

Brief Historical Outline: The Roma community in Poland

The Roma are a people about which relatively little is still known. They are descendants of folks that left northern India in the middle of the first millennium. Research by linguists asserting that the Roma language comes from Sanskrit has long confirmed their Indian origin and this assumption has been additionally corroborated by intensive genetic research carried out in recent years which led, among others, to the identification of the H haplogroup characteristic for today's Roma (H1a1a-M82).

These groups reached Byzantium, via Persia and Armenia, where they settled for a longer period. The first written mention of Roma, dating from the middle of the 11th century, comes from this area. As time went by, the travellers moved to other European countries, where they appeared in the Middle Ages: the first written references regarding their presence in areas to the North of Byzantium come from the second half of the 14th century (the first document confirming the presence of Roma in Poland comes from Kraków in 1401). The initial friendly welcome extended to these travellers that purported to be 'pilgrims' was replaced by banishment edicts and persecution. Roma lived as slaves on the territory of today's Romania and Moldova until the middle of the 19th century. Persecution reached a peak during World War II when the Germans exterminated the major part of the Roma population (e.g. in Czechia less than 1,000 people survived from a group whose numbers were estimated at several tens of thousands). Roma perished in death camps, concentration camps, labour camps, ghettos and often in forests – thus their places of burial are most frequently unknown.

The number of Roma is unknown, estimated at between 6 and 12 million people in Europe and several million in the Americas. These groups differ in terms of culture: customs, language, religion, because – in line with the principle of *cuius regio eius religio* – Roma adopted the religions of the countries where they settled. For this reason the vast majority of Roma in Poland are Roman Catholics, although recent years saw an increased Roma involvement in the Pentecostal Church and the Jehovah's Witnesses Association. The Roman Catholic Church has established a National Roma Chaplain – since 2005 it has been Father Stanisław Opocki.

The Roma used to lead a nomadic lifestyle. Today, the share of travelling Roma is estimated at approximately 15% – mainly in the United Kingdom, France, Belgium and Switzerland (*gens du voyage/Travellers*); in Italy, Holland or Norway certain groups lead a semi-nomadic life.

Since the 15th century, travelling Roma groups have been arriving along the Carpathian range and from the Great Hungarian Plain and settling in Poland. Carpathian Roma (Bergitka Roma) are their descendants. In the 16th century, Roma people started to arrive to Poland from Germany and were later called Polska Roma. The second half of the 19th century – when slavery was abolished – saw a migration of the Kalderash (Kelderari – cauldron-makers) and Lovari (Lovari – horse traders) Roma from Transylvania and Wallachia. Apart from these groups, there is a small population of Sinti (who identify themselves as not belonging to Roma folk but are sometimes equated with them) and a small number of Roma linked with the Russian culture circle (Chaładytka Roma).

The institution of the 'King of the Gypsies' was introduced in Poland in the 17th century. The 'King of the Gypsies' was a 'senior' nobleman designated by the Polish king, who was responsible for collecting

levies and for trials. After World War I the institution of the 'King of the Gypsies' was revived by the Roma – the 'coronation' of Michał Kwiek in 1937 was most spectacular. The 'King of the Gypsies' (who acts as morality judge) is a feature of the Polska Roma group, a collective 'court' (kris) is characteristic for the Lovari and the Kalderash, whereas Roma from the Bergitka group do not have such a structure.

Until the 1960s most Roma people in Poland (apart from the Bergitka group) led a nomadic lifestyle, stopped by forced settlement and the 'productiveness' campaign imposed by the communist authorities (hence large communities in the cities of Upper and Lower Silesia and in the Nowa Huta district of Kraków). Roma live in all parts of Poland and are practically an entirely urban population (92%). The largest communities (belonging mainly to the Bergitka group) live in the southern part of Poland.

After the fall of communism, Roma organised themselves in several dozen ethnic (Roma) non-governmental organisations that actively participated in previous integration programmes. At the same time, the breakthrough in 1989, and particularly Poland's accession to the EU induced a large wave of Roma migration from Poland to western Europe. There are large Polish Roma communities in the United Kingdom and in Ireland. At the same time, in the 1990s Poland was for a short time a migration destination for Romanian and (to a lesser extent) Bulgarian Roma but, in the long term, did not become a country of final destination.

The Roma minority is not represented in the Parliament. Representatives of the minority stand in local elections in some communes from the lists of various electoral committees. However, none of the candidates connected with this minority won a seat in the last three local elections.

Appendix 4

Framework scope of action of the Roma school mediator and learning support teacher assisting Roma children in education

The *Programme for the Roma Community in Poland for the years 2004–2013* pointed to the need for additional education support for Roma pupils, among others in the form of introducing the position of Roma school mediator and learning support teacher:

Roma school mediators – Roma people trusted by local Roma communities – provide comprehensive support to Roma pupils in their contacts within the school community, build a positive image of school and the benefits of education, provide emotional support to Roma pupils, help teachers and educators to discern the needs and possible problems of individual pupils, offer assistance and mediation in situations involving difficulties and conflicts. The duties of the mediator also include building a good contact between the parents and the school, informing parents about the education at school, as well as monitoring the progress and attendance of pupils.

Learning support teachers – who know the methods of working in culturally diverse groups– pay particular attention to Roma children, treating them, at the early stage of education, as foreign-language speakers and bi-cultural persons. The task of the teacher is to monitor Roma children's school progress on an ongoing basis, conduct remedial classes, help children with their homework and stay in touch with their families.

The fact that no solutions of this type existed previously led to the elaboration¹⁾ of a more detailed scope of their functioning. Considering the persisting education deficits among Roma pupils and the financial possibilities created by the Regulations on the principles of distribution of the school education part of the general subsidy provided to local government units (LGUs), issued every year by the Ministry of National Education, which allow to finance these forms of support for Roma pupils, the framework scope of action of mediators and support teachers is presented below.

Roma school mediators (RSM)

This profession has been included in the official list of professions in Poland since 2004. This time has allowed to elaborate a working practice, however problems associated with the proper and efficient functioning of RSMs still emerge. The mediator is a kind of link between public institutions – school in particular – and the home environment of Roma pupils. Thus, his work should not be limited to school premises, but should also include regular contacts with the pupil's family and with local authorities, e.g. in the scope of consultations with regard to actions for the benefit of the Roma.

It is also important to raise the awareness of employers with regard to respecting employee rights of Roma school mediators.

The scope described below depends largely on the personality predispositions of the mediator, his/her education, experience, local possibilities, the capacity to find partners for cooperation; this scope indicates essential actions in view of achieving the objectives of the mediator's work and the objectives of subsequent state strategies for social integration of the Roma in Poland and should be treated as guidelines on organising the work of the school and of supporting teachers with regard to the needs of Roma pupils and employment of RSMs.

The objective of the mediator's work is to support the process of Roma pupils receiving a high quality education, enabling them to continue education at post-elementary level, and – in the long-term – to increase the level of social and civic integration of the Roma in Poland.

It must be stressed that smooth cooperation between the Roma school mediator and the learning support teacher is essential in order to provide effective assistance for Roma pupils in education.

Main tasks

1. Working with children

- attending classes (this is essential particularly early in the school year in order to gain insight into the problems and deficits of the pupil; with time, it is possible to focus more on individual work with the pupil),
- participating in remedial classes (if needed) and monitoring the pupil's participation in such classes (essential in order to identify problems and monitor the pupil's progress, to monitor effectiveness of compensatory classes and the pupil's attendance),
- helping with homework,
- accompanying the pupil during psychological examinations (the mediator provides support and explains unknown words; this is significant particularly when psychological and educational

¹⁾ The scopes of action have been elaborated by Roma school mediators and support teachers during cyclical training workshops organised in the years 2005–2011 by the *Roma School Mediators Society in Poland* in the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship, among others.

counselling centres use verbal tests that are not adapted to the cultural specificity of children that are ethnically different),

- revealing emotional problems (talks with the pupil),
- motivating to take part in school activities,
- monitoring that the pupil has the necessary school accessories,
- promoting talented pupils (sending pupils to appropriate extra-curricular activities at school, in daycare centres or community centres allowing the pupil to develop their capabilities, applying to Ministry of the Interior and Administration scholarship programmes and other programmes – in cooperation with the relevant teacher),
- participating in extra-curricular activities (e.g. performances, school trips, etc.),
- providing care to children at summer and winter camps (particularly if the holiday trips are organised by municipalities or other non-governmental organisations using funds from the Integration Programme).

2. Working with parents:

- maintaining permanent, regular contacts with the family environment of each child (providing parents with feedback regarding the pupil's grades, attendance, successes and problems),
- working on enhancing the participation of Roma parents in the education process by encouraging them to attend parent-teacher meetings, join in school life by taking part in meetings, school ceremonies and events and monitoring their child's attendance and learning progress,
- defining mutual expectations and needs by the mediator and parents,
- informing parents about the mediator's scope of duties (explaining the mediator's role and tasks),
- building a positive image of the school among parents and showing the benefits of education,
- informing the family about the possibilities of obtaining social assistance (as far as possible) – RSMs cannot do the work of a family in this respect, they should provide information in particular on topics related to education and the pupil's functioning at school and about the possibilities of informal education (activities organised at daycare centres in school and outside school, community centres, etc.),
- providing emotional support to the pupil,
- convincing parents of the necessity of pre-school education and the need for children to go on to post-elementary education,
- raising their own qualifications by participating in training activities for RSMs and other training.

3. Working with the school:

- getting to know all school staff,
- facilitating communication between teachers and Roma pupils,
- establishing a list of Roma children subject to the education obligation,
- conducting regular individual talks with the youth counsellor and teachers (determining educational problems of pupils and how to solve them, monitoring pupils' attendance, school progress, behaviour, etc.),
- providing assistance in organising school competitions on the subject of the Roma people,
- participating in teaching staff council training meetings (getting teachers acquainted with Roma culture),
- providing assistance in organising essential extra classes for pupils (e.g. remedial classes speech therapy classes, etc.),

- initiating the provision of psychological and educational aid to individual pupils in a given school, if necessary.

4. Collaborating with institutions:

- accompanying Roma pupils during examinations at educational and psychological counselling centres,
- cooperating with NGOs (informing them about the needs of Roma families, facilitating contacts),
- conducting promotion activities in local media (informing media – for example about children’s musical performances, projects carried out, etc.),
- cooperating with public administration bodies (informing Gmina Offices and appropriate Voivodes’ Plenipotentiaries for National and Ethnic Minorities about the needs and problems associated with the education of Roma pupils and/or initiatives providing support in that matter),
- informing hierarchic superiors and the appropriate Voivode’s Plenipotentiaries for National and Ethnic Minorities about manifestations of discrimination, if any.

5. Organising work

- arranging work premises (every school should designate an appropriately equipped room and establish fixed consulting hours of the Roma school mediator, so that Roma pupils and/or parents know when they can visit their mediator),
- establishing a framework work schedule (providing for regular contacts with teachers, the school youth counsellor and parents),
- maintaining regular contacts with parents,
- documenting work (keeping a register on items such as: professional opinion on each Roma pupil, description of problems and actions taken, learning progress, participation in extra-curricular activities, etc.),
- gathering information about children and the family situation – if this is of particular significance for the pupil’s education process,
- setting out priorities of action (with particular focus on regularity, continuity and effectiveness of actions),
- participating in school events connected with Roma culture as well as celebrations of special occasions and patriotic ceremonies.

OPTIONAL TASKS

Promotion of topics relative to the Roma people, their education and the mediator’s work

– preparing information, in cooperation with the school, for example for the local media, about significant actions undertaken by the Roma community in the scope of education or promotion of their own culture,

– assisting in the cultivation of Roma culture (organising cultural events presenting the Roma culture on school premises or on the territory of the municipality, organising lectures on the subject of Roma culture, etc.).

Learning support teachers assisting Roma children in education

- helping with school-work,
- providing comprehensive support to Roma pupils in their contacts with the school community,
- providing comprehensive support to school staff in their contacts with Roma pupils,

- developing a positive image of school and showing the benefits of education to Roma pupils,
- providing emotional support to Roma pupils,
- monitoring that Roma pupils are equipped with essential school accessories enabling full and active participation in classes,
- engaging in regular cooperation with Roma school mediators,
- identifying pupils' skills and talents and ensuring that they are properly developed,
- monitoring school attendance rates and learning progress of Roma pupils,
- organising voluntary work by young people aimed at helping Roma pupils,
- sharing knowledge with (non-Roma) pupils and teachers about the traditions, culture and history of Roma (teaching staff council training meetings, lessons for pupils about modifying stereotypes and prejudices, etc.),
- sharing knowledge with teachers on specific educational and upbringing needs of Roma children,
- maintaining regular contacts with the parents of Roma pupils, informing them about their child's progress and convincing them that education is important and useful,
- engaging parents of Roma children in school life,
- supervising that the hours of remedial classes financed from school education subsidy funds are carried out and used appropriately,
- assisting in mutual contacts between employees of educational and psychological counselling centres, Roma children and their parents in order to reduce the number of decisions stating disabilities of Roma pupils,
- developing a positive image of the Roma world in the local non-Roma community,
- assisting and mediating in difficult and conflict situations,
- assisting in making basic literature on Roma culture and history as well as multicultural education available in school libraries (including music and film literature),
- cooperating with local institutions and NGOs (including Roma associations) acting for the benefit of the Roma community,
- continuous improvement of their own work skills by participating in training sessions, workshops and conferences dedicated to Roma topics/multicultural education, etc.,
- teaching compensatory classes in the area of general knowledge about the world,
- teaching Roma history to Roma children and their parents.