health and sex should be conducted not by teachers but by health care specialists (e.g., gynaecologists, family doctors) in the capacity of guest lecturers. As pointed out by a health care specialist from Zemgale region:

“If teachers conduct health education lessons they cannot ensure good quality. When I was invited to conduct a lesson at school it was the teacher who was shocked most of all at the visual aids and materials I had taken with me. [...] I had not expected such frank questions from the pupils. They were handed to me in written form, but I doubt whether the girls would have dared to ask the teacher such questions. Besides, the teacher was more confused than the girls.” (Health care specialist in Zemgale region.)

Using his or her practical knowledge and work experience, a health care specialist may be more proficient than the teacher in imparting information on the content of health education or sex education, since the teacher’s knowledge of these subjects is only theoretical. Due to these considerations, it is essential for educational institutions to start and develop cooperation with the health care specialists, organising the necessary sex education lectures or health education lessons.

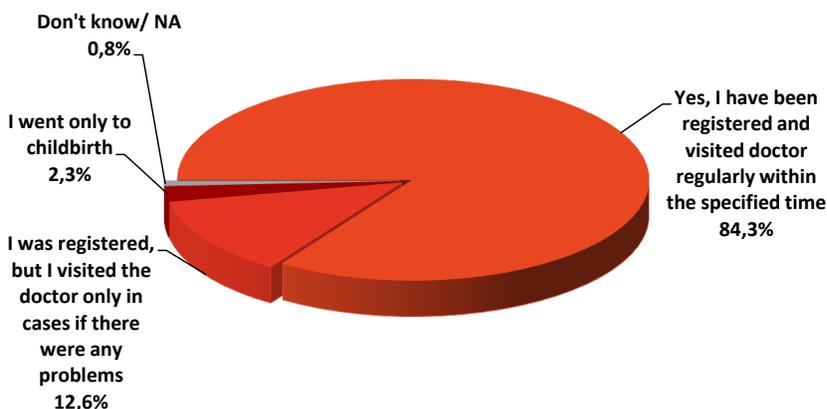
Since 2003, when the research on “The Situation of Gypsies in Latvia” was conducted by the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies, the situation in obstetrics has considerably improved: if formerly information on Roma women who registered their pregnancy with an obstetrician was contradictory – some sources mentioned that “in some town hospitals almost all Gypsy women had registered their pregnancy with an obstetrician in due time (up to the twelfth week of pregnancy)” but some other sources admitted that most Gypsy women do not register their pregnancy and are hospitalised only when the time comes for them to give birth to a child²⁷, then in 2015, the data of the Roma quantitative survey reveal the fact that the **majority or 84,3% of**

²⁷ Latvian Centre for Human Rights. (2003). *Čigānu stāvoklis Latvijā*. Rīga., p. 44.

the surveyed Roma women having children aged up to 13 years had registered their last pregnancy and had regularly visited a gynaecologist or an obstetrician.

Figure 5.3.4. Have you been registered with the gynaecologist during your LAST PREGNANCY and have paid regular visits to your gynaecologist or obstetrician?

(Base = women having children aged up to 13 years; N=92)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

Only two of the surveyed Roma women involved in the quantitative research admitted that they had not visited an obstetrician and had gone to hospital only when the time to give birth to the child had approached. One of the health care specialists emphasized that Roma women after having obtained information on the available obstetrician's services would make full use of them. Moreover they would comply with the deadlines recommended by the doctor:

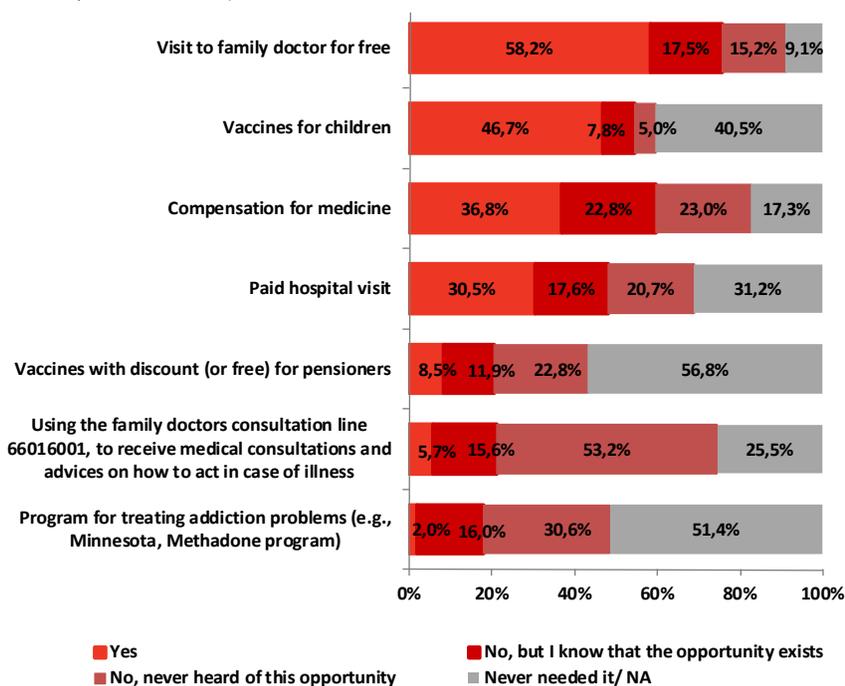
"The girls do not arrive at hospital a week ahead. Doctors, mothers and grandmothers have informed them of what would happen to them and what they will have to do in each situation. The girls pay attention to their sensations and arrive at hospital when it is absolutely necessary." (Obstetrician in Riga.)

5.4 Assistance in the area of health care

Every municipality offers preventive health services to the population. **Roma knowledge of the available health care services can be evaluated as incomplete.** Within the last three years, the patients' contribution being remunerated, 58,2% Roma have visited their family doctor, and 17,5% of the Roma surveyed admitted that they had been informed about this opportunity (See Figure 5.4.1). Roma having the status of a poor or an insecure person (73,7%), respondents whose average monthly household income per family member does not exceed EUR 136 (67,5%), women (65,5%) as well as families with children (65,6%) have used free family doctor visits more often.

Figure 5.4.1. During the last 3 years, have you or any of your family members received any help from local municipality, state institution or some organization concerning health care?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

Within the last three years, almost half or 46,7% of the surveyed Roma in Latvia have taken the opportunity to have their children vaccinated against illnesses. 40,5% of survey participants most of whom do not have children or grandchildren have not availed themselves of this service. Only 12,6% of the surveyed Roma population having children and grandchildren said they had had no need for this service. On their part, only 8,5% of the Roma pensioners who participated in the quantitative survey and who are entitled to free or low-cost vaccines have taken this opportunity within the last three years. 22,8% of Roma pensioners had heard about this opportunity for the first time. These data suggest that Roma are more concerned about the health of their children and try to use all available health care services they know about. Roma are more indifferent and irresponsible concerning the health of adults in their community or families. Three health care specialists at in-depth interviews stressed, too, that Roma often had the position of *"what will be, will be"* and that their thinking was not systematic, structured or future-orientated. Only facing a crisis which requires prompt action a Roma will act immediately. This kind of thinking is due to ignorance about the

health care services offered by the State or the municipalities as well as lack of understanding of the whole health care system.

In the last three years, 36,8% of the surveyed Roma have received reimbursed pharmaceuticals and 30,5% have had their hospital expenses covered. About one fifth of the surveyed Roma learned about the reimbursement of the pharmaceuticals and the coverage of hospital expenses for the first time (respectively 23% and 20,7%).

More than half of the surveyed Roma (53,2%) learned about the possibility to use the consultative line of family doctors for the first time when they were surveyed, though this service has been available in Latvia since 2011. Besides, significant statistic differences in various social demographic groups (taking into account their gender, age, education and income level) have not been noticed. It means that in cases when Roma have some health problems outside the family doctor's reception hours, emergency medical service will have an additional workload even in cases when acute assistance is not necessary. Analysing the data obtained during the in-depth interviews with health care specialists the conclusion was made that part of the Roma population lacked proper understanding and knowledge to be able to discern whether a worsening of definite symptoms was life-threatening and an ambulance had to be called or they should wait for the reception hours of the family doctor and consult him or her. In order to unburden the emergency medical service, information campaigns for the Roma population should be arranged in Latvia making them aware of the opportunity to use the consultative line of family doctors. Unfortunately, the usual communication channels – booklets at drug stores and family doctors' receptions, advertising and social campaigns in mass media, etc., – are not effective enough. The only method which the experts consider effective is direct contact or individual work with Roma and Roma families at each municipality.

"You have to speak personally to the Gypsies and tell them things. Informative letters won't do. They need a special approach." (Social worker in Zemgale region.)

"Every time a patient comes here, we tell him about the available services. Social workers are also informed about us, and if a Roma visits social workers he may get information on the spot. We don't know if Roma pay attention to this information or take it seriously but we are doing our best to inform them." (Hospital chief physician in Zemgale region.)

Both municipal social workers and family doctors should inform Roma about the available services, mentioning the advantages and benefits that they might make use of (for example, one has to pay for unfounded ambulance calls but if one uses the consultative line of a family doctor one may get a free consultation).

The analysis of the Roma quantitative survey shows that Roma participation in addiction treatment programmes should be viewed critically (for example, Minnesota, Methadone programmes). Drug addiction is still disproportionately high among Roma. In a research on drug use habits in Latvia carried out in 2014 by the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control it was established that "among other minority drug

addicts Roma constitute the majority significantly exceeding the number of drug addicts of other nationalities. Apart from the Latvians and Russians, about one third (31,7%) of addicts are Roma, 24,4% are Byelorussians and 17,7% are Lithuanians.²⁸ The Roma survey data show that almost one third (30,6%) of the persons participating in the survey had heard **for the first time about the opportunity to participate in the above mentioned programmes during the survey and only 2% or 7 respondents had taken advantage of the opportunity to participate in one of the addiction treatment programmes.** As four surveyed health care specialists pointed out at an in-depth interview, the use of intravenous drugs is the main cause of HIV infection among Roma men. However, Roma are rather sceptical about the HIV and AIDS prevention projects implemented up to the present day and they are distrustful, for example, of the possibility to exchange used syringes:

“Drug-addicted Roma often live in unsanitary conditions, they use common syringes, they don’t take care of their health. It seems they don’t care about it. Even when we inform them that they have a definite disease, they take it as a matter of course. They try to undergo treatment, of course, but one has a feeling that they are absolutely indifferent to their health. That is why they die more often and in larger numbers than, for example, Latvians and Russians as other nationalities have a sense of responsibility towards their health. They abstain from dubious things harmful to their health, but a Roma remains a Rom.” (Health care specialist in Zemgale region.)

Samples of best practice

In **Riga**, thanks to the commitment and self-initiative of a social worker it became possible to register a young Roma mother with a family doctor – the Roma woman for more than two months after the childbirth could not find a family doctor who would agree to register her with her child. Although during the telephone conversations with the social work the doctors agreed to accept the young mother, upon arrival to their practice place the registration was refused to the woman by mentioning as a formal reason the sufficient number of patients. In fact, the case of hidden discrimination was solved due to the comment of the social worker.

In 2013/2014, at the initiative of **Kandava** municipality social service, an informative campaign was carried about HIV/AIDS prevention among the Roma women. The campaign was carried out taking into account the type of communication most suitable for the Roma people, namely, by talking individually to each family, with each woman by explaining the most essential basic principles that should be observed in daily life in case the partner has been infected with HIV/AIDS.

²⁸ Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (2014). *Narkotiku lietošanas paradumi un tendences Latvijā (Drug Use Habits and Trends in Latvia)*, pp. 16–17.

Recommendations for facilitating health care services

/ Recommendations for the Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Health

In the context of family planning and use of contraceptives, the most attention should be paid to educational aspect – it would be advisable to introduce lectures on health education at primary school by health care specialists (including – about sex education).

To facilitate initiative of state institutions under the subordination of Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education and Science and NGOs like “Papardes zieds”, in attracting resources for in-depth examination of the situation, as well as for developing a potential programme for supporting in future Roma girls acquiring elementary education. By cooperation between representatives of different educational institutions (elementary school teachers, Roma teacher assistants) and healthcare specialists (for instance, family doctors), it is essential to assess individually situations, when necessary, to provide contraceptives partially or completely until graduating Grade 9.

In local municipalities with high proportion of Roma inhabitants (on average more than 60 Roma inhabitants in one municipality), in cooperation with NGOs and Roma mediators or other specialists, to find possibility to educate healthcare specialists about Roma culture and behavioural characteristics, necessity of individual approach.

/ Recommendations for local municipalities

To relieve the work load of emergency medical assistance service from cases when there is no need to receive emergency medical assistance, it is necessary to inform Roma people in the whole territory of Latvia about the possibility to use the consultative line of general practitioners. Unfortunately, the traditional communication channels – brochures at chemists’ and/or practice places of family doctors, advertising and social campaigns in mass media – are insufficient or inefficient at all. The only method that is to be perceived as efficient for Roma is direct communication, and also individual approach to those Roma families that are in the social risk group (for instance, with the status of financially disadvantaged, families with many children) within each municipality.

By ensuring circulation of the necessary information regarding health care among the Roma people, it is recommendable to use social workers in cooperation with health care specialists of the respective municipality – family doctors, gynaecologists, obstetricians. As an alternative approach for reducing the work load of social workers would be an increased involvement of Roma mediators in implementing informative campaigns – first by getting acquainted with the necessary information on services available to the Roma (not only informative line of family doctors, but also about vaccines to children and elderly people, refundable medicinal products, involvement in dependence/addiction treatment programmes, etc.) at healthcare specialists and then disseminating this information to the Roma community representatives.

Taking into account the previous positive practice of Roma mediators and results in facilitating cooperation and circulation of information among the representatives of Roma community and state/municipal institutions, and also healthcare specialists, it would be necessary for municipalities to find a possibility to support Roma mediators financially and increase their number (refers to municipalities with Roma population).

EU programme regarding state strategies of the Roma integration till 2020 (European Commission, Brussels, 5.4.2011, COM (2011): „**Where possible, qualified Roma should be involved in healthcare programmes targeting their communities.**”

/ 6. Housing

The provision of housing should be considered not only in its physical availability – in the meaning of a possibility to rent or buy it as a property – but also as an access to public utilities and appropriate living conditions ensuring a dignified human existence. At present, several EU level regulatory documents have come in effect (e.g., Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States, An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020) that recommend the EU Member States to consider the availability of housing to Roma people; nonetheless according to the data Ombudsman has indicated in his 2012 “Report on the spending of funding for Roma integration in the period from 2007 to 2012”²⁹ it is evident that in the area of ensuring real access to housing no systematic improvement has been achieved in Latvia until now, notwithstanding the conclusions of earlier studies³⁰, which have stated that the Roma people have a more limited access to housing and their living conditions and accommodation are of lower quality as compared to the rest of population in Latvia.

6.1. Roma living conditions

Since the 70-ies of the previous century the majority of Roma have moved over to the major cities of Latvia – Riga, Ventspils, Jelgava, Daugavpils, Jurmala – settling down there and they are characterised as urbanised community. In contrast to other European countries, e.g., Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia³¹, in Latvia no segregated territories such as ghettos or settlements of the Roma are identified, namely, their dwelling places are not isolated from the neighbourhood of the surrounding community, which otherwise might have limited their access to various public utilities. It should be pointed out that because of the characteristic desire of Roma to stick together, in the majority of cities where Roma live, their concentration in one or several adjacent buildings has been recorded, which results in a higher ratio of Roma in the community of the house or street. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that Roma do not establish geographically separated communities in Latvia.

According to Eurostat data, the majority of Latvian population dwell in apartments and this is the third highest indicator of the amount of inhabitants living in this type

²⁹ The Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia. (2012). *Pārskats par Eiropas Savienības finanšu instrumentu un valsts budžeta līdzekļu izlietojumu romu integrācijai pārskata periodā no 2007. gada – 2012. gadam.*, Rīga, p. 10.

³⁰ For example, “Latvia RAXEN National Focal Point Thematic Study Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers”—a study implemented in 2009, and “The situation of Roma in Latvia”—a 2003 study carried out by The Centre of Human Rights and Ethnic studies in Latvia.

³¹ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. (2012). *Living conditions of the Roma: Substandard housing and health*. Eurofound., p. 34–35., Retrieved from: http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_files/pubdocs/2012/02/en/1/EF1202EN.pdf

of dwelling places in Europe (64,4%)³². The representatives of the public sector, which were interviewed during the study often indicate that except for such large cities as Riga, Jelgava, Daugavpils, where the largest part of the housing fund mainly consists of multi-apartment houses, the Roma more typically live in small houses of flats and they less frequently choose to dwell in big multi-apartment buildings (houses with 10 and more apartments). In Latvia, Roma also live in one-family private houses, social homes, as well as in flats with low-standard utilities (i.e., housing with a low level of amenities lacking some of the minimum standard facilities – water supply, flush toilet, toilet or bathroom) and sometimes in rooms unfit for permanent living in them. The surveyed experts described the Roma housing as follows:

“Roma want to live in individual houses because they have this spirit of freedom, and they want a small yard for themselves, the municipality, however, is unable to provide them with anything like that”. (Municipality employee in Pierīga region.)

“We had a woman who would only have a private house and nothing else. And she would not accept any other place – she said she had a large family and they could not live in a flat because they would disturb neighbours”. (Housing specialist in Latgale region.)

“They need more individual space. They go and see each other, visit and chum around with each other. Kind of a tabor is always at home. And once they have started to engage in their popular ways nothing is left after them”. (Municipality employee in Kurzeme region.)

To characterise the accessibility of housing for Roma, one of the most essential indicators is the status of ownership, i.e., whether the housing is privately owned, or a municipal property, or whether it is rented. According to Roma survey data, in 42,5% of cases the respondent or a member of his household owns the housing, 38,2% of the respondents or a member of their household have fully acquired the housing as their property while 4,4% are still paying back the credit. Less than one-fifth of the surveyed Roma (18,6%) rent housing from another owner **while a considerable number of Roma live in municipality-owned houses** – amounting to more than one-third of the surveyed participants (**35,6%**), including 27,9% living in houses owned by the state and municipality and paying a full rent, 7,5% in social houses paying part of the due rent, and 0,2% taking shelter in an asylum (see Figure 6.1.1.).

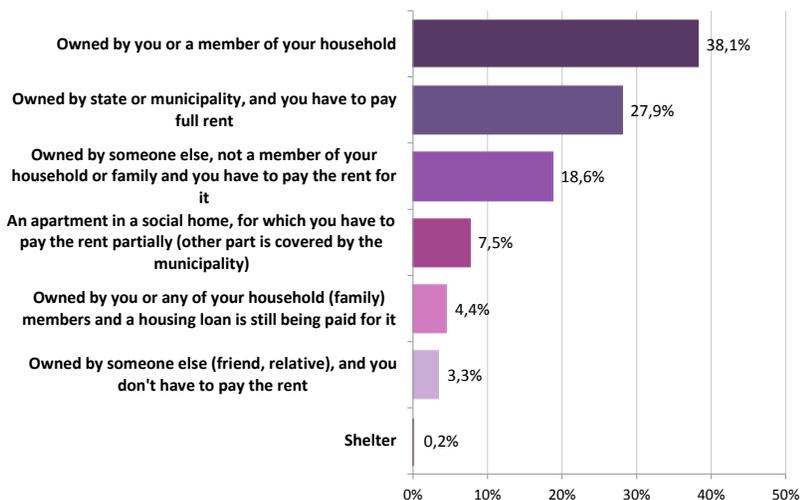
To compare the housing ownership structure of Roma people with that of the other inhabitants in Latvia the data of 2011 Census by CSB may be used as this is the latest all-embracing study of housing conditions implemented in Latvia. A comparison of Census data with the results of Roma quantitative survey proves that **in average housing is the private property of Roma in fewer cases than it is the property of the rest of the people living in Latvia** and they more frequently make use of the municipal housing fund. In 2011, the ratio of privately owned housing in the total amount of housing in

³² Eurostat Statistics Explained. (2015). *Statistics on Housing*. Retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Housing_statistics/lv#M.C4.81jok.C4.BCa_veids

Latvia was 58,8%, the ratio of rented housing was 12,6% while 28,6% reported other forms of housing ownership³³.

Figure 6.1.1. Is the housing you are currently living in... ?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

The analysis of Roma Survey data reveals a close correlation between the type of housing ownership (private property, rented or in municipal maintenance) and the income level of the members of the household – the higher the level of family income, the more frequently the housing is owned as a private property. Furthermore, differences in the structure of housing ownership may also be observed in regions: almost half of the surveyed Roma people in Latgale region (49,7%) and Zemgale region (45,1%) live in private housing while in Riga the housing is more frequently than in average rented from private owners (33,2%).

The information obtained during the interviews of housing specialists and municipality employees testifies that in several populated locations the structure of Roma housing ownership has historically developed. For instance, in Kuldīga a large part of Roma community live in private housing that they acquired by privatisation procedure, in less frequent cases it is rented from other private persons because the renting costs are too high as compared to their income level. At the same time in Jelgava, according to the assessment given by municipal authorities, Roma, if compared to other residents of the city, are *"in a particularly privileged situation as long as since olden times a large part of Roma reside in municipality-owned houses that have never been put*

³³ HousingEurope. (2015). *The State of Housing in the EU 2015. A Housing Europe Review*. Retrieved 02.09.2015. from: www.housingeurope.eu/resource-468/the-state-of-housing-in-the-eu-2015

out to privatisation and which the municipality now is forced to maintain” (Municipality employee in Jelgava). In Riga, Roma more frequently rent housing because of the shortage of the social housing fund and high renting costs in the private sector.

Both in expert interviews and during the discussions of Roma focus groups it was discovered that **access to housing is deterred due to such subjective factors as demands for a specific living location the community itself claims**. First, it depends on the pronounced desire of Roma to be located in the centre of the city or municipality, or else in such places where Roma are already concentrated to a relatively high degree. This was indicated by 10 interviewed representatives of the public sector in Sabile, Kuldīga, Valmiera, Kandava and Jurmala who stressed that Roma prefer to live nearby places where there is active urban social life and they often decline housing options that offer a better quality in remote districts. It is understood as an outspoken wish of Roma to be in the centre of events.

“There are free flats all over the municipality – and we are offering and offering all the free flats on the list. Only Kandava is needed! Forget to try to get a gypsy out of Kandava! Town, crowd, that’s another feeling of life!” (Municipality employee in Pierīga region.)

“In Kuldīga we cannot really offer anything for there are quite long waiting lists. We can offer something in more distant parts of Kuldīga municipality. But they don’t usually want to move away from Kuldīga centre [...]. I give them the keys and say – here you have a flat, it is only located in a small village 20 km from the town. But they do not want to go that far. Despite that there is a library, outpatient clinic, a shop, options for education and socialisation. They don’t want it and that’s it.” (Housing specialist in Kurzeme region.)

Second, **the housing location that Roma prefer to choose sometimes depends on mutual relations among Roma themselves** – two different Roma communities often reside in the same populated location and being afraid that they would not be accepted and in order to avoid possible conflicts the Roma refuse to live in such neighbourhoods. A Roma woman from Daugavpils when characterising the various Roma communities that live in the city clearly points to their inability to co-exist: *“They are the black ones while we are the white gypsies! We do not live together with them!”* (Roma focus discussion group in Daugavpils.) Interviews with experts also reveal that the employees who specialize in Roma housing are asked to respect the relations that exist among these different communities when granting municipal housing. A housing specialist from Jurmala points out in her interview: *“those who live in the far end of Dubulti are definitely against living in the far end of Sloka. This is another group and they do not get on with them.”* At the same time, a municipality employee from Jekabpils describes the Roma who live in the town as follows:

“We have two communities in Jekabpils and they are always at odds – the Russian-speaking gypsies, which are mainly concentrated in our unfavourable district on Krustpils side, and the other group are of Latvian orientation – and they are always at odds. For example, if he who comes to ask a flat is from Jekabpils side and we would give the flat at Madona street where the flats are not of particular quality, he would not go there and says he will

not be well-received there and might encounter even threats. Of course, such action is not officially registered, although we are very well aware of it.” (Municipality employee in Jekabpils.)

Despite the fact that Roma more commonly prefer to live together in a community, in the study several cases were identified where Roma have conveyed that they want to live in separation from the representatives of their people explaining it by a wish to “break away” from the negative impact of the community and start to live an independent life. A municipality employee from Limbazi describes one of the streets in the town where a greater number of Roma live: *“It is hard to get away from it but if they do manage to break out and get away from this street they themselves are glad”*. (Municipality employee in Limbazi.) Difficulties to choose and change the place of dwelling and decide to live separately from their folks are also stressed in the interview by a social service staff member in Riga: *“She came to us, the social service and said that she did not want to work in her sister’s business – drugs, because she had a small kid and she cared for the future fate of her child and she wanted to live in a different way. And she was very much aware that her family would exclude her from their circle.”* (Social worker in Riga.)

6.2. Possibility to rent or acquire housing

Almost all the interviewed housing specialists and several workers of social services (15 persons altogether) stress that in the context of the availability of housing, the Roma community cannot be regarded as a united entity and indicate that the provision of housing is problematic mainly among impoverished Roma population – according to the assessments by experts difficulties in the access to housing and ensuring its quality are experienced in average by 75%-80% of Roma families living in Latvia which is mainly explained by the low and irregular employment of Roma, poor income and insufficient material resources.

“Not everybody has problems with living. We have rich and even very rich Roma who live in luxurious private houses and have never been monitored by social services. However, in most cases it is difficult to provide Roma with housing. I guess at least 75% of the Roma in our region encounter this”. (Housing specialist in Kurzeme region)

“Everything is mutually connected – with no education there is no job nor must means for the maintenance of a flat, and therefore one live in cheaper housing of doubtful quality without amenities. And many of Roma are like this – most of them, some 80%, struggle but cannot pay the municipal payments.” (Social service worker in Zemgale region.)

The results of Roma survey also prove that one of the most significant obstacles in providing access to housing is insufficient income. Although the quantitative survey does not contain a special question about the expenses on housing maintenance and the survey does not give an insight into the resources that in fact are set aside to cover housing expenses, yet if we look at the structure of family income distribution in Roma

households, we may conclude that **a large part of Roma have limited resources for housing maintenance** – according to Roma survey data the average income per one family member in 35,6% of cases is below EUR 60, in 33% of cases it is EUR 60 to 136 and only 14,2 % have more than EUR 137 – and more than half of the surveyed Roma (53,7%) have been granted the status of a needy or low-income person. According to the annual research data on income statistical issues implemented by CSB “*EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions*” (hereafter referred to as “EU-SILC”³⁴) in 2014 an average household spent EUR 138 for the maintenance of housing every month³⁵ – on the basis of this research and the data obtained in the survey of Roma about the average family income a conclusion can be drawn that the majority of Roma households have difficulties to allot such an amount of resources necessary to maintain the existing housing. As a result this denies the possibility to ensure the provision of such living conditions in the chosen housing as needed and desired. The 15 surveyed representatives of the public sector have also pointed out that **the low and irregular income is one of the most fundamental factors that limit access to housing** and therefore Roma more often choose housing without amenities and in average more often than other inhabitants in Latvia they live in houses owned by municipalities and social homes.

“You know, they usually look for the cheapest variant, for example, social flats, or make use of kinship, inheritance. It is seldom, yet may also so happen that someone buys some cheap buildings. I think it was two years ago that the last purchase was made.” (Municipality employee in Latgale region.)

“They do not want new houses. They would rather choose an outhouse toilet than a new house. We offered to a family keys of a flat with all the facilities, toilet and bathroom, they however did not accept it because they were afraid the flat would be too expensive.” (Housing specialist in Kurzeme region.)

“Roma are living worse as compared to other residents of Ventspils. They seldom live in apartments with all amenities because their income is seasonal – when they go and gather berries they are better off and are buying jewellery which they may afterwards pawn and sell. But otherwise they dwell in houses without amenities or with few amenities.” (Housing specialist in Kurzeme region.)

The point of view of experts is also confirmed by a participant in the discussions of Roma focus group from Tukums who points out that *“the cost of rent from private owners is enormous. And in addition electricity must also be paid. Well, we do not have that much and therefore we rather live this way. [...] Sure, it is hard to bring that water. Winter is the worst season when the water has frozen. And no one will help us. But we do not have money for a better flat”*.

³⁴ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. (2015). *Income and living conditions in Latvia 2014. Collection of Statistical data*. Riga. Retrieved 25.10.2015. from: http://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/nr_14_ienskumi_un_dzives_apstakli_latvija_2014_15_00_lv_en.pdf

³⁵ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. (04.03.2015). *Mājsaimniecības mājokļa uzturēšanai vidēji tērē 138 eiro mēnesī*. Retrieved 25.10.2015. from: <http://www.csb.gov.lv/notikumi/majsaimniecibas-majokla-uzturesanaivideji-tere-138-eiro-menesi-41763.html>

The research reveals that a factor that substantially sets limits in the access to housing is **the existing prejudice in society about Roma as undesirable tenants and neighbours**, this has been stated not only by the interviewed experts but also by Roma themselves in focus group discussions stressing that in society there circulate a deeply rooted view of Roma as a social group of people who live in poverty, treating property of the others without care, lead a way of life that does not conform with the accepted norms of behaviour in society, their everyday habits disturb their neighbours. In total, 13 experts that were interviewed during the research, as well as one of the participants of focus group discussions have emphasised that these stereotypes considerably reduce the access of Roma to renting in the private sector.

“People are not particularly eager to let out their apartments to Roma because of stereotypes and imagining the problems that might follow, and in the result Roma are in the street. They are sometimes even ready to pay but since nothing is rented they remain in the street.” (Municipality employee in Kurzeme region.)

“It is more complicated with Roma to find anybody who will rent out. Silent telephones sometimes function, and stereotypes exist in society. Tukums is a small place and it so happens that if there is a family which has committed something the word of this accompanies them as a small black spot, it is very difficult to find a flat then.” (Social services worker in Pierīga region.)

“Nobody wants to rent to us. As soon as they hear our surname or see us, it turns out that the flat is already rented out to somebody else. Of course! They simply do not want to give it to us!” (Discussion of Roma focus group in Tukums.)

Access to housing is also often limited by the fact that **Roma themselves lack skills to find out and make a full use of the available informative resources** which correlates with the relatively low educational level of Roma population and frequent lack of literacy skills (in accordance with the results of quantitative survey the education of 48,9% of respondents is below elementary, 34% of respondents have elementary education and the education of 17,2% is above the elementary level), low computer literacy and limited access to internet. This does not allow them to use the traditional ways in the search of housing for rent and it considerably narrows the possibilities to find housing. In such cases help is asked from some of Roma confidants – local authorities or Roma mediators, sometimes the social services workers are addressed or in some municipalities housing specialists, thus creating an additional job load for municipality employees to find a solution in their problem situations. Problematic is the situation in Riga where housing specialists have observed that in such cases Roma often have no one to turn to for help – the interviewed experts strongly insist on the need to have such a person in municipality who would develop Roma searching skills in order to be able to find housing and help to find solutions to problem situations in the provision of housing.

An important indicator of access to housing is also the possibility of acquisition. Taking into account that in Latvia such data as the social status, ethnicity, the number and size of the households in their ownership or the amount of purchased housing, are not regularly (annually) collected, the data showing the number of people who live in mortgaged houses or houses purchased on credit or loan that must be paid back, may give a certain insight pre-supposing that part of the houses have been acquired with the help of a bank loan. The analysis of the quantitative results of the survey on Roma shows that **4,4% of the surveyed Roma live in a house that belongs to the respondent or another member of the household and the credit is still being paid back, which is less frequent than the average in Latvia** – in 2014 according to the data of EU-SJLC research conducted by CSB 9,4% of the population in Latvia live in a housing for which a mortgage credit or loan is being paid back³⁶. The average data show that Roma less frequently than others use the possibility to acquire housing on credit. The most essential reason is connected with the relatively low and irregular income of this ethnic group, as well as lack of savings, which besides making the purchase of property impossible does not allow to accumulate savings for the first instalment needed for the crediting of housing (only 9,4% of the surveyed Roma have savings for unforeseen spending that might amount to more than EUR 250). Most of Roma families with children are unable to benefit from the state support programme implemented in 2015 to help the families with children to acquire the first housing (“Housing guarantee programme”)³⁷, which provides a guarantee loan for the first instalment. The majority of Roma families with children cannot use this programme as they cannot afford to pay the minimum instalment to receive the requested bank loan for housing. Second, among Roma dominates an open mistrust in the services the banks provide and an outspoken unwillingness to take up credit liabilities. During the discussions of Roma focus groups an openly deprecatory view was voiced regarding the possibility to purchase housing with the help of a loan from bank. *“No credit from bank!”, “God forbid!” or “We do not want to be in debt! Gypsy does not live in debts!”* (Discussions of Roma focus groups in Tukums and Kraslava.). The explanation probably lies in Roma traditions and life perception – living for one single day.

The results of the quantitative survey of Roma reveal an interesting aspect – in the survey, Roma were asked to disclose in detail if the relatives of their family have been in situations where because of their ethnicity they could not receive a credit from bank and could not buy some goods on lease. Although half of the participants said that they had not experienced such a situation, almost **one-fourth (23,2%) of the surveyed Roma admitted that they or another member of their family had come to be in a situation where Roma could not receive a credit from bank or purchase a commodity in leasing**

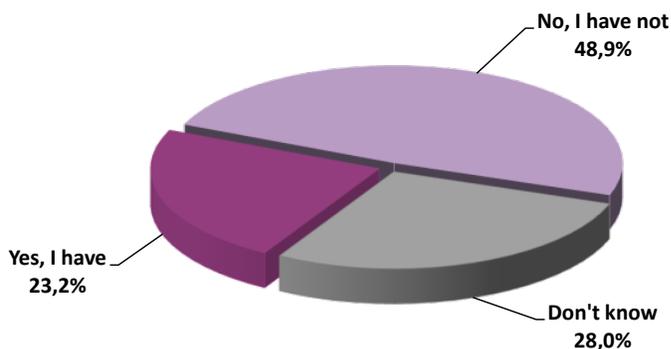
³⁶ Eurostat Statistics Explained. (2015). *Statistics on Housing*. Retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Housing_statistics/lv#.C4.AApa.C5.A1umties.C4.ABbu_status

³⁷ See a detailed Housing guarantee programme at: http://www.hipo.lv/lv/attistibas_programmas/majoklu_galvojumu_programma

because of their ethnic origin (see Figure 6.2.1.). These data, however, should be considered with caution as they characterise the subjective feelings Roma have about the reason why a financial service was not received. Probably, it is not discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity but the financial incapacity of a large part of Roma, namely, the low and irregular income and lack of savings.

Figure 6.2.1. Have you or someone from your family, during the last 3 years gotten into situation, where Roma people are not able to receive a loan from a bank or buy goods on lease?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

The analysis of research data discloses that **part of Roma are low-skilled in housing maintenance**; on the one hand it is connected with their comparatively low education level and lack of skills in dealing with financial resources, on the other hand it depends on Roma life-perception – living for the present moment and not caring for life in the long run. One of the interviewed employees of Ventspils public sector has pointed out that *“Roma do not think about the future, instead they expect help from the municipality. When we tell them how the budget is made where resources for support may be derived, they do not understand it and only ask to give a flat to them.”* A large part of housing specialists (8) recognise that the attitude of Roma towards the need to maintain the housing is problematic – Roma often appear to be unscrupulous and fail to comprehend that it is necessary to pay for the municipal services, in their view such expenses for the maintenance of housing are *“wasted spending”*.

“In general, few are such Roma families that consider that pay for municipal services is a must. They simply do not understand that there is anything to be paid for. Yes, electricity is switched off and then they come and tell us that there is no light at home and the child cannot learn. And the social service cannot but go and try to find some money to support this family.” (Social services worker in Zemgale region.)

“It is very often that they who have received a flat are expecting a family increase, they come and ask for something larger. But then you begin to discuss and open their case history and see that they are not paying for the existing living space. Not paying is rather an attitude than anything else. That is what their understanding is.” (Housing specialist in Latgale region.)

The local government of Jelgava city has paid particular attention to the problem of unpaid debts for municipal services. They promote the goal of awareness building among Roma and teach them that it is necessary to pay for the services they have received – water, heating, electricity, rent of housing; *“with the aim to enhance the awareness of responsibility and understanding why this is a must.”* (Policy maker in Jelgava.) The necessity to establish a dialogue with the community is stressed in an attempt to engage the more active representatives of Roma community in governance:

“It needs to be stressed that in Jelgava the result is slightly better than in other municipalities because we have had a dialogue with the community already for ten years. A non-stop dialogue. Haralds Didžus (an active representative of Roma community in Jelgava) is also included in the administrative commission just because the information he has about the families is unavailable to other institutions. Just in order to keep up the dialogue!” (Municipality employee in Zemgale region.)

6.3. Availability of social housing

One of the ways how municipality provides assistance in solving housing issues is the provision of housing by extending a possibility to rent a living space which is in the ownership of municipality, or a social housing (for a period up to 6 months), or else a short-term shelter in the asylum. Ensuring assistance in the area of housing is particularly significant for families in situations of crisis – being without a job and unable to provide for the basic needs including housing – and for socially vulnerable groups of population. The research that has been conducted until now and the data from the quantitative survey of Roma prove that a large part of Roma ethnic population in Latvia constitute the group of population that is at the risk of poverty and social exclusion, they less frequently have housing in ownership, therefore the last resort left for Roma often is to hope for assistance from municipality which has the right to grant a living place in social homes.

In Latvia, social housing (the term means both social flats and social houses) is rented out applying the so-called limiting approach where housing is granted to socially vulnerable persons that are at the risk of poverty and social exclusion strictly identifying the categories of persons that may rent them. Along with the law “On social flats and social housing” that regulates the renting procedure of social housing, the municipalities issue binding regulations where they determine which categories of persons have the right to rent a social flat – most often the following categories are included: needy persons or low income families, persons with disability, elderly persons and families

with children. According to the effective municipality regulations **Roma are not identified as a separate category of persons entitled to rent social housing and the right is granted in compliance with general procedure**, thus from the formal point of view non-discriminatory access to social housing is ensured.

“No normative enactment gives the right to sort persons by their ethnicity. Consequently, the normative enactment equally treats all persons – all nationalities and any age group. The law provides other categories that are prioritised in the provision of flat – disabled persons, retired persons and families with children – and I must say that Roma more often than others are included in one or another of these categories.” (Housing specialist in Latgale region.)

“They [Roma] are more often included in the common list and if the situation is regarded as urgent and an instantaneous action needs to be taken, then again they are included in the common waiting list together with everybody else. We judge not by faces but by situations.” (Social services worker in Pierīga region.)

Disregarding that municipality employees do not summarize the data on granted social housing by the ethnicity of beneficiaries and it is impossible to have a precise number of Roma inhabiting the houses maintained by municipality, the research results prove that **on the whole Roma more often than other residents use the possibility to stay in social home as well as in municipality-owned houses**. According to the data obtained from quantitative surveys of Roma 35,6% of Roma live in municipality maintained housing (7,5% in a social home where part of the rent must be paid, 27,3% in a state or municipality owned housing where they pay the full sum of rent and 0,2% in asylum. According to the data of Census conducted by CSB in 2011 28,6% of inhabitants have indicated another form of housing, except for private property and renting from private persons³⁸). The high ratio of Roma living in municipality-maintained housing depends, first, on the higher ratio of Roma in the category of needy persons as compared to other ethnic groups in Latvia and, second, as several of the interviewed housing specialists (6 persons) have stressed it, Roma more often than other ethnic groups in Latvia correspond to the identified categories of persons that qualify for assistance in housing issues, namely, the categories of low-income families with small children, also disabled persons.

One of the obstacles that hinder access to social housing and is identified in the study is **applicant's failure to conform with the basic preconditions for receiving municipality support**. The applicant for social housing must comply with the status of a socially vulnerable or low-income person. A family can be recognized as needy in compliance with Cabinet Rules No 299 *“Regulations Regarding the Recognition of a Family or Person Living Separately as Needy”*, while granting the status of a low-income person is regulated by local governments at municipality level by binding rules

³⁸ HousingEurope. (2015.) *The State of Housing in the EU 2015. A Housing Europe Review*. Retrieved 20.09.2015. from: www.housingeurope.eu/resource-468/the-state-of-housing-in-the-eu-2015

that define: first, the income level of the person applying for the status of low-income family and, second, the way how the municipality assesses person's property. The study has identified several cases where a property of no value combined with a thoughtless neglect of the necessary formalities in connection with property has deprived Roma of the possibility to obtain the status of a needy person which is a prerequisite when applying for municipal assistance in the area of social housing and social flat. For instance, a Roma woman who lives in Zemgale region cannot legally receive the status of a needy person because of property that is registered in her name although in fact she does not own it – some time ago the woman helped another Rom and had five cars registered in her name. She herself has never used them, however, now she cannot cross them off the register as she has neither the car documents, nor their number plates. Researchers have also encountered a situation where because of a property of financially insignificant value a Roma pensioners who lives all alone cannot receive a housing benefit – the woman lives in one of the small towns of Kurzeme region and she has decided to grant her property to the municipality because it is in such a poor condition that it is not habitable any longer and cannot be sold either. As the woman formally is the owner of this property, in compliance with municipal rules she cannot obtain the status of a needy person which in its turn precludes the right to receive a municipality-assisted housing.

The interviewed experts have also come across situations where **Roma do not understand the existing municipality procedure by which housing is granted and they are not interested in completion of formalities**, especially concerning the status of a needy person. Sometimes Roma lack initiative and discipline, they also tend to skip the bureaucratic requirements in solving the housing issue.

“In such cases Roma plead that they understand nothing and that they are illiterate and cannot write and that all the same they have the right to everything.” (Municipality employee in Kurzeme region.)

“On their part, they have some obligations that they must fulfil if they want to be taken on the waiting list – they have to go to the Welfare Department and they have to get the status of a low-income or needy person, and that is where problems start. Some of them don't want to, others don't know how to do that and these matters remain where they are. They come, write an application and that's it. Another problem crops up when they have gone through this documentation process and the flat is granted. They do not complete the further formalities on their part. Social flat is granted for the period of 6 months, and then the status of a low income person needs to be renewed again, and this is where the “brake”sets in. About 70% of them do not take up their obligations.” (Municipality employee in Pieriga region.)

A factor that often precludes access to the social housing fund is **non-compliance with the category of population that in the given municipality is given the right to apply for municipal flats or social homes**; besides, it is not uncommon that the applicant has not been registered as the resident in the territory of the given municipality for

a period as set up by municipal regulations. The length of the period of registered residence as defined in a given municipality may be different than the length set up in other municipalities. For example, in Riga and Daugavpils the period of registered residence must be no less than 10 years, in Jelgava – five, while in Jekabpils the period of declared residence is not defined. Consequently, Roma who do not reside at one and the same place and often change the registered place of residence cannot apply for municipality social flats. A municipality employee in Riga points out that *“the registration of the place of residence is problematic for those who rent housing from private persons because it is not seldom that the owner of the housing does not allow to register the residence in the given place”* – this is an ever increasing problem for Roma who live in Riga. Furthermore, a housing specialist from Daugavpils stresses that the most crucial problem in her city is that Roma delay registration: *“There are very many such people who have been living here for decades but they have not performed the formalities, they have not registered their place of residence and we cannot put them on the list. Even today we reject more than accept. Conditions are missing and we reject.”* (Housing specialist in Latgale region.)

At the same time, **the most fundamental obstacle in the access to social housing is the insufficient and outdated social housing fund** – the housing is of sub-standard quality and not renovated. The fund of social housing constitutes a small part in the total living fund and municipalities are not always capable to provide a social flat for everyone who is on the waiting list. Several of the interviewed experts (11 persons) have paid attention to this saying that the queues for social housing are long – in Riga the waiting period even lasts for several years, in other municipalities the capacities are also limited.

“Our living fund is very small – we are absolutely unable to provide anything at once – it is only possible if a flat that is not privately owned is freed – if the previous tenant passes away or if a judgement of eviction has been passed.” (Housing specialist in Latgale region.)

“To get a flat in Riga is a hapless effort! People are queuing up for years! No matter how many social houses are built and how many new flats are added to the social fund, at present it is impossible to satisfy the demand. Lists are very long and the progress is very slow.” (Social services worker in Riga.)

In compliance with the normative regulation it is the municipality that takes a decision on the issue of social flats and social housing in view of the demand on the part of needy and socially vulnerable persons who live in its territory, as well as the capacity of the given municipality. However, **due to limited financial funding the municipalities are unable to increase the social housing fund**. The municipality in Riga is the only one that has recently implemented several social housing construction projects. A similar situation is with the renovation of the social housing fund – although some municipalities have renovated social houses, on the whole in Latvia **the social housing fund is outdated, the houses are of sub-standard quality and are not renovated**.

Six of the interviewed representatives of non-governmental organisations and public sector disclose, that the municipalities often offer for rent flats that are not suitable for living and only formally comply with the criteria of a habitable living space as set up in Article 16 of the Law on Assistance in Solving Apartment Matters (room with light and heating which is suitable for long-term staying and placing of household objects and corresponds to the accepted Cabinet regulations concerning the construction and hygiene requirements). The interviewed experts and Roma point out that housing space is rented out which is not fit for living and where the basic elementary facilities are not provided or where large financial resources need to be invested but taking into account that the persons of low income have limited financial resources, they cannot afford repairs. In focus group discussions Roma also convey their dissatisfaction with the quality of the granted municipal housing. A youth from Talsi municipality is particularly critical about the housing the municipality has granted: *“Peeling walls, no water, the window with cracks and a cold floor. Well, how can I let my 2 years old child sit on such a floor? At least there is a small stove installed. Who knows how it will be in winter.”* The study has also identified a situation where the municipality has formally granted a living space to an applicant without proper assessment the given case and not taking into consideration whether the children have access to educational and pre-school educational establishments and whether these are within a reasonably attainable distance, which has substantially reduced the possibilities of schooling. *“They granted a flat to the family 10 km out of town – several kilometres or more behind Pastende. But there is no nursery there! In autumn the kid must go to nursery but it can’t be done! They promised to find a job, save money for a car, so that it is possible to get around. But I rather doubt if they going to succeed.”* (Roma leader in Kurzeme region.)

6.4. Assessment of housing quality

In the provision of housing one of the most essential aspects is its quality which is characterised, first, by its *adequacy* – in the meaning that sufficient living space is ensured, and second, by its *suitability for living*, that reflects such characteristic aspects of household circumstances as the level of material depreciation due to wear, the available facilities and access to municipal services.

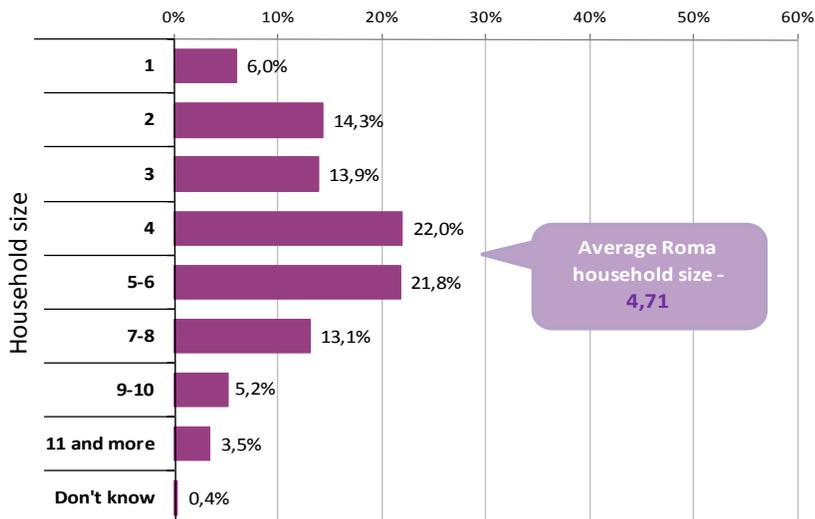
In assessing the living conditions of a housing, an essential factor is whether there is sufficient space for living. According to the data obtained from the EU-SILC study that CSB conducted in 2014 the average number of members in one household in Latvia was 2,4³⁹, while the data analysis of Roma survey shows that **in average there are twice as many persons in a Roma family living together (4,71) – typically it is a family of 4–6 persons and at least one-fifth of them live in households where under one roof three or more generations reside**, which, in its turn indicates a possible overpopulation

³⁹ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. (2015). *Income and living conditions in Latvia 2014. Collection of Statistical Data*. Riga

in these households. It should be pointed out that opposite to a traditional Latvian household which usually consists of one or two persons, among Roma the number of one-person households is small – only 6%.

Figure 6.4.1. How many people live together with you in your household (apartment/house)?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

According to the data of Roma survey the largest households are in Latgale region – in average 5,71, and in Pierīga region – in average 5,4 of household members in one household. In Kurzeme region and in Rīga the families are smaller with respectively 4,27 and 4,31 persons in average living in one household. In Vidzeme region the average number of persons who live in one household is 4,42 but in Zemgale region 4,44 members of the household.

The results of the quantitative research of how Roma perceive sufficiency of their housing also reveal that one third (33,1%) of the surveyed ones consider that there is too little space in their home and too close proximity – more often than in average it is the Roma of the reproductive age-group (20-49 years) that have marked this, which is connected with the existence of children and grandchildren in the household; Roma with very low income also say the same, thus it proves that the material security is very decisive in relation to a possible overpopulation. Although during the research the influence of overpopulated housing upon the individual was not further investigated, two interviewed experts have paid attention to the fact that overpopulation is closely connected with different health problems and increases the risk of the spread of various diseases, in particular infections, it also influences the sleep quality of the

dwellers and after all also tells upon their general physical capacity. Three experts in the area of education have pointed out that living in high density significantly influences the academic achievement of learners, and they stress that in such houses it is quite often that Roma children do not have a separate place for them to learn and homework is done in unsuitable places, for example, in bed or on the floor.

In order to explain living in large families reference is made to the tradition that in Roma community several generations live together. Thus in the study a municipality employee from Ventspils who was interviewed points out that *“they have a feeling that they must live several generations together. This is their tradition”*, a housing specialist from Kuldīga also stresses that *“we wanted to grant a flat to a family but they want to live together with other relatives therefore they ask large housing space.”* On the other hand, the study reveals a trend that the tradition of several generations living together in one household tends to decrease, and young Roma families willingly prefer to live separately, if possible – a young Roma guy from Kraslava says the following in the focus group discussion: *“I want to live separately, we want our own apartment. You know what it is like when many live together – it is much noise, little room, but we have a small child. I am saving money now, visited also the social service to discuss if they couldn’t grant some small flat. We hope we’ll get one.”* (24 years, male, Kraslava.) A social services worker from a town in Kurzeme region also stresses that *“it is not any more that they live in such large families as before – children, grandchildren, grandparents, brothers and also other relatives. Nowadays these families have shrunk, the children try to live separately from parents. Of course, there are still large families but not so often as in old days.”*

As adequate living space is only one of the aspects in housing provision, therefore further on the quality of Roma inhabited housing will be characterised paying attention both to the level of its accommodation with domestic facilities and amenities, and the availability of access to municipal services. In comparison with other EU Member States the living houses in Latvia are obsolete and the quality of the houses that are available for living is low – approximately one-third of the houses in Latvia were built before World War II, their depreciation is considerable since then and their quality is unsatisfactory⁴⁰. Disregarding the differences in the assessments that the interviewed experts have given to the quality of Roma housing and the level of facilities varying from *“exclusive apartments furnished with carpets and mirrors”* (Social services worker in Kurzeme region) to such places that *“remind of living in a stable”* (Roma leader in Kurzeme region) and where *“it is hard to understand how a human being can live at all”* (Housing specialist in Vidzeme region), it is generally pointed out that on the whole Roma live in houses that have served their age and now are in a critical condition. The observations of the interviewed housing specialists and social services workers (altogether 16

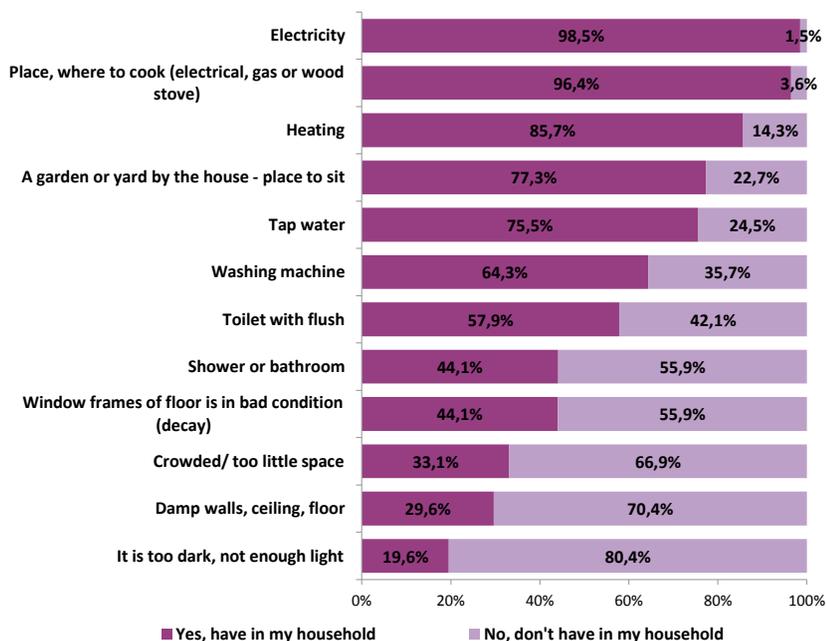
⁴⁰ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. (2012). *Living conditions of the Roma: Substandard housing and health.*, p. 15. Retrieved from: http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_files/pubdocs/2012/02/en/1/EF1202EN.pdf

persons) indicate that the housing and living conditions of Roma are lower than the average level of the rest of population in Latvia. The data of the quantitative Roma survey also confirm the same, revealing that in some cases the level of Roma housing, facilities and domestic amenities is critical.

The analysis of the obtained data proves that **electricity is available in almost all the places where Roma dwell** (98,5%) which does not essentially deviate from the general electrification level of housing in Latvia. One of the suitability benchmarks for the assessment whether the housing is fit for living is the possibility to heat it either by central heating systems or a stove in the living room – nevertheless the quantitative survey data show that in **14,3% of housing where Roma live heating is not available** which turns the problem of heating into an acute urgency in the homes of a significant part of Roma families when it is cold. According to the survey data more often than in average heating is not available to the surveyed Roma in Kurzeme region (22,4%), also in Pieriga region (16,2%) and to Roma who live in Vidzeme region (16,1%).

Figure 6.4.2. Which of the following do you have in your household?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

Nonetheless, **it is sanitation that is considered to be the most serious problem in Roma housing** – 55,9% of Roma housing have neither shower nor bathroom and 42,1% of the housing are not equipped with flush toilets. One-fourth of the surveyed

Roma (26%) do not have access to water supply in their housing which means a serious backlash in living circumstances. The discussions of Roma focus groups also prove that absent water supply in housing is the most significant drawback in housing provision – water outside the house freezes up in winter, consequently it imposes limitations on the daily provision of elementary hygiene needs – there is no possibility either to wash or do the laundry; consequently, because of the growing risks of falling ill the risk of social isolation increases. Especially deep is its impact upon families with small children – a municipality employee from Pierīga region stresses the influence the inadequate quality of housing has upon the risks that the children of school age be socially excluded and she says: *“The poor kids, they do smell and logically, they are afterwards mobbed in school”*.

It should be stressed that in Latvia the level of domestic amenities and sanitary equipment is not evenly balanced – in Riga almost all Roma housing units have water supply and flush toilets while in the other regions their availability is considerably less frequent.

Table 2. Roma household facilities in the regions of Latvia

	Riga	Vidzeme region	Kurzeme region	Zemgale region	Latgale region	Pierīga region
Have flush toilet	96,3%	63,6%	47,0%	57,9%	61,1%	30,1%
Have water supply	10,0%	74,6%	69,2%	85,0%	72,1%	44,9%
Have a shower or bathroom	68,4%	34,3%	35,4%	48,1%	51,3%	25,6%

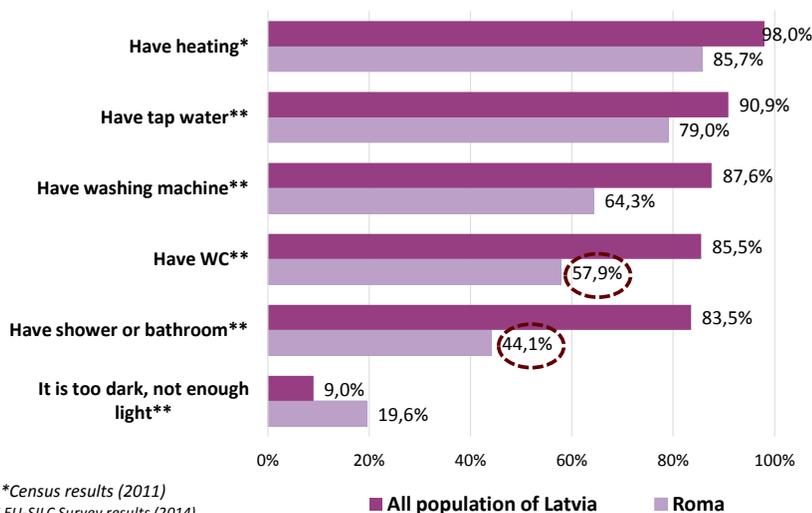
Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by “Latvian Facts” (2015)

Regarding the accommodation of amenities and sanitary appliances in housing, the situation is most problematic in Roma households that reside in Pierīga region – only one-fourth (25,6%) of the surveyed Roma housing have an available shower or bathroom, in 30,1 % of cases there is a flush toilet and 44,9% have water supply. Relatively low is also the accommodation with sanitary amenities in the housing of Roma residents in Kurzeme region – only slightly more than one-third (35,4%) of the surveyed Roma have indicated that they are accommodated with a shower or bathroom, and 4% of respondents mention that they have a flush toilet. Roma housing is also less frequently equipped with a shower or bathroom in Vidzeme region (34,3%) and Zemgale region (48,1%). Substantial differences may also be observed in the levels of housing amenities depending on the size of the populated location – in cities, housing is accommodated with amenities at a considerably higher level than in small towns, or rural territories. A lower level of amenities is also in the housing of Roma with low and very low income (up to EUR 136 per one family member).

The technical quality of Roma housing is assessed as rather poor – a considerable part of respondents (44,1 %) have reported that window frames or the floors in their housing are in a poor state (or rotten), and almost one-third of them have mentioned that the walls, ceiling or floor of their housing are damp (29,6 %), while one-fifth of Roma respondents have indicated that their housing is too dark and that the light is insufficient (19,6%). Data analysis proves a substantial correlation between the housing circumstances and income level – the Roma who are better-off have considerably less frequently mentioned any dissatisfying circumstances in housing. When characterising the level of domestic amenities in Roma housing, it should be stressed that in almost all Roma dwellings there is a place for cooking (an electric, gas or fire stove – 96,4%) and two-thirds of respondents have a washing machine in their housing (64,3%). When characterising the environment of the place where the housing is located, a large part of respondents have indicated that there is a place – small garden or courtyard – where they can sit outdoors for a while (77,3%).

Figure 6.4.3. Household amenities and utilities services provided in households of Latvia’s population and Roma households

Comparing Latvia’s situation with Roma survey results



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by “Latvian Facts” (2015); CSB (2011), CSB (2014)

An overall insight in the living and housing conditions of Latvian population is presented in the EU-SILC inspection conducted by CSB in 2014⁴¹, as well as in Census data on household amenities conducted by CSB in 2011. Taking for granted that the living conditions of population have not had essential changes within the period from

⁴¹ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. (2015). *Income and living conditions in Latvia 2014. Collection of Statistical Data*. Riga

the time these two studies were conducted until the completion of the quantitative survey of Roma, the data of these studies may be used for an overall comparison of the housing conditions of the population in Latvia with those of Roma. The diagram below (Figure 6.4.3.) reflects the indicators of the survey of Roma as compared to the data obtained in earlier inspections of separate housing accommodations by CSB. When comparing the provision of separate domestic amenities and municipal services it is evident that Roma are in more unfavourable situation than the majority of population in Latvia. The most essential differences are observed in the provision of housing with sanitary utilities – in Roma housing there are considerably fewer flush toilets, showers or bathrooms. In 83,5% of the housing in Latvia and only in 44,1% of the housing where Roma live such facilities as showers or bathrooms are available; 85,5% of the population in Latvia and only 57,9% of Roma live in a housing with access to flush toilets. This is a circumstance that has a serious deteriorating impact upon the living conditions and limits the provision of basic hygiene requirements causing a negative effect upon Roma health and increases the risks of the spread of various diseases.

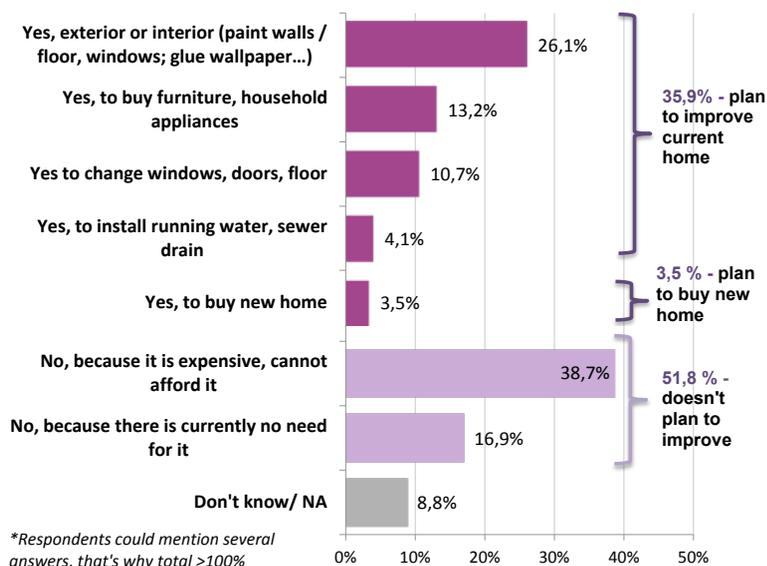
6.5. Housing improvement plans

To ensure a better quality of housing and its suitability for living, the initiative and will of residents to change their conditions of life play a significant role. Therefore it is important to find out the opinion of Roma people about the future housing improvements – whether they have any plans for a better accommodation of the housing and if the answer is yes, what improvements they intend to implement and where they plan to get funding for the implementation, as well as what main obstacles prevent improvements.

Data obtained in the quantitative survey of Roma prove that **slightly more than half of Roma respondents do not intend to improve their housing in the nearest year** – 38,7% of the surveyed respondents explain it with a shortage of financial resources, saying that it is expensive and at present they cannot afford it, but 16,9% have mentioned that at the present moment there is no such need for it. Slightly more than one-third of the participants (35,9%) are planning to introduce improvements in their housing next year. Most frequently Roma intend to take up re-decoration and make such repairs that need smaller financial investment – housing's outside or inside decoration, e.g., to paint walls, floors or windows, paste a wallpaper (26,1%) and buy new furniture or domestic appliances (13,2%).

Figure 6.5.1. During the next 12 months, do you plan to improve your home?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

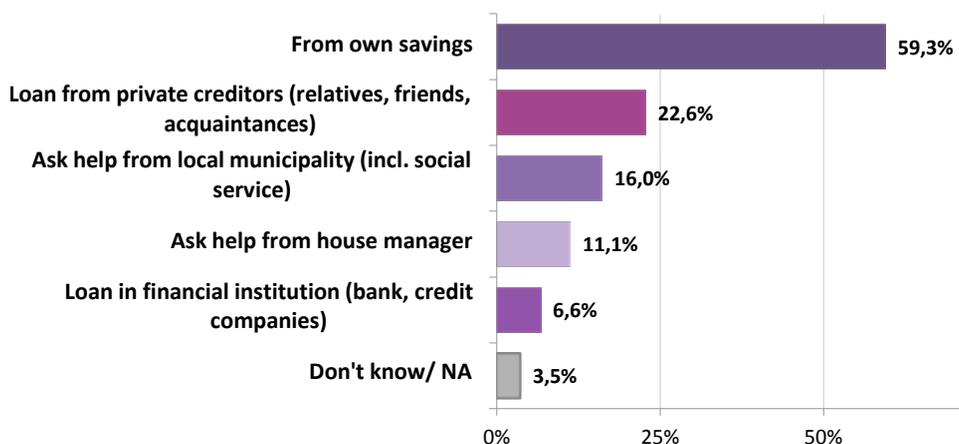
To put aside larger financial resources for housing improvements, such as change of windows, doors or walls, is the intention of 10,7% of respondents. At the same time, few Roma have plans for extensive reconstruction work – although the results of research show that one-fourth of the surveyed Roma households (26%) do not have water supply in their homes and almost half of the households (42,1%) have no flush toilets, only 4,1% of respondents plan to install these facilities in the nearest year. It is significant that 3,5% of surveyed Roma only have plans to acquire a new housing next year – this intention is more characteristic of young respondents (15-29 years) and it is connected with the desire of this age group to live an independent life separately from parents and establish a family.

The results of Roma survey show that there are no statistically significant differences in the answers of the respondents who own their housing and those who either rent it or live in municipality-maintained housing. Neither does the level of household income influence the Roma housing improvement plans, and no statistically meaningful differences have been identified in the responses obtained from respondents of various income groups.

In the survey Roma were asked to specify where they hoped to get means for the implementation of the planned work – the data obtained prove that a rather large part of Roma people are certain about the financial source for the possible improvement of housing – only 3,5% of all the surveyed persons who plan next year to improve housing cannot indicate where they hope to get money to carry out the intended work.

Figure 6.5.2. Where do you plan to get finances for the planned works?

(Base = respondents, who plan to improve their homes in next 12 months; N=131)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by "Latvian Facts" (2015)

It is common with Roma to rely upon their family and community – the surveyed Roma mainly plan to obtain resources for housing improvements from their own savings (59,3%), while slightly more than one-fifth of them intend to borrow the money for housing improvements from private lenders, e.g., relatives, friends, acquaintances (22,6%). However these plans and the high degree of readiness to make individual investments in improving housing conditions should be considered with discretion as the results of survey reveal the limited resources of Roma to implement large housing improvement projects in view of the low income level of this group of population and lack of savings – a little more than two-thirds of surveyed Roma report that the average income per one family member in the preceding month was up to EUR 136 (69%) and only 14% of respondents have indicated that their income per one family member is more than EUR 137. Furthermore, 9,4% of the surveyed Roma only have savings more than EUR 250 for emergency spending. In the focus group discussions Roma themselves point out that they hope to get a constant job and have earnings in the future which they might put aside for housing improvement, saying *"I'll earn! Well, I'll get a job somehow or other!"* (Focus group discussion in Dobele), or *"I'll find a job, start to work and do the repair"* (Focus group discussion in Tukums.) The participants of two Roma focus groups expressed a supposition that they themselves or somebody else of their family might go abroad to earn money (Focus group discussions in Kraslava and Daugavpils.) Despite the close ties that link Roma community and their mutual reliance, a little more than one-fourth of respondents plan to obtain resources for housing improvements from a source outside the circle of their community, 16% of respondents intend to apply for assistance in municipality, including the social service, and 11,1% of Roma plan to ask

the housing supervisor to help them. It is only 6% of the surveyed Roma that hope to get a loan from a financial institution or bank. This is connected with deep distrust in financial institutions the Roma people traditionally have and their own low income level.

6.6. Available assistance in housing area

In the area of housing services, Roma are not set off as a specific target group, thus they receive from municipalities and NGOs assistance by the same procedure as all other people who manage to prove to the municipality employees that their basic needs are not ensured. Assistance in solving housing issues is provided in accordance with the binding rules of municipalities and according to general provisions of legislation, and it aims to reach low-income and high social risk families by providing a vast range of various services – a possibility to get housing (in crises situations there is a possibility to live in social homes, asylums), a financial support for the maintenance or improvements of housing, as well as access to hygiene services (a possibility to use a washing machine and take a shower).

The study results convey that **Roma make an active use of the assistance the municipalities and NGOs provide in housing area**. The most frequently used possibility is the possibility to receive a housing benefit which is a financial assistance to pay the housing rent or maintenance costs and pay for services that are connected with the exploitation of the living space. As was stressed by 16 interviewed employees of the public sector, although requests for housing benefits have a seasonal character among Roma and in summer the number of beneficiaries and the amount of the granted sums slightly decrease, this is the most frequently requested kind of assistance in the area of solving housing issues. Roma are characterised as *“a culture of allowance beneficiaries”* (Social services worker in Latgale region) who *“know nothing but be waiting for a benefit and survive from one benefit to another benefit.”* (Policy maker in Kurzeme region.) One of the interviewed housing specialists noted:

“The essence of the problem is that these young Roma families cannot or don’t want to... Instead of trying to develop their own skills they try to get rid of everything. Looking for a job, earning some money and keeping up, no, not them, they are coming and seeking assistance for housing. They come and demand a benefit instead of trying to solve the problems themselves.” (Housing specialist in Pierīga region.)

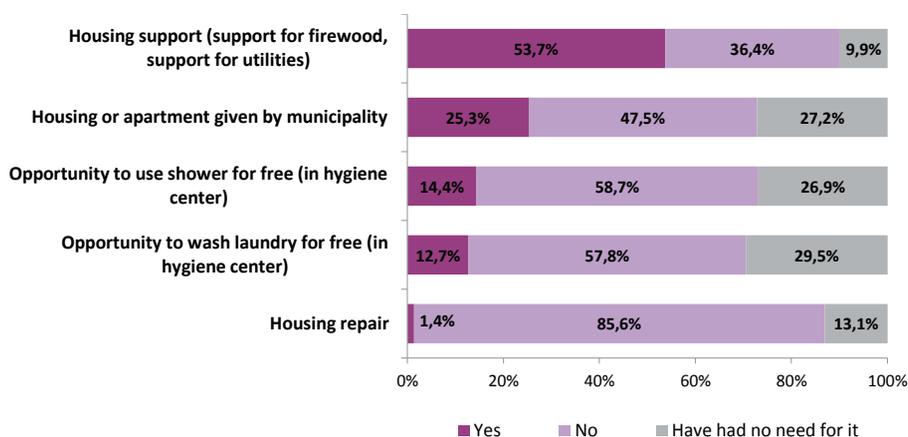
It is impossible to find out the exact number of Roma people who receive assistance in solving housing issues, because the municipality employees and social services workers do not register the ethnicity of clients when providing services. Therefore some idea of the assistance that Roma families have received in the last three years in the area of housing is obtained from the results of the quantitative survey of Roma.

As the data obtained in the quantitative survey of Roma show, **during the last three years more than half of the surveyed Roma (53,7%) have received a housing benefit**

and only one-tenth (9,9%) have indicated that such financial assistance was not necessary for housing maintenance (see Figure 6.6.1). The high number of housing assistance beneficiaries is explained with the high ratio of Roma in low-income and high risk of social exclusion group – according to survey data in the last three years the housing assistance was extended most frequently to low-income persons with education level up to 6 grades. Statistically significant variances may also be observed by regional distribution – in recent three years housing benefit was allotted to 62,7% of Roma residing in Kurzeme region, 68,6% in Latgale region while the Roma who live in Riga have used this benefit considerably less frequently (25,9%).

Figure 6.6.1. During the last 3 years has your family received any help from municipality, state institution or some organization in HOUSING?

(Base = all respondents; N=365)



Source: Survey of Roma inhabitants by “Latvian Facts” (2015)

Besides the material allowance for housing maintenance various other kinds of benefits are also available, e.g., in all the municipalities that were included in the survey, the local governments provide separate groups of population with preferential discounts of property tax, while low-income and needy families receive from company JSC “Latvenergo” a discount on consumed electricity. It is interesting that in all focus group discussions there are some participants who believe that benefit is something that goes without saying and “*is their due*”. There was only one woman from Tukums who expressed gratitude for assistance.

Extraordinary allowance for the repairs of housing or assistance to low-income persons to repair the dwelling they own is another type of material support the municipalities provide in solving housing issues. The municipality council, in its binding rules, establishes the procedure by which the allowance is granted and the amount determined. It needs to be stressed that assistance in the area of housing is only provided for in a small number of Latvian municipalities – as the Ministry of Economics of the

Republic of Latvia conveys in summary information on municipality assistance granted for solving housing issues in municipalities where the number of residing Roma is above 70 in 2014, allowances for housing repairs were only granted in six municipalities – to 400 persons in Daugavpils, 25 in Riga, nine in Kuldīga, two in Jelgava, two in Preiļi and one person in Jūrmala⁴². Among Roma, too, this kind of assistance in solving housing issues has been a seldom grant. According to Roma survey data, during the last three years **only 1,4% of the surveyed persons have received allowance for housing repairs, although a considerable part (85,6%) of Roma would like to receive it**. Not more than 13,1% of the surveyed Roma pointed out that they did not need such assistance. However, taking into consideration the low quality of Roma housing and their limited financial resources, Roma themselves and the interviewed housing specialists and municipality employees (altogether 12 persons) stress just this kind of assistance as vital for the improvement of housing conditions and facilities and point out that the social housing fund of municipalities often is old and not fit for living any more, but the municipalities do not have financial resources that are needed for its maintenance and improvement.

Since a considerable part of Roma housing does not offer access to a washing machine (35,7%) and shower or bathroom (55,9%), Roma use the hygiene services the municipalities and NGOs offer – as the data of Roma quantitative survey show within the period of the last three years 14,4% of the surveyed Roma have used shower services while 12,7% of the surveyed Roma have used laundry services and only slightly less than one-third (29,5%) have marked that there is no need to use the services. These data prove the need to develop a wider availability of municipality-provided hygiene services in the future. More frequently than in average, shower and laundry services are used by families with low and very low income (up to EUR 136 per one family member in month), 15-29 years old respondents, as well as the residents of Pierīga region, the explanation is the popularity of *Roma Day centre for Jūrmala city residents* (Roma Day centre) among the Roma people and the hygiene services that are offered free of charge and in unlimited amounts.

“Roma cannot be restricted for such things, it’s totally senseless! One needs more time to take a shower, another needs less, and in average it is not going to take so much time. We know how much electricity, hot water we may use – and if we see that the monthly limit is exhausted, I’ll go and say: “Dear Roma folks, this month, please, let us be more prudent!”
(Roma Day centre worker.)

One of the reasons why hygiene services are not used as widely as Roma might need them (in view of the fact that 35,7% of Roma housing have no access to a washing machine and 55,9% do not have shower or bathroom facilities) is the fact that these services are not available to those who need them. The research shows that the amount

⁴² Ministry of Economics. (2015). *Pārskats par piešķirto pašvaldības palīdzību dzīvokļa jautājumu risināšanā*. Retrieved from: https://www.em.gov.lv/nozares_politika/majokli/petijumi__statistika/

of used municipal shower and laundry services differs among various municipalities and limits are imposed – it is a common practice to regulate how many times per month the services are available free of charge or at a reduced fee to low-income or needy families (persons). For example, each family member of the residents in Dobele has the right to use shower services once a month for free (in other cases it is a paid service). In Jelgava, a visit of shower costs EUR 1, while it is only the Jurmala municipality Roma Day centre that provides its clients with an unlimited possibility to use both shower services free of charge and laundry services also free of charge with preliminary registration. According to the summary information by the Head of Roma Day centre, Roma willingly attend and use the hygiene services available at the centre – in 2014 shower services were provided 1623 times and laundry services 1110 times. A worker at the Roma Day centre believes that *“using hygiene services reduces not only the spread of various diseases and threats to health among Roma but also prevents their social exclusion.”* (Roma Day centre worker.)

Participants in Roma focus group discussions voiced the opinion that there is a necessity to increase the availability of shower and laundry services and to extend both the number of persons entitled to receive hygiene services and the possibility to receive them for free. For example, one of the participants of focus group discussions in Daugavpils noted that his family cannot visit the shower for free because the family has not received the status of low-income family; however such assistance would be very necessary as hot water is not available in their housing. The amount of the laundry services that families with small children may use is disproportionate – a Roma woman from Dobele notes that *“washing children clothes once a month is completely nothing. Two days and we have a full washing machine!” Well, it is simply ridiculous.* (Focus group discussion in Dobele.)

Samples of best practice

Already for five years, with the help of resources allocated by Jurmala City Council, a project *“Development of social rehabilitation programme and its implementation in the day centre for Roma inhabitants of Jurmala city”* is being implemented in the premises of SIA *“Veselības un sociālās aprūpes centrs Sloka”*, to enhance restoration of the social functioning skills of the Roma living in Jurmala, reduce their social exclusion and promote their successful integration in the labour market. **Roma Day centre provides them with access to the hygiene services – laundering and shower as much as they need and free of charge.** In cooperation with municipal housing experts and housing manager different issues associated with supply of the housing are being settled and housing management skills of Roma inhabitants as well as understanding of the need to pay for public utilities are enhanced by discussing matters with the debtors and explaining possible consequences

Thanks to the involvement of Roma mediator from Valmiera city, situation with the housing amenities for a Roma woman living in Dobeles municipality was settled successfully. When colder weather set in, the Roma woman discovered in her flat a problem with the heating system of – radiators stayed cold. Turning to the housing manager did not result in the problem being solved and only after the official meeting between Roma mediator from Valmiera city and the housing manager, problem was immediately solved and radiators were degassed.

Binding regulations of the Daugavpils City Council No. 4 “Establishing a family or a single person as being low-income” adopted on February 6, 2015 state that separate **additional estates** owned by the family should not be evaluated when granting status of the low-income person, thus ensuring more individual evaluation of each applicant and expanding the group of persons who have rights to apply for assistance of the municipality in solution of the issues associated with the housing. In other municipalities researchers encountered situations when e.g. Roma pensioner living separately could not receive accommodation allowance because of a low-value property owned by him.

Recommendations for improving availability of the housing

/ Recommendations for the Ministry of Economics

Since no unified standards have been established in the current regulation (Law “*On assistance in solving apartment matters*”) for residential space that is rented out, and definition of the residential space fit for living established by this regulation can be freely interpreted, as well as taking into account the cases identified during the research when Roma inhabitants received very low quality residential spaces from municipalities, it is necessary to develop and fix criteria for definition of the space that is or is not fit for living on the national level, thus establishing minimal requirements for rented out housing, its physical condition and level of amenities.

Since Latvia has a relatively small social housing fund and it is not possible to provide with social housing all persons included in the waiting list for the rent of social apartment, after having considered resources of the municipality, demand of the socially vulnerable living in its territory as well as demographic trends, resources should be found to increase social housing fund by building new social housing units and restoring the existing ones, co-financing this from the state budget, EU funds or using of the public-private partnership approach. It is recommended for the Ministry of Economics to develop support programmes for increasing the social housing fund, thus helping municipalities to direct resources of the EU Structural funds for construction of it.

As part of the EU support programme for advancement of the infrastructure and availability of the services, support programmes should be planned to improve basic sanitary conditions of the housing – first of all to provide water supply and sewage system, thus significantly improving sanitary level of the housing of low-income persons.

Do not allow renting out of the living-spaces and social homes which are unfit for living, are not provided for the basic needs or require capital investments (taking into account that low-income persons have limited financial resources for such renovation works).

In case municipal apartments unfit for living are allocated, potential tenant must be provided with opportunity to perform cosmetic renovation of the residential space by granting single allowance for housing renovation or by developing of special programmes financed from EU Structural funds for support of the socially vulnerable families so that building materials necessary for renovation of the housing could be acquired and renovation of the housing could be done by tenant himself.

When allocating municipal apartment or social housing, access of the children to the education establishments and pre-school institutions must be assessed and housing provided as close as possible.

Having considered financial resources of each municipality, it is recommended to establish broader category of the inhabitants who are entitled to receive free of charge or for lower price hygiene services (shower, laundering) provided by municipalities or non-governmental organisations; this group should include not only low-income and poor persons, but also those who have no real access to the respective public utilities or amenities (for instance, housing has no running water, hot water or washing machine), as well as persons who need to use such services more frequently (e.g., families with small children).

Taking into account the relatively low housing management skills of the Roma inhabitants revealed by the research as well as unwillingness to get financially involved in the maintenance of the place of residence, it is necessary to provide for focused and long-term development of the awareness and understanding of the Roma regarding the need to pay for use of public utilities. Social workers, Roma mediators and leaders of the Roma communities must negotiate matters with the debtors and explain possible consequences of the approach (loss of the place of the housing, moving over to the

housing without amenities, irreversibility of the debts etc.). In addition, taking into account resources of the municipality, it is recommended to implement informative campaigns on the obligation to pay for use of public utilities. Campaigns need to be integrated in the activities attractive for the target group, e.g. culinary courses or other practical activities.

Manager of the housing has to engage without delay to solve problem of the debts for using public utilities, so that tenant would not accumulate excessively large debts for them. Preventive measures regarding potential risk families must be duly implemented and understanding of the need to pay for the services must be developed.

EU programme regarding state strategies of the Roma integration till 2020 (European Commission, Brussels, 5.4.2011, COM (2011): **“Regarding access to the housing and essential services, eliminate differences between Roma having access to the housing and public utilities (e.g., water, electricity and gas), and respective part of the other inhabitants.”**

/ Appendix

The list of participants of in-depth interviews

There were 197 representatives interviewed from following institutions and organizations:

RIGA:

Riga City Council Housing and Environment Committee; Riga City Council Social Issues Committee; Riga City Council Education, culture and sports committee; Riga City Council Education, Culture and Sports Department Projects and society integration division; Riga City Council Education, Culture and Sports Department General education schools division; Riga City Council Housing and Environment Department Apartment administration; Riga Social services territorial centre “Ķengaraga krasts”; Riga Social services territorial centre “Avoti”; Andrejs Pumpurs Riga elementary school No 11; Riga city Maternity hospital; Retail shop “Narvesen”; organisation “The Latvian Red Cross”; Latvian Centre for Human rights; Latvian Roma national culture society.

VIDZEME REGION:

Valmiera Education administration; Valmiera Pargauja elementary school; State Employment Agency Valmiera branch; Valmiera city municipality Social service; Valmiera youth centre “Vinda”; municipality company “Valmieras namsaimnieks”; Roma mediator in Vidzeme; Limbazi district council; Limbazi district Education department; Ladezers elementary school; State employment agency Limbazi branch; Limbazi district Social service; Jurmala City Council Property administration; Jurmala City council Welfare administration; Jurmala City Society integration department; Day centre for Roma population of Jurmala city; municipality company “Health and social care centre Sloka”; Jurmala special elementary school; Jurmala city Mežmala secondary school; JSC “Putnu fabrika Ķekava”.

ZEMGALE REGION:

Jelgava City council; Jelgava City council program of Social issues, health and culture issues; Jelgava City council Society integration administration; Jelgava city council institution “Jelgavasocialissuesadministration”; State Employment Agency Jelgava branch; Day centre “Atbalsts” in Jelgava; Jelgava city hospital; Jelgava city hospital Maternity and gynaecology department; Jelgava elementary school No 4; Roma mediator in Zemgale; Tukums district education administration; Tukums district municipality agency “Tukums

district social service”; State Employment Agency Tukums branch; Tukums city municipal police; State Probation Service Tukums territorial department; Tukums hospital; Tukums hospital Gynaecology department; Latvian Roma association „Nēvo Drom” Tukums branch; Dobele District Council administration; Dobele district council Social committee; Dobele district council Apartments committee; Dobele district Education administration; Dobele district Social service; Dobele district Custody Court; State Employment Agency Dobele branch; Dobele Christian elementary school; Dobele Adult education and entrepreneurship support centre; Organisation “The Latvian Red Cross” Dobele committee; Roma society “Zora – 7”; “Dobeles namsaimnieks” Ltd; Jekabpils city council; Jekabpils city council Education department; State Employment Agency Jekabpils branch; Jekabpils municipality Social service; Jekabpils Custody Court; Jekabpils secondary school No2; Public Benefit Organisation “Jekabpils NVO resource centre”.

KURZEME REGION:

Talsi district council Sabile town and Abavas parish administration; Talsi district council Culture department; Talsi district Education administration; Talsi district Social service; Talsi district municipal police; Talsi district Valdemārpils administration Custody Court; Sabile secondary school; Sabile preschool educational institution “Vīnodziņa”; family support day centre “Stāvu augstāk”; Family doctors practice in Sabile; Roma informal leader in Talsi; the facilitators of project “Learning reading and writing skills for Roma adults project” realized by organization “ADRA Latvija”; Ventspils City Council; Ventspils Education administration; Ventspils city council apartments department; Ventspils city council Social issues commission; Ventspils city Social service; State Employment Agency Ventspils branch; Ventspils city Custody Court; Ventspils municipal police; religious organization in Ventspils; Ventspils evening school; children’s home “Selga”; Ventspils city council Culture centre; multifunctional centre for family, youth, society “Spēkuguns”; society “Ventspils youth council”; Kuldīga district Education administration; Kuldīga district real estate department; Kuldīga district municipality agency „Social service”; State employment agency Kuldīga branch; Kuldīga district Adult education centre; Kuldīga hospital; Kuldīga hospital Maternity department; Kandava district council; Kandava district Education administration; Kandava district Social service.

LATGALE REGION:

Daugavpils City Council; Daugavpils city Education administration; Daugavpils city council Apartments department; Daugavpils city council Social issues administration; Daugavpils Social service; State employment agency Daugavpils branch; Daugavpils Raiņa secondary school No 6; family doctors practice in Daugavpils; Latvian Roma society “NĒVO DROM D” Daugavpils branch; Roma culture development society “Me Roma”;

society "Erfolg"; Roma mediator in Latgale; Daugavpils district council; Daugavpils district Social service; Daugavpils district Education administration; Daugavpils district Kalupe parish administration; social service and social help centre in Daugavpils district Kalupe parish administration; Daugavpils district Līksna Custody Court; Kalupe elementary school; Kraslava district council Education and culture department; Kraslava district municipality institution "Social service"; Preili district council; Preili district council Real estate department; Preili district Education administration; Preili district Social service; State employment agency Preili branch; Preili district Evening (shift) and part-time secondary school; Preili secondary school No 2; Preili district day centre.

REPRESENTATIVES OF NATIONAL LEVEL:

Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, Education department; Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, Education quality state service; Ministry of Health of the Republic of Latvia, Health care department; National Health Service; Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia, Labour market policy department; Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia, Social inclusion and social work policy department; Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, department of Society integration; Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia, Electronic services department; State Employment Agency, development branch of Finance and development department.

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Within the project several activities were implemented, such as survey and awards promoting diversity management in private sector; **video stories** developed regarding the **stereotypes** and prejudices; **research of the Roma** community in Latvia to monitor the situation in employment, health, education and housing and **training for trainers** programme developed and implemented about the diversity in society.

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