Roma people, education and work in Slovakia

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Original Article

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Abstract:

The thesis on the importance of education in relation to the labour market, more precisely a good job, is supported by many research findings. The question is whether it also applies to marginalised groups, namely Roma people living in socially isolated environments. In this paper, the authors use quantitative data obtained through a questionnaire survey to show the relationship between education and selected employment characteristics of Roma people from marginalised backgrounds. The results suggest that the assumed relationship between education and job quality may not hold in their case. This is an important finding for a number of reasons, e.g. from the perspective of motivation for education and an overall understanding of the formation of educational aspirations of Roma people from marginalised communities.

Introduction

The educational attainment is considered to be one of the significant factors influencing employment as well as income level. In other words, the higher the level of education, the higher the chances of getting a good (and well-paid) job. Low education and qualification levels reduce the chances of entering the labour market. A number of analyses (e.g. Dujava - Pécsiová, 2020; Dujava, Vaľková, Ježo, 2024), including data from national surveys, show that this thesis also applies to the Slovak labour market (Tab. 1). Data from the most recent 2021 Population and Housing Census in Slovakia show a very strong relationship between the level of education and the amount of wage (Filadelfi, et al., 2023).

Poorly educated people are the most vulnerable on the labour market, not only in terms of wage level, but also in terms of other characteristics (job stability, working conditions, etc.) and, of course, employment rate (e.g. OECD, 2019; EUROSTAT, 2020). Slovakia is one of the countries where the impact of education on employment is most visible. In 2020, the employment rate of people with low education was only 34%, which is the lowest in the whole EU (Habrman, Habodászová, Šrámková, 2022). Even worse figures appear in research on employment, or better said unemployment, of Roma people from marginalised communities, who will be the focus of this text. Roma people face multiple exclusion, including exclusion from the labour market and also from quality education, and are among the most vulnerable groups in terms of poverty (e.g. Veselovská, Pirová, 2014; Rusnáková, Rochovská, 2016; Rusnáková, Rochovská, 2014; Filadelfiová, Gerbery, Škobla, 2007; Ivanov, Kagin, 2014; FRA, 2022).

Table 1 Gross monthly earnings in 2023 by level of education and region[1]

	ISCED 2 Primary education	ISCED 3 Secondary vocational apprenticeship	ISCED 3 Full secondary vocational apprenticeship with school leaving exam	ISCED 3 Full secondary general	ISCED 3 Full secondary vocational	ISCED 5 Higher vocational	ISCED 6 University - Bachelor's degree	ISCED 7 University - Master's/Ingineer's degree	ISCED 8 University - PhD.
Slovak Republic	1,159	1,280	1,470	1,464	1,552	1,748	1,760	2,210	2,296
Bratislava Region	1,342	1,519	1,759	1,784	1,868	2,009	2,119	2,682	2,373
Trnava Region	1,274	1,293	1,517	1,426	1,526	1,476	1,749	2,079	2,264
Trenčín Region	1,206	1,313	1,441	1,397	1,492	1,655	1,612	2,022	2,524
Nitra Region	1,155	1,219	1,389	1,367	1,462	1,671	1,605	2,014	2,033
Žilina Region	1,129	1,310	1,488	1,382	1,500	1,666	1,640	2,036	2,308
B. Bystrica Region	1,032	1,193	1,364	1,284	1,419	1,691	1,606	1,944	1,958
Prešov Region	921	1,112	1,258	1,246	1,356	1,704	1,521	1,782	2,028
Košice Region	1,000	1,193	1,363	1,323	1,529	1,710	1,679	2,034	2,423

[1] Most Roma people live in the Prešov and Košice Regions, followed by the Banská Bystrica and Nitra Regions.

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

Roma people in Slovakia

According to the mapping of Roma communities carried out in 2013, an estimated 400,000 Roma people in Slovakia live in various types of ethnically homogeneous settlement concentrations as well as in spatial integration with the majority population (Mušinka et al., 2014). Segregated communities are considered to be the most at risk, with approximately 70,000 Roma living there according to data from 2013. In addition to the aforementioned mapping, data on the living situation of Roma households is also provided by the UNDP research (2007; 2012) and a number of other research studies, all of which agree that Roma people are among the population groups most affected by poverty and social exclusion (Džambazovič, Jurásková, 2002; FRA, 2012). According to the results of a national survey in 2020, up to 87% of households in Roma communities are at risk of poverty, 52% face severe material deprivation, 58% live in substandard housing (Markovič - Plachá, 2021). The poor living conditions[2] in which people live in these communities directly determine their life chances, life strategies and labour market opportunities (e.g. Rusnáková et al., 2011).

The handicap of Roma people in the labour market is a complex set of factors, among them the very belonging to an ethnic minority (e.g. Ayala and Rodriguez 2007; Carlsson and Rooth, 2007; Darity and Mason, 1998; Li, 2010; Lajčáková et al., 2017 and others). The other factors include gender (Roma women are particularly vulnerable), employment history, poor access to important services in marginalised settings, education and qualifications. The educational structure of the Roma population is significantly worse than that of the majority population. More than 18% of Roma people have not even completed primary education, almost 60% have only primary education, almost 5% graduated from a primary school for children with special needs and less than 0.5% have an education higher than ISCED 3 (Filadelfiová et al., 2012).

The fact is that a significant proportion of Roma people in Slovakia are excluded from the labour market, with only less than a quarter of them working. Although Roma employment has been increasing in the last decade, it is still estimated to be less than half of the employment rate of the majority population (Hidas et al., 2022). It is important to note that employment does not necessarily mean breaking the cycle of poverty and a pathway to improved quality of life. For a significant number of employed Roma people from marginalised communities, high job instability and high volatility (short-term or seasonal jobs), employment in so-called precarious jobs (low wages, unfavourable working conditions) and less protected employment contracts (e.g. temporary work agreements, etc.) are typical (Hidas et al. 2018; Lajčáková et al. 2017)

The question addressed in this paper is whether education is among the factors that influence the employment (employment rate, selected characteristics of employment) of Roma people. That is, whether the relationship between the level of education and the quality of employment discussed in the introduction applies also to Roma people.

Methods

The following parts of the paper present data obtained from two related scientific projects, APVV No. -17-0141 and VEGA No. 1/0886/21, carried out in the years 2021-2023. The authors of this paper use data from a questionnaire survey conducted on a sample of 805 Roma adults (in total for both projects, the items that were included in both questionnaires are analysed). In the context of the topic of this paper, these data were analysed mainly within the framework of the first-named project (VEGA), which focused on examining educational inequalities and educational aspirations of Roma people.. The research in the project was conceived more broadly, combining several questionnaire surveys (mainly in Slovak schools) and qualitative interviews. The selection was based on selected

[2] One in fourteen households in marginalised Roma communities has no electrical wiring, and in approximately one in seven households the wiring is inadequate. Fewer than half of households have a functional public sewerage system and one third of households in marginalised Roma communities have no plumbing (Grauzelová, Markovič, 2018).

demographic indicators (gender, age, position in the labour market) and also on the basis of the established typology of the geographical distribution of the Roma population in relation to the majority population (spatial integration, spatial segregation). The paper mainly presents the findings obtained from a sample of 314 employed Roma people .

In relation to the topic of the paper, the data on the educational structure of the respondents is important: 64.09,% of the respondents have primary education; 25.71% have secondary education without school leaving exam, 7.70% have secondary education with school leaving exam and 2.48% of the Roma people have university education. The education of the subgroup of employed Roma people is better. Here, people with primary education make up 47.13%, secondary education without school leaving exam31.21%, with school leaving exam16.24% and university graduates 5.41%. In any case, the educational structure of the respondents is better than in the FRA surveys and in other surveys mentioned in the introductory chapters of the paper. The explanations may be both the sample selection - the presented researches included Roma people living in spatial integration with the majority (in contrast to several researches that surveyed only Roma from ethnically homogeneous communities) and also the trend of improvement of Roma education.

In the following section, the paper will focus on the analysis of employment rates, wage level and subjectively assessed job satisfaction in relation to Roma education. The aim is to find out whether there is a relationship between the educational attainment and the above mentioned job characteristics.

Results

Education seems to help Roma people get jobs. The table below shows that there is a higher employment rate among the better educated respondents. The distribution is statistically significant.

Education is an important factor in relation to job stability, which is an important job characteristic. The following table presents the employment history of employed respondents in our sample. The distribution of their responses by education is statistically significant, indicating that education has an impact on job stability.

Secondary school graduates with school leaving exam and university graduates have mostly been employed continuously since leaving school, with the highest share of continuous workers among secondary school graduates with school leaving exam (higher than among university graduates). When combining those who have been employed consistently with respondents who have mostly been employed than unemployed since leaving school, secondary school graduates with school leaving exam rank first; in this group, all respondents chose one of these two options. The second place was taken by university graduates (94.12%), the third by secondary school graduates without high school

Table 2 Employment rate by education

	Education							
Are you currently employed?	**primary education**		**secondary education without school leaving exam**		**middle education with school leaving exam**		**university education**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	150	29.07%	109	52.66%	51	82.26%	17	85.00%
No	366	70.93%	98	47.34%	11	17.74%	3	15.00%
Total	516	100.00%	207	100.00%	62	100.00%	20	100.00%

Table 3 Employment history of working respondents

	Education							
What is your employment history, from finishing school up to now?	**primary education**		**secondary education without school leaving exam**		**middle education with school leaving exam**		**university education**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I have been employed continuously since leaving school	38	26.20%	25	36.76%	40	86.96%	12	70.59%
I have been mostly unemployed	39	26.89%	14	20.59%	0	0.00%	1	5.88%
I have been mostly employed	63	43.44%	27	39.70%	6	13.04%	4	23.53%
I have not been employed yet	4	2.75%	1	1.47%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
I don't know, I don't remember	0	0.00%	1	1.47%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
This is my first job	1	0.65%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Total	145	100.00%	68	100.00%	46	100.00%	17	100.00%

exam (76.46%), followed by primary school graduates (69.64%).

In the following characteristics, the importance of education is fading. It is not related to the length of current employment, job mobility, type of job contract, satisfaction with wage and only partially with wage level.

Table 4 shows the length of respondents' current employment by their educational background. The highest shares across all education groups are in the under 12 months category, followed by the 13 to 36 months category (except for secondary school graduates, where the second highest share was in employment lasting more than 5 years), and the third highest share in almost all education groups is in the more than 5 years category. While among Roma people with primary and secondary education without school leaving exam the percentage differences between the 0-12 months category and the more than 5 years category are relatively high, (e.g. 49.32% of Roma people with primary education have been working up to 1 year and only 13.51% of them have been working in their current job for more than 5 years), among secondary school graduates with school leaving exam and univer-

Table 4 Length of current employment by education

If you are currently employed, for how long?	Education							
	primary education		secondary education without school leaving exam		middle education with school leaving exam		university education	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
0-12 months	73	49.32%	42	42.86%	18	35.29%	7	41.18%
13-36 months (1-3 years)	40	27.03%	26	26.53%	11	21.57%	5	29.41%
37-60 months (3-5 years)	15	10.14%	15	15.31%	9	17.65%	1	5.88%
More than 5 years	20	13.51%	15	15.31%	13	25.49%	4	23.53%
Total	148	100.00%	98	100.00%	51	100.00%	17	100.00%

Table 5 Commuting to work

How often do you commute to work?	Education							
	primary education		secondary education without school leaving exam		middle education with school leaving exam		university education	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Daily	98	66.22%	71	72.45%	27	52.94%	14	82.35%
Less frequently than once a month	4	2.70%	3	3.06%	3	5.88%	0	0.00%
Weekly	23	15.54%	5	5.10%	6	11.76%	3	17.65%
Once a month	23	15.54%	19	19.39%	15	29.41%	0	0.00%
Total	148	100.00%	98	100.00%	51	100.00%	17	100.00%

sity graduates the more than 5 years group is more strongly represented and the share of those working 0-12 months is lower. However, the differences are not statistically significant and it can be concluded that the relationship between the educational attainment and the length of current employment has not been demonstrated. Interestingly, with the exception of secondary school graduates without school leaving exam, the least represented across all education groups is the 37-60 months category.

Even in the case of commuting, there are no statistically significant differences among Roma people with different education.

Table 5 shows the responses of Roma people to the question *"How often do you commute to work*?". The highest share of those working close to home (daily commuting) is among people with university education, followed by secondary school graduates without school leaving exam, then respondents with primary education and secondary school graduates with school leaving exam. The highest share of labour migrants is among Roma people with secondary education with school leaving exam (47.05%), the largest part of them commuting to work in monthly intervals. Commuting once a month was also chosen by the largest number of labour migrants with secondary school education without school leaving exam (19.39%), 27.55% of Roma people in this group migrate for work. Of the respondents with primary education commuting to work (33.78% of the total number of employed Roma with primary education), the same number of respondents travel once a week as once a month (15.54%).

Information about the type of employment contract is important for job security. The following table shows what kind of employment relationships Roma people have with their employers. Again, the differences between people with different education level are not statistically significant.

The highest share of Roma people in all education groups have their employment relationship confirmed by a full-time employment contract. For university graduates (note the total number of respondents is not high) it is up to 88.24% and the rest combine self-employment with part-time employment. The second highest share of peo-

Table 6 Type of employment

	Education							
If you are currently employed, which of the following applies to you? (more answers possible)	**primary education**		**secondary education without school leaving exam**		**middle education with school leaving exam**		**university education**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Full-time employment contract	66	44.59%	66	67.35%	31	60.78%	15	88.24%
Self-employment	45	30.41%	23	23.47%	17	33.33%	0	0.00%
Part-time employment contract	5	3.38%	0	0.00%	3	5.88%	0	0.00%
Other form: e.g. temporary work	27	18.24%	7	7.14%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Part-time employment and temporary work	5	3.38%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Self-employment and part-time employment	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	2	11.76%
Work contract for weekends	0	0.00%	2	2.04%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Total	148	100.00%	98	100.00%	51	100.00%	17	100.00%

Table 7 Monthly wage

	Education			
What is your net monthly wage?	**primary education**	**secondary education without school leaving exam**	**middle education with school l eaving exam**	**university education**
Average wage	EUR 560.83	EUR 792.30	EUR 840.71	EUR 731.21
Wage median	EUR 500	EUR 640	EUR 700	EUR 697.50

Table 8 Satisfaction with wage

	Education							
How satisfied are you with your wage? (marks as in school)	**primary education**		**secondary education without school leaving exam**		**middle education with school leaving exam**		**university education**	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1	63	42.57%	18	18.37%	9	17.65%	5	29.41%
2	36	24.32%	30	30.61%	19	37.25%	5	29.41%
3	45	30.41%	48	48.98%	23	45.10%	7	41.18%
4	4	2.70%	2	2.04%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
5	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Total	148	100.00%	98	100.00%	51	100.00%	17	100.00%
Average	1.94		2.35		2.78		2.10	
Median	2		3		2		2	

ple employed with a full-time contract is among secondary school graduates without secondary school exam, followed by secondary school graduates with secondary school exam, and the lowest share of people employed with a full-time contract is among Roma people with primary education. With the exception of university graduates, full-time employment is followed by self-employment. Among Roma people with primary education, the difference between full-time employment and self-employment is the lowest (full-time 44.59% and self-employment 30.41%)

The distribution of wage levels by education is highly significant in the general population in Slovakia (Tab. 1). The following table shows the situation in the group of respondents to our research.

Even in the case of employed Roma people, the differences in wages by education are statistically significant. However, if we take a closer look, we find that wages rise with education only after secondary education without school leaving exam. Beyond that, the growth is less significant, with even the average wage

and median wage being higher in the group of secondary school graduates with school leaving exam than in the group of university graduates. 9 out of 14 university graduates who responded to the question about jobs reported that they work in positions that do not require a university degree (e.g., administrative worker, stock clerk, community centre assistant, sales clerk). This may be one possible explanation for the lower average wage in this group. In any case, it is true (also when compared to the average of the general population in Slovakia) that Roma people carry out lower paid jobs, education influences the wage only after secondary education without school leaving exam, university-educated Roma work mainly in the social sphere, and a large part of them do jobs requiring only lower education.

In the last table we look at satisfaction with wage by education.

When it comes to satisfaction with wage, there are no significant differences between the education groups. Overall, it can be stated that employed Roma people are rather satisfied with their wages regardless of the level thereof and their educational background. The median shows that secondary school graduates without school leaving exam are the most critical of their pay (median 3), in all other groups the median is 2.

In 2022, a job satisfaction survey was performed among Slovak employees (regardless of their ethnicity). An exact comparison is not possible as different methodology was used, but the figure is interesting. In 2022, as many as 53% of respondents were not satisfied with their wages (this year falls within the period of our survey collection) (Trend, 2022).

Discussion and Conclusions

The argument of poor motivation is often used in relation to the educational attainment of Roma residents of marginal and poor communities. In the literature we can find claims that education is not a value for Roma people, that they do not consider it important enough to invest effort and time in it (Turzák, Turzáková, 2013). Especially in the sociological literature, the prevailing perspective emphasises the impact of poverty and social exclusion and the human rights approach to addressing the lower educational level of Roma (e.g. Kusá, 2017; Culenová et al., 2024), which is shared by the authors of this text. The barriers that Roma people have to overcome in their path to education are well identified, they are structural in nature and the solution is not on their shoulders or in their power. Labour market disadvantages seem to be part of it.

The prospect of a well-paid job occupies an important place in the mosaic of motivation to learn, especially for adults, but adults play a key role in motivating children. The results of our analysis suggest that the Slovak labour market does not offer equal opportunities to educated Roma people. For most of the employment characteristics analysed, the educational attainment does not play an important role. According to our findings, education helps Roma people to enter the labour market, but it is not related to the wage level. It affects wage up to secondary school, but for higher education the wage growth is no longer statistically significant. In other words, in terms of wage, Roma people only need to obtain secondary education without school leaving exam.

Education is not related to respondents' satisfaction with wage, nor does it affect the type of employment contract, the length of current employment, job mobility or commuting. The average wages of university-educated Roma people in our sample are lower than the average wages in the general population, partly because they work in lower-paid spheres (social services, education) and also because they work in jobs where university education is not required.

The labour market disadvantages of educated Roma people have deep roots and are the result of a combination of several causes (poor availability of better paid secondary and higher education and better paid jobs in regions more populated by Roma, ethnic disadvantage of Roma people in the labour market, based, for example, on employers' distrust in their skills and morale, etc.).

Wage and overall good work are not the only arguments in support of education, but they are important for work motivation. Especially when it comes to disadvantaged groups who have to put in more effort to attain education.

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