



**Diverse, inclusive workplace  
for the Roma and for others**

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*„Bridging young Roma and business – Intervention for inclusion of Roma youth through employment in the private sector in Bulgaria and Hungary“*

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# Introduction

This guide had been compiled with the goal of helping companies which are open to strengthening their diversity, because they see it as one way to become more effective and successful. Therefore, they are willing to open toward new employees, among them Roma. The “company” as such, of course, will not read this publication - it was written for various people working in corporate settings, such as HR managers, line managers, subject matter experts. For you.

## Who are we?

The HRom program, led by the Autonomia Foundation<sup>1</sup>, has been connecting educated young Roma and quality corporate positions for many years. We, at Autonomia Foundation, have expertise both in the field of Roma social inclusion as well as in the areas of research, training, and communication. This publication describes an “ideal” process – starting from the phase when a potential Roma applicant becomes aware of a company/position, through the selection process and finally when she/he becomes a successful employee of that company. Our efforts in compiling the guide have been strongly based on the input of the Working Group on Diversity, involving the Hungarian Employers Forum on Equal Opportunities as well as HR professionals from a dozen Hungarian corporations, which met six times during the first half of 2018. Corporate colleagues also shared their relevant experience and opinions through individual interviews. These companies consider diversity to be important and would explicitly like to strengthen the procedures leading to the inclusion of their Roma employees.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://autonomia.hu/en/>

## *The HRom program*

*Within the framework of this initiative, young Roma people aged 18-35 with at least grammar school education are supported to have better access to quality job openings, through soft skills trainings, among other developments. They get familiar with the corporate world, its typical positions, and major companies. They have the opportunity to network with and build relationships with company representatives. Their communication skills and self-knowledge are improved, they are prepared for job interviews and practice their skills in mock interviews. During the training, their CVs are developed with the help of experts. They gain knowledge to better identify potentially relevant positions, areas, and companies they wish to apply to in the future. The program also provides opportunities for development of foreign language and IT skills - knowledge that is highly appreciated in many positions.<sup>2</sup>*

## **Why and how was this publication compiled?**

The guide was written with the aim to provide all interested parties with access to all the experiences gathered and the practical examples learned about corporate diversity processes, so organizations can learn from each other's successes and failures and improve their effectiveness in the inclusion of disadvantaged employees with various backgrounds.

The publication focuses primarily on the employment and inclusion of the Roma, however many aspects and tools will be discussed that might equally be important in the integration of other

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<sup>2</sup> The HRom program (Bridge to Business in English) is being implemented in two countries - Bulgaria and Hungary – in 2016-2019, by Autonomia Foundation, the Open Society Institute–Sofia and Center for Policy Studies of the Central European University. The program is supported by the European Commission.

vulnerable groups<sup>3</sup> or even for mainstream employees. This reading is highly recommended even if you are not dealing specifically with the employment of Roma people, but you are interested in learning new aspects that can lead to more successful outreach, recruitment or selection processes and improved cooperation within your company. There is a long way to go for any company to become a truly diverse and inclusive, attractive and talent-retaining workplace - as you will see below. Still, this journey offers many exciting challenges and opportunities for you and your company. So let's set out together and examine this field.

Experiences around the topic of diversity are quite scarce in Hungary, so we set out to review the literature on Western European and North American practices to broaden our knowledge base. In doing this, we learned about initiatives and trends that we could not yet find in Hungary. Parallel to understanding the opinion of the corporations and experts, we were also curious to discover the views and experiences of the program participants. Focus group interviews were organized with young Roma graduates with corporate experience or similar career plans.

Thus, the present article is as diverse as any workplace, in terms of the authors and their collaborators. However, we do not claim we have the philosophers' stone. On one hand, relatively little experience had been gathered on the subject, and initiatives of diversity and Roma employment in Hungary are in their infancy. The subject has barely been researched, so we currently have limited information available. On the other hand, the situation, the priorities and the environment of each company is different, so the optimal

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<sup>3</sup> Vulnerable or sensitive group: Any social group whose members are more likely to be victims of discrimination or face economic difficulties than members of other groups, such as the elderly, new entrants to the labour market, women, divorced people, single parents, people with disabilities, LGBT people, people of different ethnic origin (e.g. the Roma), refugees.

tools can vary from company to company. We offer here a systematic collection of theoretical considerations, good practices and relevant aspects to keep in mind. It can help you as a company professional to set out and make the first conscious steps, for your company to become more diverse and able to attract Roma employees.

The publication accompanies you throughout the process. From theoretical approaches to channels to reach Roma candidates, through their selection, recruitment, and integration.

We hope we manage to explore all the possible questions and methods and cover everything you are interested in.

So if you think it is important for your company to reachout to and retain new employee groups, to become more diverse, inclusive, and employee-friendly, you will learn many practical aspects and examples in the coming sections. Though not all of them will be applicable to you, there will certainly be some worth trying, even if you work for a smaller company, or if diversity and inclusion are not at the forefront for you for the time being. We think small steps can be effective if they are purposefully planned and really serve your goal. You will almost certainly find practical help for your work on the coming pages.

# **I. Corporate Diversity and Roma employees – Advantages and Characteristics, Concerns and Answers**

## **Why is a diverse, inclusive workplace better?**

While companies are driven by profit considerations and generally rational factors, diversity and inclusion issues are often considered in an ethical and social context. Although these might be significant from an ethical point of view, but otherwise do not provide practical benefits for the company in terms of productivity.

In reality, however, a company being a diverse, inclusive workplace carries concrete value in terms of its operation and efficiency. International research<sup>4</sup> proves that diverse workplaces gain competitive advantages over other companies. The authors of this publication found the following benefits of a diverse workplace:

1. A diverse workplace can attract employee groups that competitors might not seek to engage or may even discriminate against. If external communications explicitly reflect this goal, the company and the positions it offers will become even more attractive for members of many vulnerable groups. Moreover, a company that pays attention to social sustainability in its operations is more attractive to a growing number of majority-group employees. Therefore, a

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<sup>4</sup> For example <http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>



company that can address members of one or more vulnerable groups and communicates effectively its actions for social sustainability can expand the pool of all potential employees, thereby recruiting more numerous and better-quality staff.

2. The retention of employees is more effective in a diverse environment. Since almost all of us, in one way or another, are related to one or more vulnerable groups through our own identities or those of an immediate relative (e.g.: disabled person, non-majority origin, LGBT, woman, newcomer to the job-market, aged over 45, single-parent, divorced, etc.) we should all care how our employer treats employees who are in any way differ from the average. Where diversity considerations play an important role in HR strategy, there is less fluctuation and longer retention time. It is especially true for disadvantaged groups. If a staff member with an employment disadvantage finds an inclusive environment, it greatly improves his/her motivation to stay in the job long-term. Among other things, this could be one of the reasons behind 8% less fluctuation among workers with disabilities as compared to other employee groups, as measured by a Hungarian retail company.
3. The performance and commitment of the employees are strengthened if they do not have to hide their diverseness at a workplace – if they have the possibility to freely express aspects of their origin, age, marital status, sexual orientation, etc. These employees save a lot of energy by not having to hide, and work more enthusiastically with an organisation that respects their specificities. This latter aspect is also important for majority employees. If the company values its employees and recognises them, its staff will be more

committed to the company's activities. According to Gallup's *State of the Global Workplace Report*<sup>5</sup>, the share of committed/engaged employees is only 15% on a global scale, while the rate of non-engaged / non-committed employees is 67%. Expressly disruptive employees make up 18% of the total workforce. (Results of similar assessment in Hungary are more positive, with a higher ratio of committed employees). Disruptive staff causes a loss of \$ 5.5 billion a year only in the US.

4. The strengths of employees of vulnerable/marginalized groups can contribute to the more efficient operation of the company. Members of vulnerable groups, who frequently faced and coped with difficulties, are generally more determined, more persistent, more resilient, or more flexible and adaptive, have stronger conflict management and intercultural communication skills than the average employee. This can lead to a company having a competitive edge over one that does not hire diversely.
5. Innovation and creativity is boosted by a diverse team. Teams of diverse composition can recognise, explore more aspects, ideas and suggestions for their joint work, a great advantage in creative industries. According to research literature, corporate diversity is one of the determining factors of innovation, performance and the expansion of the customer base. According to an article<sup>6</sup> published in one of the most prestigious journals, the Harvard Business Review, a survey

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brentgleeson/2017/10/15/5-powerful-steps-to-improve-employee-engagement/#4fa1f87c341d>

<sup>6</sup> Rocio Lorenzo, Martin Reeves: How and Where Diversity Drives Financial Performance <https://hbr.org/2018/01/how-and-where-diversity-drives-financial-performance>

of 1700 companies in 8 countries (United States, France, Germany, China, Brazil, India, Switzerland and Austria) found a statistically significant (i.e. real) correlation between the diversity of employees and management (gender, age, origin, career history, education) and the innovation performance of the companies. The more aspects the diversity of the company carried, the stronger the impact. The study also states that diversity alone does not necessarily lead to higher levels of innovation and stronger corporate performance. In order for a company to benefit from this competitive advantage, it must enable employees to develop their innovation capacity rooted in their differences. This is only feasible in an inclusive workplace environment and in a corporate culture where diversity of ideas and abilities can freely emerge and compete.

6. The needs of a diverse clientele can be served more effectively by a diverse set of employees. A company that has vulnerable groups among its customers and clients might find it valuable to include the members of those groups among its employees. On one hand, a member of a given group might better represent specific needs and considerations throughout the functions of the organisation. On the other hand, a non-majority person in client-facing positions can more easily build confidence with the client/customer belonging to the same group. Thus, the more diverse members of the society are represented at a company, the more attractive the organization is to its potential customers/clients belonging. This is how the clientele expands.

7. Companies are recognised by various awards in Hungary for their achievements in diversity and inclusion. These credits improve company image, attracting business partners and new employees.

Diversity can, therefore, be an asset in reaching out to broader, better-quality employee pools, as well as in boosting productivity and the commitment of employees and in reducing fluctuation. In addition to these HR aspects, it might also positively impact outreach to new clients and new business partners and can lead to innovative, creative solutions with a competitive advantage.

Of course, completely different aspects might be crucial for companies in the creative industry than for international B2B service providers or for organizations operating in a local context engaging with a wide range of customers and clients on a daily basis. In some cases, creativity and productivity are more prevalent, while elsewhere access to and retention of vulnerable customers is crucial, or drawing foreign workers or business partners by being open and cooperative with members of the largest ethnic minority in Europe.

### **Why it might be beneficial to hire Roma and what might keep you from doing so?**

Representatives of the companies taking part in the working group agreed in principle that the above-mentioned arguments for workforce diversity in general also apply to the employment of the Roma. However, as these companies have a relatively low proportion of Roma workers, and there are only a few surveys available in the Hungarian context, it is not possible to prove anything by actual results and quantifiable data in this field. We have indeed seen, by individual cases, that determination, flexibility, intercultural communication and loyalty are common advantages of Roma employees. Furthermore, in the case of companies providing

services to a wide range of clients (e.g. retail chains, energy suppliers), Roma clients and customers are also more likely to turn to a Roma salesman or customer service representative. So the profile, target group, and operation of the company greatly determine which benefits of diversity can be used best.

The Roma are also disadvantaged among the underprivileged groups because no state-benefit of tax exemption is available to support their employment. While companies employing mothers with young children, people with disabilities, people over the age of 55, or even new entrants to the labour market can access a number of state-guaranteed benefits, the employment of a Roma is financially supported only in case he/she also belongs to another target group, such as those listed above.

Presently, however, most companies are struggling with labour shortages, which can hardly be fully resolved by using the existing recruitment channels and by reaching the usual applicant pools. Thus, it might be smart to target one of the least utilised potential pool of employees - the Roma – even if the company does not see any added value, opportunity or benefit in strengthened corporate diversity or specifically in the employment of the Roma. *"There is no labour force in Hungary today, we have to grab everyone who is available, even if it involves compromises [...] Have to open up towards employees, no matter whether he/she is Chinese, Arabic,..."* - said the HR manager of a large Hungarian company.

So the recruitment and inclusion of Roma employees could be a primary interest of most companies. However, even if strengthening diversity and access to new groups is the priority of an HR Department, there are challenges: opinions, concerns and distrust from managers, local team leaders, colleagues, or even the senior management regarding the employment of the Roma must be taken into account. Below, we summarize these possible issues and potential solutions.

### *Roma candidates in the recruitment process*

We have heard the experiences of many companies, about the unreliability of Roma applicants who do not show up at an agreed interview. This happens more often with people with lower education. The background reasons could be lack of self-confidence or financial limits than personality traits.

Their CVs are often confusing, sometimes featuring large detours (for example having worked in very different sectors), and there may be periods of 1-2 years that appear to be passive. Without understanding the person's background, this discord might undermine the confidence of the employer. However, it is worth finding out the reasons. It often turns out that the candidate was forced to "jump" between sectors not because of indecision or unreliability, but due to financial considerations. Seemingly passive periods in the CV might cover temporary or "black" work, which the candidate is afraid to list.

In general, the recruitment of Roma staff might require extra effort. However, companies that do take on a growing number of Roma workforce indicate that it is worth investing in additional work in the hiring process. We will discuss the details further on in this document.

### *Performance*

We have heard many concerns about the adequate performance of (a future) Roma employee. At the same time we also received feedback from companies expressing that worries concerning the poor performance of the Roma are often unfounded. According to their experience, a significant part of their Roma employees perform at the right level.

The potential weak performance of a Roma employee might cause an additional problem because it might be attributed by his colleagues to him/her being Roma and not to the actual circumstances - which can affect the perceived performance of other Roma employees. Even if it is possible to know why the performance of a given colleague is low (e.g. pursuing studies parallel to work), the manager facing a serious problem may occasionally interpret the situation as a Roma-specific case and later become less motivated to recruit additional Roma staff.

Self-assessment problems can also affect performance. A Roma worker might experience self-inflicted restraints, lack of self-confidence may cause stress and limit their performance. Regular positive reinforcement or support and development can be helpful in this regard.

### *Conflicts between colleagues*

Although worries about the incidence of conflicts often arise in connection to hiring Roma, the companies participating in the HRom program rarely experience such situations. Still, it is recommended to be prepared for conflicts in advance and, if necessary, to include external assistance, expertise in their management.

### *Negative branding*

Another frequent aspect brought up is that Roma employees might “scare off” non-Roma clients. No extensive survey can justify or disprove this at present. However, companies exist even in Hungary, which have already recognized the advantage their Roma staff might mean in boosting the company’s attractiveness and credibility for Roma clients. This clearly would be a predominant argument only for companies that have a large retail clientele, with a significant proportion of Roma customers. For example, one of the

retail service providers has defined an important benefit of hiring Roma for its customer service as: *“The Roma customer service agents themselves tell us that many Roma clients prefer to turn to them. Customers perceive the company less as an authority if there are Roma customer service personnel.”*

### *Applying negative group stereotypes at the individual level to Roma employees*

There are at least as many negative stereotypes about the Roma as about other groups. If the hiring staff performing the selection have such prejudices, which might question the perceived suitability of the candidate for a particular position, it is worth clarifying this with the recruitment staff. For example, if one is afraid that the candidate might be quick-tempered and angry sometimes, leading to unacceptable communication towards the customers or damaging the company's property, it represents a very important aspect in the selection, which should be made relevant in the hiring of not only Roma applicants, but for all candidates. Thus, identifying selection and screening measures that are suitable for exploring such important and relevant personality traits or problematic coping strategies would improve the screening toolkit that can be applied to any candidate. Thus we can avoid the trap that a potentially good Roma candidate will not be hired because this character trait had been attributed to him/her based on the stereotypical fears, instead of actually measuring it. Furthermore, hiring processes will be made more precise in screening out those Roma or non-Roma candidates who actually possess this negative feature.

### *'Hypersensitivity' of marginalized groups*

There are Roma employees who find it harder to accept criticism and tend to interpret it having received due to them being Roma and not due to their performance. Objective-setting, clear feedback on



performance, and the genuine discussion of possible conflict situations can help in these cases. Intermediary organizations, such as the HRom program, can also help ease such problems.

## **Reasons for competitive disadvantage in the labour market**

### **How diverse are the Roma?**

In order to manage the concerns of the organization or deal better with the difficulties faced by Roma candidates/employees, it is important to be aware of the background factors that determine the life of many Roma, the effects of which sometimes lead to misconceptions about the person.

To define who is a Roma, the most frequently used criteria is self-identification, whether one claims he/she is Roma. It is also decisive, however, whether one's environment perceives one as Roma. Although we can define or communicate our identity according to our decision, often the perception and opinion of the environment is the stronger determining factor. After all, people are not treated (e.g. discriminated against) on the basis of a group membership because they identify as such but because their environment considers, perceives them so. Since there is a significant proportion of assimilated or multi-identity Roma (identifying as Roma and as Hungarian) in Hungarian society and many people, for example, did not declare themselves Roma in the census (sometimes because they feared negative consequences), a significant proportion of the Roma cannot be clearly identified as such. In the 2011 census, 315 000 people declared themselves Roma, while sociological surveys suggest that the Hungarian Roma population is of 500-850 000.

According to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office data for 2015<sup>7</sup>, 60% of the Roma live in economically disadvantaged areas - far from competitive job opportunities. Approximately one-fifth of the Roma population has secondary school qualification, while only 1-2% reached university level education. However, the level of educational attainment has significantly increased for the 20-29 age group over the last decade.

Overall, only 40% of the Roma have regular jobs and a large proportion of these employed people work in public work schemes. Many more work in the black or grey economy, as casual workers, as borrowed manpower, or on fixed-term contracts, with less predictability and job security.

Therefore it can be concluded that the proportion of Roma with geographical and economic disadvantages, those with low educational attainment and being unemployed is much higher compared to the non-Roma. In addition, they make up the most untapped target group of the labour market. The aforementioned disadvantages often reinforce each other - e.g. living in a disadvantaged settlement negatively impact educational chances, while the lack of qualifications further decreases job opportunities. On top of all this, a significant proportion of the Roma experience discrimination in the areas of housing, education and labour, which further reduces their chances for success

However, there exists a narrow Roma middle class, whose members work in white-collar, intellectual positions (about 6%) and have appropriate qualifications (grammar school or university). Despite their relatively high social status and educational achievement, in many cases even they do not succeed in eliminating all their objective disadvantages. As most of them have been

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<sup>7</sup><http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/munkerohelyz/munkerohelyz15.pdf>

studying in less prestigious secondary schools and higher education institutions, their professional knowledge and foreign language skills may be weaker. Their network is weaker among the middle-class and especially among employees of the corporate sector. Thus, even prominent candidates can face disadvantages as compared to members of the mainstream society. A diploma obtained at a rural college will be less valuable than one from a school in the capital; foreign language skills acquired at school will be weaker than those gained in language schools and by living abroad, and the lack of network capital will result in less knowledge about the career opportunities of the corporate world and weaker motivation for the candidate to apply. Of course, there are exceptions, but the above drawbacks are eliminated completely by very few.

In addition to young Roma with grammar school or university level education, the proportion of skilled workers and VET graduates is also significant. Despite our relatively broader experience with young Roma with at least upper secondary level education, it is important to talk about groups that are relevant to blue-collar positions as well.

The differences between the university graduate, multi-lingual young Roma living in the capital and middle-aged people with primary education in economically disadvantaged regions do not justify drawing up a very generalised picture of the Roma. However, experiences of multiple disadvantages in several areas, discriminations and failures, disrupt one's self-esteem for many Roma. Due to these negative experiences, certain situations might be more often interpreted by the person as discriminative, negative feedback and failures might often attributed to their ethnic origin. (This is also frequent with regard to many other vulnerable groups with significant experience of prejudices or discrimination.) However, coping with often difficult situations, or succeeding in

unfamiliar environments while studying or working, often lead to flexibility, endurance, strong and diverse communication skills.

By paying attention to the above characteristics, we are more likely to find solutions to potential challenges and build a basis for effective collaboration.

## **II. Which direction to set off and how?**

In the previous section, we have reviewed the practical benefits of a diverse, inclusive workplace, the potential positive effects as well as challenges of Roma employment. We have explored the basic background factors that need to be understood if we aim to reach, recruit and retain Roma employees effectively. Before we turn to the aspects of outreach and recruitment of Roma candidates and creating an inclusive environment, it's important to consider where one's company stands now, what opportunities exist, and which theoretical frameworks and strategies can be pursued.

Companies are at least as diverse as the Roma employees are. For example, British/American-origin SSCs in Hungary usually possess strong diversity strategies and have dedicated professionals or teams for this task. Thus, they can rely on internationally tried and tested practices to improve diversity and inclusion and this type of focus is even expected by their headquarters. However, there are many more companies that have neither practical experience nor strategic targets in the field of diversity.

### **Non-discrimination and equal opportunities**

The Equal Treatment Act (Act CXXV of 2003 on Equal Treatment and Promotion of Equal Opportunities) prohibits any person being disadvantaged due to their characteristics (origin, age, gender, ethnicity, etc.) native or acquired, that are not relevant to their work. Thus, the first criterion for a diverse, inclusive workplace is that candidates should not be screened out based on their protected characteristic (e.g. ethnicity). This standpoint is called non-

discrimination. However, this condition is not guaranteed at a significant proportion of employers in Hungary. Discrimination can be direct (when one is specifically disadvantaged because of one's protected trait) or it may be indirect (when a person is disadvantaged in a seemingly neutral process, not because of their protected attribute, but based on some other, related quality). Indirect discrimination occurs, for example, when an employer unjustifiably requires 10 years of uninterrupted employment to fill a certain position and thus excludes all those who have interrupted their employment, for example, because of childbirth and childcare.

Discrimination can be conscious or non-conscious. In the former case, the offender is aware that for example he/she rejects the candidate because the applicant is Roma. The latter one might refuse a candidate who would be eligible for the position based on the objective criteria, claiming inappropriate outfit, vocabulary, personality, skin colour on a conscious level.

According to the above, there are companies that operate at the minimum level of anti-discrimination. For them, the guiding principle is to comply with the regulatory requirements and the main motivation is to avoid the sanctions of the law. These employers will not find this guide very helpful, its considerations are not designed for them.

However, companies searching for tools for building a more inclusive culture that goes further than avoiding all forms of discrimination will find many useful recommendations in this publication. It is a serious challenge to ensure that none of the employees make any discriminatory decisions, either directly or indirectly, in a conscious or unintended way. The extent of possible discrimination can only be assessed if decisions in all phases of the recruitment process are documented and monitored. On the basis of the monitoring, we might plan substantial steps to reduce/eliminate discrimination.

On the basis of **complex non-discrimination**, it is equally important to examine the seemingly neutral procedures (tests, interviews, CV reviews, test tasks, etc.) and the unbiased operation of recruiting staff and partners. (In the past, for example, IQ test scores of white, middle-class men were higher than that of women with other cultural and social backgrounds, until the test was made culturally neutral). Training and follow-up of the recruiting staff are indispensable to reach non-discriminatory selection. Without this, we cannot expect to actually reduce unintended bias and the distorting effect of prejudices.

Most corporations in Hungary - although they have the **equal opportunities plan** that is statutory for public companies and recommended for private ones by law - prioritize non-discrimination at the practical level - either with a minimum or a complex anti-discrimination approach. However, further actions may be needed to develop a fully inclusive culture.

However, besides achieving non-discriminatory operation, there are also possibilities for overcoming or offsetting disadvantages. Treating everyone equally often does not lead to real equality of opportunity. (For example, if we send a test task to be completed on a computer to a candidate who does not have computer and internet connection, we do not provide the same chances for him/her as to another applicant with all the necessary infrastructure).

We might aim to level off disadvantages through affirmative action, which have to be based on a thorough understanding of our target groups and their typical disadvantages. Affirmative action can be implemented prior to the job application process (e.g. through the capacity building of potential candidates), incorporated into the selection/recruitment process as well as into the phase of on-board integration and in building an inclusive environment.

The usual practice of firms operating in Hungary rarely go beyond the equal treatment approach, which does not necessarily lead to the creation of a diverse company. Equal treatment alone can preserve the homogeneous composition of the company's workforce - in terms of social status, origin, gender, age and other characteristics. Although many companies are striving to provide equal opportunities for all (potential) employees, only a few apply an effective equalization approach. This would require proactive support of some groups. According to the Equal Treatment Act, it does not necessarily mean a violation of the law to provide specific support for people with protected characteristics – affirmative action in an appropriate legal framework can help the company become more diverse. However, the Hungarian regulation on the application of affirmative actions is rather complex, and subject to several laws. The details of the legislation are not discussed here; we recommend to involve a legal specialist in the field of equal treatment when planning such measures.

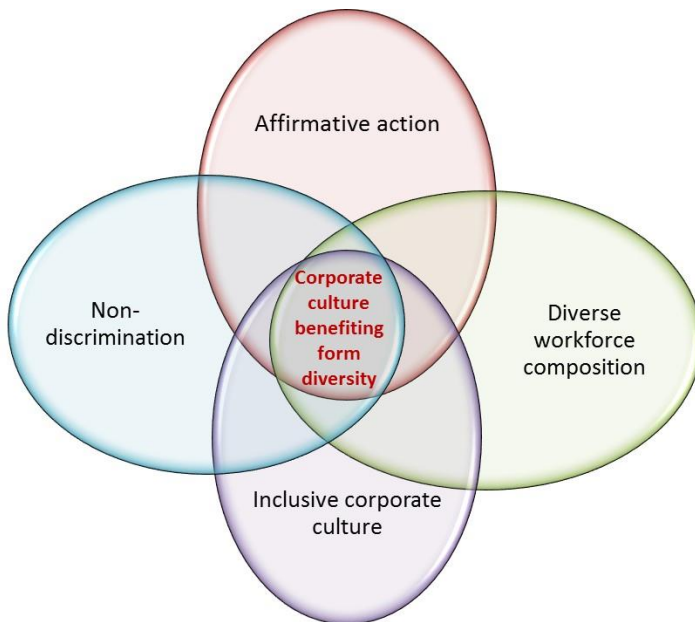
In addition to the above, it is also crucial how diverse the current workforce of a given company is. There could be completely different options for launching development actions at an international SSC where present employees come from dozens of countries, so the composition of the staff is fundamentally diverse as compared to a production company that mainly employs 25-45-year-old men, belonging to the mainstream majority.

Besides diversity, the inclusiveness of the workplace environment is an important aspect, as mentioned - regardless of the presence of any specific vulnerable groups. Focusing on corporate culture, which, in case of an inclusive workplace, provides much more opportunity for frequent, bilateral, transparent communication between employees and managers, for the expression and recognition of different personal values within the organisation. Such an inclusive culture allows employees to be



themselves within the company. Companies that regard their employees as uniform executors of production and not as diverse and valuable members of their teams, will not be able to create an inclusive culture. By doing so, they lose very valuable creative energies and also lose competitiveness on the job market.

The following figure illustrates the above relationships:



### **Complex non-discrimination or levelling off disadvantages?**

The anti-discrimination minimum approach in itself typically will not lead to significantly stronger outreach or inclusion of vulnerable groups. As we have seen, even seemingly neutral selection tools can often be indirectly discriminatory, and even well-intentioned recruitment staff might apply non-conscious discrimination (also known as unconscious bias). Strategies of complex non-

discrimination and levelling off disadvantages can be more effective. However, it is important to consider many aspects of both approaches.

If we strive for complex non-discrimination, we need to make our recruitment processes completely objective. In such a system, there is no space to consider individual, subjective aspects. Such a system most probably results in the enrolment of the candidate with the highest score, even if we have a strong feeling, he/she will not stay on the job for more than a few months. Likewise, we do not have the opportunity to recruit a candidate with a few points less but with an obviously stronger potential when measured on other dimensions. Furthermore, recruitment tools aimed at cultural neutrality, measuring only the competencies required for the given position are likely to disadvantage Roma applicants who do not have the most fluent foreign language skills, did not finish in the best schools, but would be perfectly eligible to fill the position.

Utilising affirmative action in the selection process also holds risk - if we lower the expectations too much for vulnerable groups, the self-esteem of the employee is compromised, becomes frustrated, they may enter more conflicts with colleagues, or perform at a lower level. Such negative experiences can also often discourage the organization's openness towards Roma employees in general - even if the above negative experience is only relevant for one Roma worker and is due mostly to inappropriate recruitment expectations or practices

Numerous international examples prove that affirmative measures can improve the diversity and success of companies. However, contradictory examples can also be observed. In addition, a certain tool might be an effective solution for one vulnerable group but might not be applicable for another.

As an example: a research study<sup>8</sup> in the US investigated the relationship between the diversity policy of 151 leading law firms and the fluctuation of members of different vulnerable groups. The research found two approaches for communicating diversity policies about vulnerable groups. Some stress “value in difference”, while others emphasise the “value in equality” approach. While the former was much more successful in retaining women, the latter was more attractive to ethnic minorities. Women, who comprise close to 40% of all employees, represent such a large group that it allowed them to be proud of their group identity and they did not feel isolated. Whereas black women and men make up only 5% of the workforce. Being represented in very small numbers makes them feel less distinct from other groups and they are not motivated by emphasizing the value of difference. For them, focusing on their otherness reinforced their isolation. At the same time, the "value in equality" approach motivated members of ethnic minorities to perform at maximum levels in a workplace where their origin did not represent benefit or disadvantage either. Therefore, their results were unquestionably due to their professional competencies. In the framework of the experiment it was examined how it affects white employees if they have to work in a team that is represented by a 5% minority. Results proved that they also were better motivated by the "value in equality" approach, due to their position, rather than the "value in difference" approach.

Relatively highly educated young Roma with some corporate employment experience or career plans also expressed similar concerns in a focus group discussion. They resent situations where their colleagues might think they have been favoured because of their Roma origin. Such feelings can contribute to tense relationships with their colleagues and their performance-based achievements

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<sup>8</sup> <https://hbr.org/2016/08/why-your-diversity-program-may-be-helping-women-but-not-minorities-or-vice-versa>

could be perceived by their peers resulting from advantages due to their ethnicity. In addition, the questionability of their performance may confuse their own self-assessment.

Different approaches - complex non-discrimination and levelling off disadvantages - can, of course, be combined. However, it is important to do so consciously in any field, in any form.

### **Tools and methods - sadly, there is no magic bullet**

No matter which direction we set off, none of the methods will bring change rapidly. Even in the US, with a much more advanced corporate diversity culture, relatively modest results have been achieved in the past decades.

According to a US survey<sup>9</sup> based on a large database, despite the diversity efforts of the last 30 years, the proportion of many vulnerable groups is still low, and the positive shift is also weaker than expected. The representation of black men in management is around 3% and has hardly increased over 30 years. The proportion of women in management has been close to 30% at the beginning of the 2000s but has stagnated since then. Several diversity tools have been examined in this research to determine their returns on the diversity of management.

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<sup>9</sup> Why Diversity Programs Fail, <https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail>

*Some examples of the effects of various diversity programs<sup>10</sup>*

	White		Black		Hispanic		Asian	
	men	women	men	women	men	women	men	women
Voluntary diversity training			↑		↑		↑	↑
Mandatory diversity training				↓			↓	↓
Mentoring				↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Diversity task force	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Diversity manager		↑	↑	↑		↑	↑	↑
Job test		↓	↓	↓	↓	↓		↓
Grievance system		↓	↓	↓		↓	↓	↓

*The direction of the arrows in the table indicates increase or decrease in the proportion of the given group in the management, the size of the arrows shows the strength of the change.*

The above data shows, the way a tool is used greatly influences its effect. For example, when introducing a diversity training, its voluntary or compulsory nature clearly affects its impact on the representation of some employee groups in management. Compulsory trainings had either no or negative impact on all groups, while voluntary training had no negative impact on any group but increased the presence of some groups in management.

<sup>10</sup> Based on the study of 829 midsize or large US firms. Why Diversity Programs Fail, <https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail>

Mentoring and setting up a Diversity Team also had positive effect. However, the introduction of an objective selection tool, such as a test, will significantly reduce the chance of reaching management for most sensitive groups.

The above research illustrates that significant changes can only be achieved in the long term. It also highlights that some measures might even have counterproductive effects if goals and tools and their potentials risks are not properly analysed.

However, this should not discourage us! As explained earlier, diversity can be a significant market advantage in the long run, so long-term investment and responsible strategic thinking are just as justifiable here as in any other area of corporate operation.

It is also important to keep in mind that well-intended but not well thought through initiatives can be harmful. Once these ill effects have happened, it may take some time for the management to be motivated again to take further steps towards diversity.

# III. How do I reach my potential Roma employees?

## **The importance of external communication in HR processes**

The importance of external communication of corporations cannot be overestimated. Besides (potential) clients, customers and shareholders, informing current and prospective employees is a fundamental interest of every company. The decision of a candidate to apply to a given organisation is greatly influenced by numerous factors; the information about the company's activities, social responsibility, the circumstances and opportunities of the employees, the diversity and inclusiveness of the environment or the reputation of the company - as well as the work to be done and compensation. Job seekers around the world are becoming more and more attracted to companies that act ethically, contribute to social and environmental sustainability, respect their employees, provide an environment where people with diverse backgrounds can cooperate and get along well.

Therefore, external and internal communication, as well as corporate diversity activities, must be closely connected not only to the goals of the PR department but also to the work of the HR department. Communication about diversity can also significantly impact the company's recruitment results. Young Roma participants of the HRom program highlighted the importance of how a company relates to diversity and equal opportunities issues, what is its sponsorship policy, how its communication and advertising activities are shaped. These aspects are important not only for young Roma people but also

for members of other vulnerable groups, and increasingly, for most young people generally. As a Roma candidate, it is easier to trust a company will really treat them inclusively as an employee if the company has credible communications on the integration of the Roma or other vulnerable groups. However, many companies are cautious about external communications on vulnerable groups and have concerns about its potential negative branding effect.

### **What can be gained or lost by promoting certain social groups and communicating it?**

Various vulnerable groups appear in the sponsorship and communication campaigns of companies. Issues related to people with disabilities or chronically ill children are prominent. Advocacy of less “popular” social groups, such as migrants or Roma are far less common. The main dilemma is how much extra confidence could be gained - whether from customers, investors or employees, and how much risk it carries. With regards to the Roma, the Hungarian society generally has a negative attitude towards them<sup>11</sup>. However, the perception of certain positive Roma characters (such as musicians, intellectuals) is far less negative. For example, A Hungarian TV series titled “Among Friends” featured a Roma character. This did not lower the viewing figures of the show at all<sup>12</sup>. Several young Roma have won talent contests. Recently a bank featured a young Roma actress in its advertisement.

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/30/hungarians-share-europes-embrace-of-democratic-principles-but-are-less-tolerant-of-refugees-minorities/ft\\_16-09-29\\_hungary\\_minority/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/30/hungarians-share-europes-embrace-of-democratic-principles-but-are-less-tolerant-of-refugees-minorities/ft_16-09-29_hungary_minority/)

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2001\\_01\\_tavasz/01\\_roma\\_szereplo\\_a\\_baratok\\_koztben](http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2001_01_tavasz/01_roma_szereplo_a_baratok_koztben)



Nevertheless, most companies are still very cautious about communications related to the Roma. Although there are companies that sponsor civic initiatives supporting Roma communities, these grants are rarely featured in mainstream communications of the company. It is even less common to explicitly indicate if the recruitment or retention of Roma customers or employees is important for the organisation. As a result, most Roma candidates and other diversity supporters will hardly find any hint that Roma inclusion, either in the company functions or on a social level, represents a value for the organisation. As this mode of communication is still in its infancy, the first companies with perceptible messages on this topic could gain significant competitive advantage among Roma candidates and people valuing diversity.

The main reason behind weak communication is usually the lack of commitment of senior management towards the topic, since it does not represent a priority in a corporate strategy. While an HR employee might find the space to initiate steps in recruitment, selection, and integration without explicit high management support and strategic background, the transformation of external communication is unlikely to grow out of bottom-up initiatives.

However, do not give up on reaching out to Roma candidates, even if widespread external communication does not seem feasible, as Roma communities can be reached by other means. It is also true that the lack of corporate communication in themes related to the Roma is not a "fatal deficiency" for Roma applicants. Many other aspects will affect the attractiveness and accessibility of the company. Communications to potential candidates should serve two main purposes: the candidate believing that working at the company will be fine, and also that opportunities are accessible for him/her there.

## **Why believe in myself? Why trust you?**

Most Roma people – due to the numerous failures, disadvantages, discrimination encountered - usually find it difficult to believe they are suitable candidates for a company. The first important question one should pose about recruitment and outreach is on tools and methods that not only reach out but convince the candidate that he/she has a real chance at the organisation. Recruitment should also highlight; that this is a diverse place that welcomes him/her, that this is the workplace where one will be appraised by performance, and that one will work here in a fair and stable environment that will allow for long-term planning of one's life. Most of the diversity tools will be beneficial not only for vulnerable groups but also for other employees/candidates. Not only Roma candidates browse job ads with deep concerns about the expectations or questions about the credibility and fairness of the employer.

The following aspects may restrain potential Roma candidates from applying to a given company:

- The company is hardly known, or its image has no attractive edge. Since a significant proportion of the Roma have hardly any network capital among corporate employees, they may have rather limited first-hand information about the credibility and fairness of the employer.
- Economic and social disadvantages might cause the services of some companies to be viewed adversely, for reasons such as the following:

- energy providers might be associated with unpaid bills and debt,
  - debt collectors may be perceived as hostile by their loved ones
  - public transport companies, whose ticket inspectors, possibly unjustifiably, have fined them or their relatives;
  - retail companies whose security guards may have shadowed them without reason while shopping
  - construction companies that did not pay for their "black" jobs,
  - banks that did not give them credit, etc.
- Just as a corporate employee may think in general terms about the Roma in some cases, job seekers may also have a rather monochrome image about several companies or members of a particular sector. If you suspect your company or sector might be viewed negatively by many Roma or other vulnerable applicants, it might be worth paying special attention to improving the image of the sector and the specific company in its external communication and during the recruitment process.
  - The diversity of the company and its inclusive nature is not explicit and convincing in the corporate communication, in its sponsorship and visual image. If diversity and its importance are not reflected in the external communication of the company, it undermines the trust of Roma candidates.
  - Candidate do not trust that the company will indeed not discriminate against them and/or there is a real chance to gain employment there: the trust of the candidate will be

weakened if it is not clear and understandable by the communication what the standpoint of the company is towards discrimination and there are no positive, personal stories related. Will one's CV be screened out because one is called Orsós or Lakatos? How can we manage such assumptions?

- Candidate do not believe once hired, he or she will work in a truly inclusive, supportive environment.

### **Who am I looking for? What should I do if there are no candidates at all?**

The Hungarian Roma are as diverse as the positions offered by companies. The employment of the Roma – as opposed for example in the case of some people living with disabilities - does not require any infrastructural development. Contrary to some beliefs, the Hungarian Roma hardly differ in cultural and linguistic aspects from the mainstream society. There are no fundamental differences that could pose serious functional challenges to their employment. The differences experienced can rather be attributed to the social situation of the Roma and not to the Roma culture. This is well proven by the fact that many young Roma with proud Roma identity, gain high-level education and quality employment and integrate into the Hungarian labour market without any particular difficulties.

Either the diversity strategy or the most pressing job openings will define the type of Roma employee the organisation is typically searching, such as multi-lingual customer service providers or factory operators. It is very difficult to reach out to "the Roma" in general, because of the diversity of this large social group, outlined above. Presently many businesses are experiencing significant labour shortage among blue-collar

workers, where a relatively high number of suitable or close-to-suitable Roma applicants can be found. Many companies in these sectors already have Roma employees, but there is still a large untapped workforce pool to be utilized.

If we aim to build a diverse company beyond the production line and would like to see the members of the largest Hungarian minority among white-collar employees or even managers, we need to reach a relatively small group of highly educated Roma people.

As mentioned before, Roma candidates might not be the ideal applicants in many cases due to objective disadvantages. Thus, presently we might access less Roma applicants with the required professional knowledge and skill set than needed.

Some potential future colleagues might fail in the recruitment only because they lack certain soft skills. Development of communication skills, CV writing, career orientation, knowledge of the corporate sector could be an important affirmative action. Such developments are being provided by some companies for members of some vulnerable groups. Other companies provide development opportunities for near-eligible potential candidates in collaboration with external partners. The HRom program of Autonomia Foundation also offers such a skill and knowledge development program.

Besides developing soft skills, immersions in foreign language learning, user IT training, obtaining driving licenses also efficiently boost the employability of young Roma people.

Some initiatives provide long-term mentoring during studies or in job placement of young Roma by corporate employees.

However, there are large numbers of jobseekers whose access to quality positions are hindered by imperfect foreign language skills, lack of IT knowledge, poor communication skills or the lack of a good CV. As mentioned earlier, there is a growing shortage of blue-collar employees. Some companies must train most of their skilled workers even for the most basic tasks, despite their qualifications, as vocational training often does not provide students with sufficient knowledge. This is a system wide problem in Hungary and not a Roma specific problem. Therefore, more and more companies are building close cooperation (e.g. dual education) with secondary and tertiary educational institutions, with profiles matching that of the company's workforce needs.

Collaboration with educational institutions is not only advantageous for companies, because during their training students acquire the relevant knowledge but it also allows for personal contact with students and for an introduction to the company and its opportunities. This could influence the career orientation of the students and facilitate their integration into the organization long-term.

Roma students often have very limited access to trainings in marketable professions. This is not necessarily only due to poor educational results, but also to school segregation. Therefore, it is also important to communicate and advocate the anti-discrimination policies of the company and expect similar non-segregation of the partnering schools. This could mean a significant opportunity in case the company provides some benefits to the school or if there are alternative schools to cooperate with if the current partner does not want to eliminate its discriminatory practice. Thus, we could increase the chances of Roma students studying for a marketable profession and later joining our organisation. Employers might also provide stipends

for disadvantaged students, which may be particularly important for young people from poor families, over the age of 16 (the compulsory schooling age in Hungary), to be able to complete their studies.

These types of collaborations do not solve the problem of finding the right colleague tomorrow or next month, but in the medium term, they might provide an effective response to the company's workforce shortage while being an important step forward for diversity.

### **Which recruitment channels?**

After having reviewed the external communication of our company, the development possibilities of the potential candidates, and our most relevant workforce needs, it is important to turn to the question of the most effective recruitment channels to reach Roma candidates.

**The communication interfaces of the organisation:** It is important to feature user-friendly information about the organisation as well as about career opportunities and open positions on the company's website and social media channels. This information should be easy to understand and attractive to the target group. Commitment to diversity and equal opportunities, as well as achievements in this field, should be visible, clear and personal. Long sustainability reports will be read by very few applicants; it is more convincing and credible, for example, to feature diverse groups in visual materials or the personal stories of employees. Nevertheless, photos and videos should also include representation from members of groups who could really, feasibly be employees of the company in Hungary and with whom the candidate can identify with. For Roma candidates, of course, the visual display of Roma staff may be important, but presenting even other vulnerable groups can

increase the level of trust. Communication on Facebook and in other social media is important for the young and lower-qualified applicants as they are particularly active on these platforms. Thus, it is worth sharing the job opportunities on the company's Facebook page or in other thematic groups.

**Recruitment Partners:** Most companies collaborate with external partners, such as recruitment agencies. These companies typically forward the material of all the appropriate candidates in case of positions where there is a real shortage of applicants. However, for example, in the case of a simple administrative position where many applications are received, “self-censorship” might be practiced and Roma applicants will be screened out. (Such practice of recruitment agencies is proven by research<sup>13</sup>.) Therefore, it is important to clearly define the equality and diversity aspects of the recruitment for our partners and their implementation is periodically monitored.

Recruitment partners often seek potential candidates in the whole population, where the proportion of Roma applicants is likely to be underrepresented. Therefore, it might be efficient to contact initiatives such as HRom, Integrom, Romaster or even other non-governmental organizations that reach out to Roma communities, where potential candidates could be targeted. Cooperation with local Roma Minority Self-Governments may be helpful as well. Only a few attempts have happened in this field, most of which ended with failure. This may be because although Roma self-governments have contacts with members of Roma communities, they are less familiar with the expectations of employers and of the development opportunities. Therefore, our cooperating partners in reaching out to Roma communities should be selected based on their professionalism, network

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<sup>13</sup> Tardos, Katalin (2015) Halmazódó diszkrimináció. Kirekesztés és integráció a munkaerőpiacon (Cumulative discrimination. Exclusion and integration in the labour market). Belvedere Meridionale, Szeged, Hungary



capital and credibility, and their ability to channel in pre-selected and prepared candidates suitable for the positions offered.

The companies we interviewed mainly rely on cooperation with various civic programs supporting Roma applicants in the recruitment and retention of Roma employees. The most frequently mentioned programs are HRom, Integrom and Romaster. Roma applicants are mostly drawn from these pools. Only a few companies mentioned other channels, such as Roma self-governments or other Roma networks. One company experimented with broadening outreach through a Roma intern recruited through the HRom program. This remains a unique practice currently, even though the personal network of existing employees can be one of the most important recruitment channels.

**Roma media:** Although in recent years special Roma media channels Hungary mostly ceased to exist. There are still some media channels that effectively reach Roma communities. The most popular is Dikh TV on Facebook with mainly entertainment content and a countrywide outreach to Roma youth. Several public and civic radio and TV stations have special Roma themed programs. However, these mainly focus on cultural and public activities, and the actual reach of the Roma target group is lower. Among news portals, Romnet is still in operation with regularly refreshed content. It might be valuable to report diversity, Roma-related initiatives, and achievements of the company on these forums. If possible, job openings could be communicated through these channels as well.

**Events, personal encounters:** Sponsoring or implementing events with a Roma focus (e.g. the concert of a Roma musician, charity event or volunteer day supporting a Roma community) can fundamentally improve the image of the company and raise awareness among the target group. At the same time, it is also

highly recommended to implement events focusing on recruitment. Most companies take part in job fairs at universities. Similarly, you may want to contact the network of Roma Special Colleges and the Romaversitas Foundation, both supporting Roma university students. Through the HRom program, representatives of our partner companies have the opportunity for personal encounters with young Roma job seekers in informal settings. Several companies have organized open days where interested Roma job seekers can get insight not only into the company's work processes and practices, but also build personal contacts with the staff. These events can boost the image of the company through personalised experience as well as contribute to a more realistic and positive self-esteem of the participant. Personal encounters are key in creating a positive experience, boosting the motivation of the candidates and gaining practical knowledge by job-shadowing positions that are often difficult to imagine for an outsider.

**Personal Relationships, referrals:** Besides knowledge capital, the most important factor in finding a good job is network capital. As mentioned earlier, most Roma people have hardly any connection with employers in high-quality corporate positions. This not only limits access to information about corporations but makes understanding some non-traditional corporate position descriptions very difficult. A significant proportion of the young Roma with relatively high education are much more familiar with and have work experience in jobs in the public, civic, educational, social or health sectors. Knowledge of and education in financial, technical, or IT fields are rather rare among Roma due to social patterns and limited opportunities.

The employee referral system could also limit the chances of the Roma, as companies recruit a significant proportion of new employees based on recommendations from existing employees.

This practice can be very effective and successful. However, since most employees (up to 99-100% in white collar positions) are not Roma, the people they recommend are also more likely to be non-Roma. So, the referral system could be a major factor in keeping the existing staff composition unchanged. (Therefore, it might be recommended to raise the awareness of staff from vulnerable groups about the referral system. They often have broad, active networks, with connections to very different groups than those traditionally accessible through usual channels, potentially opening up access to new employer pools.)

However, young Roma employees and jobseekers expressed some concern if such an opportunity was explicitly advocated only for Roma employees, specifically to recruit more Roma. Nevertheless, if this option is promoted to all members of a given team - including the Roma – nobody would feel disadvantaged, and the Roma employee would not have to take on the unpleasant expectation to "deliver more Roma to the company".

## **Job ads**

The creation of a credible, non-discriminatory image of the company is very important, but in many cases, it is the actual job advertisement that prevents a suitable candidate from applying.

It is useful to consider the following aspects when compiling job postings:

- **Clarity:** clear, understandable communication of the position, tasks, expectations, and benefits offered. As mentioned earlier, many of the specific job descriptions of corporate positions are almost incomprehensible to many potential employees. At school, we learn about a teacher, a doctor, an electrician but not about an account manager, an IT help desk assistant or a CNC operator.

Therefore, many people see themselves unfit to fill a position they don't understand, even if it seems obvious they would be able to do the job, or they would be able to complete a course to become eligible. The most common difficulties Roma job seekers express when reviewing job advertisements are: the first line/title of the position is not fully comprehensible; English terms appear in the ads even if knowledge of English is not expected for that position; many positions are not easy to decode even with advanced English language skills; job advertisements are inaccurate or not clear; misspellings in the text of the ad; the name of the position and the expected experience is not synchronized (e.g. the expectations of a senior position reflects that of a recent graduate);. For people who cannot easily access help to interpret - because they don't have friends in that particular company or sector - all these can easily be confusing. Content and form harmonization, straightforward but not superficial wording, limited inclusion of English terms, are all recommended. The use of jargon may disqualify candidates who would be fit to fill the position. Relevant further technical information or any other additional information might be included in an external link so that the job ad is concise but relevant information is still easily accessible.

- **Reference to diversity:** textual or visual reference to diversity might be beneficial if the company is committed to equal opportunities, diversity, inclusion. As mentioned earlier, a photo of "diverse" staff members(s) may be effective in itself, but additional expressions of some of the relevant values (e.g. "become a member of a diverse team", "performance-based, transparent bonus system", "our company supports this issue") strengthens the

message. Reference to specific target groups is quite rare at Hungarian employers, although more and more companies are indicating in job ads if the position is open for people with disabilities. This might mean that the necessary infrastructure is in place (e.g. ramps), but also refers to the inclusive nature of the company. In Anglo-Saxon countries, it is common practice to specifically indicate in the job notice that "all candidates are welcome to apply regardless of gender, age, origin, religion or sexual orientation". To apply something similar would be welcome in Hungary as well. However, this message is only credible if inclusiveness is also reflected in the communications and operations of a company. Lacking that, such dry, regulatory-sounding statements can also produce a counterproductive effect for young Roma, wondering what could have been the real motivation of the company to formulate such a text.

- **Compensation:** job advertisements in Hungary rarely include information on the available salary range, except in low-wage, low-qualified position, as opposed to the practice in the UK and the US. It might not raise an issue for candidates with a broad network of similarly positioned contacts and access to information on realistic expected wages. However, for Roma candidates with often negative previous experiences from jobs in small enterprises and in the grey economy, the lack of compensation information might raise suspicion of exploitation and very low expected wages. Terms such as competitive compensation often sound like empty phrases. People who have had mostly negative experiences when negotiating their wages, and with their employers' morale on punctual payroll will have bad feelings if asked to define their wage expectations during recruitment.

- **Expectations/advantages in job ads:** disadvantaged candidates often underestimate themselves, making it difficult for them to believe they have a real chance to access a position. If the ad lists many expectations or advantages that most of the candidates will not meet, it may be worth lowering the stated expectations to a realistic level. Then there is a greater chance that a disadvantaged participant meeting most of the expectations/advantages will apply. For example, a Roma participant with many years of corporate experience applies to a position if he meets the most important criteria and only half of the others. However, such strong self-confidence is a result of several years of work experience, while an inexperienced Roma candidate will not do so. Many people, even if they do not meet only some of the advantages listed, will not be ready to apply. They have many experiences when they haven't been selected even when they've met all the criteria.

The above aspects should be considered by any recruitment expert. However, only experiment with those that can be aligned with the current situation and goals of your organisation. If there is already significant commitment for and communication activity in this field, you might choose stronger and more open tools to reach out to Roma during all phases of recruitment. If your organisation is still in the experimental phase and motivation on the mid-management level, you might rather start with smaller, finer tools, and build larger steps later on these results.

As noted earlier, the company's HR activities may operate alongside the principle of complex non-discrimination but might also focus on balancing off disadvantages and strengthening vulnerable groups, including the Roma. The (controversial)

critical voices, according to which the provision of advantages for the Roma create disadvantages for non-Roma, may be more prominent in the context of selection and on-board development and support. Affirmative actions might also result in hiring some Roma explicitly for this purpose, putting the Roma employee into a rather uncomfortable position. However, similar actions in the development of potential candidates prior to the application, or in outreach and recruitment, do not favour them against any other candidate or employee. So a good direction could be to reach out to Roma applicants through the right partners, channels, information, personal meetings, development events. Then Roma applicants can be persuaded that applying to our organisation will lead to win-win and provide support to be more successful in the recruitment (e.g.: by open days, trainings, civic partners).

## **IV. How to select my candidates?**

Much of the literature on corporate diversity focuses on how a company can attract the best qualified talent through its diversity-enhancing tools. However, in addition to finding talented professionals, it is increasingly challenging to alleviate the shortage of labour by finding reasonably qualified employees for everyday positions. There are SMEs where job interviews have been abandoned, and almost all applicants are admitted. Some corporations report insufficient expertise of even the most qualified candidates. Thus, the challenge for an increasing share of companies is to fill the knowledge gaps of non-ideal candidates within the operation of the company, for non-Roma workers as well. Some of the Roma applicants could be ideal candidates for a given position, while others — possibly due to the complex disadvantages outlined before — could turn out not to be the most competitive candidates within the labour market competition. Using standard selection tools the ideal candidate would probably be recruited anyway if there is no conscious or unintended discrimination in the recruitment process. Some others might only be considered eligible candidates if some training and development opportunities are offered before they apply. The third group is approximately suitable for the given task, maybe needing some minor advances. In the case of this third group affirmative actions could effectively balance their disadvantages. This chapter, similar to the previous ones, will review tools of two approaches: complex non-discrimination and overcoming disadvantages.



One of the most frequent dilemmas of HR professionals is outlined as such: Recruitment is "colour-blind" (i.e. any background factors will be ignored). As long as the candidate is a good one, he/she will be recruited. If the candidate is not good, why would we apply special tools to hire him/her? (Of course, the everyday experience is not so black-and-white, and it is often difficult to predict with standard admission methods, which applicant will turn out as the most effective workforce.)

However, in seemingly colour-blind systems, often the "chemistry" between the manager and the candidate will be the final decisive factor in choosing between two suitable candidates. Thus, the preferences of the recruiting staff may not relate only to essential characteristics. For example, the candidate might have excellent communication skill but does not seem totally reliable, allowing for unconscious prejudices and discriminatory decisions. Objective and subjective aspects are, therefore, present in almost all recruitment processes.

A large number of Roma candidates possessing the appropriate competencies can perform worse in a standard selection process. However, this does not mean that they would be less efficient employees. The primary reason for weaker performance in recruitment could be some communication deficit. A not fully professionally edited CV, dialect, less sophisticated phrasing in verbal communication, insufficient knowledge of the company's operation, or seemingly weaker plans and ambitions might be perceived by the recruiter as inadequate communication skills and lack of motivation.

### **What could be the reasons for an applicant with the right skill-set not performing adequately in recruitment to be admitted?**

As mentioned before, soft skills, network capital, corporate information, IT, and foreign language skills could be weaker than that of middle-class, non-Roma applicants. In addition, experiencing discrimination in education and in other fields of life increases sensitivity and ruins self-esteem and self-confidence. Therefore, self-presentation is more difficult, speech could be less fluent, timidity might prevent posing questions, and CVs might lack important details.

### **What can be done to recognise suitable candidates and be able to recruit?**

In this sub-section, we consider the means by which equal opportunities for Roma candidates can be ensured during the selection process as well as interventions which can be designed that support the recruitment of Roma with different disadvantages.

The possible methods had been sorted into three categories.

**Tools that enhance objectivity** reduce the chance of unintended distortion and discrimination in the selection process. These measures are based on the principle of complex non-discrimination and enhance the colour-blindness of the selection process. They help to minimize the impact of non-relevant background factors of the candidate. These instruments aim at creating a uniform screening process for all applicants with the same aspects investigated for everyone. Such interventions are useful if the main bottleneck is assumed to be in the selection system: while complying with anti-discrimination provisions, non-conscious perceptions, fears and schemes affect the recruitment procedures. For example, if there is a large Roma population with the right profile in a recruitment area - a population who is in principle accessible to the company - but

there remain very few Roma staff in the organisation, it might imply that many of the potential candidates are lost somewhere in the process.

The second set of tools **reinforce the equalization** process, i.e. balancing off disadvantages, by supporting the recruitment of valuable, but disadvantaged candidates. Within this group, we examine whether there are options that can be specifically applied to Roma applicants.

Finally, we will look at the possibilities of more **general equal opportunity** processes, slightly distancing these from the actual selection process.

All in all, the application of these methods can strengthen the transparency and fairness of the selection process and ensure that each candidate is allowed to present one's personality, skills and knowledge in an optimal setting. Thus, ensuring we do not lose any valuable future employee because we failed to provide the right space and deliver methods to get to know and support them.

It is important to state at this point that none of the tools or any combination of them is necessarily adequate and sufficient to achieve the diversity goals of a given company. Depending on the specific context, problems, and goals of the organisation, these methods should be experimented with to build up the right set of tools, along with a medium-term strategy.

### **Tools to strengthen the objectivity of the selection process**

The selection process is a series of multi-stakeholder decisions that inevitably sometimes lead to unconscious distortions based on human factors. The use of objective measures can reduce the impact of these factors.

*„Like people in most other human endeavours, hiring managers are powerfully and often unwittingly influenced by their biases. While it's exceedingly difficult to remove bias from an individual, it's possible to design organizations in ways that make it harder for biased minds to skew judgment. We should stop wasting resources trying to de-bias mindsets and instead start to de-bias our hiring procedures”.<sup>14</sup>*

In order to plan proper interventions, the steps of the selection process should be reviewed to discover where distorting factors might prevail and determine which elements to modify.

### **How are applications, CVs evaluated?**

If CV evaluation does not follow a standard procedure with pre-set criteria, subjective factors (e.g. the impressions of the recruiter) may have a strong impact. The following tools could be considered:

Set **standard evaluation criteria** to evaluate CVs. Try to apply these aspects in a uniform way for each candidate and record the result of the CV evaluation in writing. In the absence of this, it is very difficult to monitor the effect of subjective or non-conscious distorting factors at this first step of selection, which could cause the identification and management of potential issues to be problematic. Moreover, the company's non-discriminatory operation cannot be fully proven.

While blind CV is not yet widespread in Hungary, the method is successfully applied in other countries. To assess the candidates in a non-discriminatory way, it may be beneficial to ignore the place of residence, name and photo when evaluating a CV. The easiest way is not requesting this potentially distortive data in our job ads (e.g.

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<sup>14</sup> How to Take the Bias Out of Interviews, <https://hbr.org/2016/04/how-to-take-the-bias-out-of-interviews>

photo, age, address). Since some of the candidates will anyway include this data, it is recommended to remove them from the candidates' materials before the evaluation. Some organisations even conceal the name of educational institutions for the evaluators. (Since the prestige of rural and metropolitan institutions providing the same education differ, applicants who have studied in the countryside may be at a disadvantage compared to metropolitan alumni).

It may be valuable to review the weight given to **acquired skills and work experience** as compared to formal education achievements in the CV assessment for a given position. Recognition of skills that can be acquired in non-formal settings could be an advantage for Roma applicants with weaker access to quality education and with deprived status in the labour market. The recognition of non-formally gained skills is an increasingly important issue on a European level, justified partly by the fact that formal, institutional training often does not provide the necessary practical knowledge. For example, an applicant with a formal carpentry qualification might not possess better skills than an unqualified candidate with years of relevant work experience.

**Tests** might also enhance objectivity by formalizing the evaluation process and strengthening its transparency. It is important to strive for tools that are not biased by cultural and social aspects. The application of objective tests shows a very mixed picture in our experience. In some companies, every position is tested, while in others no tests are applied. It could be beneficial because it measures objective factors, but often it also leads to the exclusion of disadvantaged groups. The appraisal of various test results also differ. The results of technical tests, for example, are taken seriously, while scores on soft personality tests can sometimes be considered of lower importance.

It is important to examine how **assessment of the interviews** might be influenced by aspects that are not relevant to the particular position—such as makeup, clothing, dialect—and how the impact of these impressions can be reduced. It might be interesting to investigate if questions and aspects covered in the interviews vary for different candidates. Does the evaluation process include a phase, in which all the recruiters' experiences converge and all the interviewed candidates are evaluated jointly along the same aspects?

We came across a situation in which a reliability/compliance questionnaire was perceived as discriminatory by a Roma candidate because he thought, falsely, that a particular set of questions on reliability was only tested in his case. It is not enough to use evaluation tools in a standardised way and not differentiate along ethnic dimensions; it is also important to communicate this in a transparent way to the applicants. Candidates for a customer service position have regularly encountered the question: how would he/she handle a group of Roma clients raising hell in the office? The issue is problematic in itself because it strengthens a stereotype, but it is particularly offensive in the case of Roma candidates. An essentially fair question would be how the candidate would manage a group with such behaviour, regardless of their ethnic origin.

AC<sup>15</sup> tasks should also be composed with the aim of not assessing features that might disadvantage the Roma candidate in the given group composition if that trait is not relevant to the given position. So, preferably, the relative weak assertive behaviour expressed by a Roma woman in a predominantly male group, for example, should not be assessed negatively. We may not be able to objectively measure her character in this context, as the composition of the group might have had a strong influence. If assertiveness is important for the position, the composition of the AC groups should be planned carefully.

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<sup>15</sup> Assessment centre: a complex set of selection tool that can involve work simulations, situational tasks, role plays, case studies, mostly in group form

The tools described above can ensure that negative subjective factors that may arise in relation to Roma candidates are less prevalent in the selection process. However, if these "blind" tools are rigidly applied, we will not be able to implement affirmative actions to facilitate the recruitment of valuable candidates with various disadvantages.

In the next section, we look at options that can promote the selection of vulnerable candidates. With this approach, we do not strive to assess everyone by the same uniform process. Rather the aim is to consciously identify factors that might negatively impact the performance of vulnerable candidates (candidates who might actually be more suitable than their competitors) in a standardized procedure.

### **Balancing off disadvantages, implementing affirmative actions in recruitment**

Recruitment professionals often ask how the recruitment of Roma or other vulnerable groups can be specifically supported if sensitive data of group affiliation cannot be disclosed. This data protection issue can at least partially be addressed by cooperating with special partners. Organisations supporting a specific vulnerable group can complement recruitment by channeling in candidates from their target pool. These recruitment channels not only provide access to a particular employee group but ideally also offer some quality assurance through pre-screened, pre-trained candidates, matched with the job profiles of the given company. Thus, the Roma identity of the candidate could be defined, opening up opportunities for affirmative action.

However, a significant proportion of Roma candidates might not be attracted through such channels. In their case, their Roma identification and eligibility for specific affirmative measures could

be based either on self-declaration or on the judgment of the recruiters. Since questions regarding ethnic affiliation are prohibited in job interviews, recruiting staff might find themselves in a strange situation, having to assess which applicant is Roma and on this basis provide affirmative action. This can cause many problems.

We examined the possibility of introducing voluntary indication of ethnic affiliation in job applications. The legal regulation is very strict about those cases where the collection of ethnic data might be permitted. We identified such a framework in Hungary in the case of human resource development programs targeting and supporting the Roma. We do not know of any company in Hungary that would collect ethnic data for affirmative action—although we know of one company practice allowing candidates to indicate in their application that they are being channeled in by a partnering Roma recruitment program. The main barrier, however, seems not to be the legal regulation, but the personal concerns of both corporate professionals and Roma candidates. Such data collection mechanism is feasible only within the framework of a clear, transparent and publicized diversity strategy, inclusive, and trust-based work environment that ensures confidential data processing. A system that allows candidates to indicate affiliation with a vulnerable group could be valuable for companies, not only as a basis for affirmative action, but also in providing data to monitor the implementation of their complex anti-discriminatory approach.

Most of the partner companies of the HRom program designate an **equal opportunity specialist** or a dedicated HR employee, who not only follows-up the selection process of Roma applicants but who can also provide valuable background information for the recruiters and pay special attention to the candidates during the selection process. The recruitment of an HR trainee specializing in such task to ease the capacity problems of the HR department has been identified as good practice at one of our partners.



*"They receive special attention, if you like, there is a kind of positive discrimination towards potentially valuable candidates... we keep track of their applications, discuss which openings could be relevant. Telephone interviews are conducted with all of them. I can ensure this through the recruiters - who are external partners – to do so for Roma applicants ... 90% of them would be invited for an interview, where they meet the manager... their case is decided there."*

For disadvantaged applicants, it may be particularly important to receive some **preparation** at the beginning of the selection process—a good practice at some companies—to be better equipped for some elements of the screening (e.g. discussing the interview process, access to practice tests, help in managing a complex online application system).

The opportunity for an **introductory interview** can be a great opportunity for the recruiter to get to know the candidate better and to assist the candidate in deciding for which position he/she should apply. It also provides the opportunity to prepare the candidate for a "real" interview and provide more detailed feedback.

According to a senior HR manager, who often conducts introductory interviews, *"Based on their CVs, 80-90% would not be invited even to a telephone interview."* The selection process can be supported if the recruiter conducting the introductory interview provides a "recommendation" of the candidate to other professionals involved in the selection process.

Sensitive questions brought up during an introductory interview, conducted by a trained HR or equal opportunity specialist, could also be beneficial in preparing the candidate.

*"I'm actually looking for people who somewhat differ from the average. It is not a problem at all if one uses an obscene word, if one shows his tattoos in public, if expresses being offended by me*

*unintendedly hurting his/her Roma identity, because this way these aspects are revealed and we can discuss [in an introductory interview]."*

The introductory interview might also be effective for sensitizing HR managers:

*"The [candidate] should get a more detailed feedback at the introductory interview, which obviously affects diversity in a sense the HR managers must think through the case more consciously ... later, if there is a vacancy, they will remember these applicants better."*

The non-discriminatory and/or supportive character of the interviews can be greatly enhanced by including in the interview team an equal opportunity expert, who has expertise in working with Roma applicants. This inclusion can have a strongly positive, personal effect for the candidate, while the interview team is also supported by the expertise. The inclusive image of the company can also greatly strengthened by including a member of a vulnerable group in the interviewing team, even if he/she belongs to a different sensitive group than that of the applicant.

Presently, however, in most cases, the introduction of these practices depends on the actual HR employee, his/her commitment and personal relationship with cooperating partners and programs (such as the HRom). Sustainability and strategic guarantees are not ensured by this bottom-up approach, in the case of fluctuations in positions or persons or if some external programs are closed.

The HR manager of a Hungarian financial institution who cooperates with two Roma employment programs and recruited several Roma colleagues, said:

*“I stand behind the affairs. Not very closely, but I'm there. It is good because the system itself can manage their hiring, they don't need to be caressed or guided, they meet the basic expectations, or are close to it. This is how it is managed at present but that's not enough. Especially if we plan to increase the number of Roma. Slowly I will not be enough to do this, as we are now cooperating with two programs, recruiting from two sources: one must be present at more places, talk to more candidates. I did not yet find the way how to involve others in this task.”*

In terms of the transparency of the recruitment process, receiving substantive feedback would be essential for every candidate (particularly in the case of rejection) and especially so for sensitive groups. Unsuccessful recruitment, without the opportunity to learn about the reasons, strengthens the sense of failure and can damage the goodwill image of a particular company. A company that declines applicants from vulnerable groups without any justification can easily appear discriminatory if it cannot communicate its reasons for the decision. The disappointment of one candidate can easily influence the attitudes of a whole community towards an organisation. Giving written feedback on the reasons for rejection may be hindered by legal obstacles; therefore, a possible solution could be to give verbal feedback to the candidate or share relevant information with the recruitment partner. The motivation of the candidate to apply again to the same company can be greatly improved by sharing information. For example, that one has done well in the selection process and has achieved a good rank in the competition, but has not been chosen this time due to certain objective reasons. Although HR resources for giving feedback are very scarce, a company providing relevant assessment can gain a competitive edge in the field of employer branding. Some of the HRom partner companies introduced the practice that in addition to the automatic email response, Roma candidates should receive in almost all cases verbal feedback as well, explaining why they have

not been selected and what competencies they need to develop. This information greatly motivates the candidate to reapply for other positions, since they perceive a supportive, helpful, inclusive environment.

We have heard little about **employer branding** towards Roma candidates. In the current labour market, it does happen that Roma candidates get several parallel attractive offers from different companies. In such cases, companies with a transparent, inclusive environment may have the advantage of attracting better candidates. As one HR manager said: *"I am proud to succeed in recruiting a Roma staff member for a branch office ...we gave an offer for two of them, one refused because the salary was not attractive enough. These days it happens that a Roma candidate rejects a bank branch office job...though I think it is a positive [sign]!"* The company image, the credibility of its diversity messages, its ownership composition, the perception of its activity among Roma clients, and the perceived corporate culture during the recruitment process can all be special consideration for Roma applicants when choosing where to apply or which position to accept.

If Roma candidates are perceived to pose a significant "risk" by some of the recruiting staff, it is recommended to put these concerns out openly as opposed to keeping silent and dealing with the applicant "quasi-equally", which in reality leads to hidden discrimination against Roma candidates. By doing so, **new screening tools** might be introduced that can assess this risk/quality of both Roma and non-Roma candidates. For example, a test, an AC task, requesting references, etc. can be applied to all candidates in a non-discriminatory way.

There are some *soft factors* that might influence the assessment of the hard criteria when setting up the *rank order* of candidates. For example, loyalty might override weaker language skills, or high ambition with high qualifications might not be an advantage for a

monotonous job. Proper background expertise on Roma candidates will make the interpretation of advantages/disadvantages more efficient and the evaluation more effective.

The recruiter might employ **special aspects** in the evaluation of Roma candidates if the necessary expertise is available. Some of the frequently relevant aspects could be:

- The CVs of Roma candidates might feature unusually numerous or long passive periods. These do not necessarily mean the person was really inactive; therefore, it is worth exploring uncontracted or casual work, voluntary work, or caring for a family member.
- Behind an uneven career path—especially in disadvantaged regions—one might not necessarily find lack of determination and ambition but financial constraints and lack of relevant job opportunities.
- The recruiter might ignore the faults of a lower quality CV and gather more information during the interview.
- The recruiter might set up lower, flexible, while still relevant, expectations in terms of style and clothing if these are not decisive aspects for the position.
- The quality of qualification from lower-prestige educational institutions due to being geographically more accessible should be explored further to assess the real skills and knowledge, as well as those gained by work experience.
- More intense interest in compensation during the selection process might signal previous negative experiences with former employers, rather than impatience, for example.

The introduction of the above and similar methods by the recruiting staff can sensitize the management as well.

By allowing **greater flexibility** of the requirements for a given position, the company can access additional valuable candidates. It might seem “risky” to take on a weaker candidate. Consider those “manageable risks” in the selection process that would allow reaching candidates who, for example, could bring in a broader array of experiences. For example, Roma candidates who plan a career switch from social services to the corporate sector, often have acquired interpersonal skills through social work with particularly difficult clients, which are highly valuable in any customer service position. Assessing skills that are relatively easy to develop — for example by internal training or mentoring-can also improve our screening process by converting these deficiencies from exclusionary criteria to areas for further development.

HR staff plays the crucial role not only of identifying the benefits of the candidates but also of communicating these benefits to line managers. Reflecting on the above can help the recruiting staff build a balanced picture of the candidates, reflecting not only the risks and insufficiencies, but also on advantages and strengths.

One of the pressing factors in accomplishing this vision in the Hungarian corporate world is the strengthening of expertise and sensitivity on equal opportunities and Roma candidates, as well as dedicating resources to implementation of such policies. The strong commitment of higher management is crucial for progress.

The variety of diversity measures necessitates determining those which best fit our goals. Here we must refer again to the research described in Chapter II. There are no 'magic bullets', each tool must be determined and justified by our diversity goals, the realistically accessible candidate pool, and any specific obstacles to achieving diversity targets.

## **More general, diversity-enhancing management processes**

If an organization possesses a diversity strategy and targets, it is recommended to interpret it for the recruitment processes and monitor its implementation.

Some companies set up **specific targets** for the proportion of employees from a particular vulnerable group. Thus, the recruiting team should periodically report its achievements on the introduction of relevant tools in the recruitment process for better outreach. It may be important to review the diversity of the applications received before the closing of a recruitment phase. Did the number of targeted vulnerable candidates meet the expectations? Can further action be taken if the target has not been reached at this stage? The application period might not be closed until everything has been done to achieve the diversity target in this phase. We might rethink the possible tools of outreach — the job description might be redefined, advertised in other channels, etc. It is worth planning for a longer search period in case of planning to reach a new target group.

**Diversity aspects** can be adopted **for assembling shortlists**, for example, to include at least one female candidate, if possible. If the shortlist is compiled by our own recruiter team, it is important to communicate diversity goals among all concerned and determine who is responsible for diversity proofing of the shortlists.

If **external recruitment partners** are employed, it may be important to monitor their selection practices and support their non-discriminatory operation. In practice, the client's code of conduct is usually accepted by the contractor; however, the composition of the shortlist might not take into account the client's diversity goals. Thus, the applicants excluded from the list are not even known by the client.

Therefore, it is important to clarify the customer's diversity goals when compiling the request. This can be especially important in Hungary, where — due to the widespread discriminatory practice of clients — recruitment agencies might easily assume a company would not like to see Roma candidates on the shortlist. Indicating specific geographic regions or communities to reach out to might be particularly useful in enabling the recruitment partner to reach Roma applicants.

Partnering with specific organisations that support a given vulnerable group in recruitment might also be considered as affirmative action. For example, in positions with low entry criteria, where a high number of applicants are expected, the first round of call might be circulated exclusively through this partner. If a suitable candidate is found by this channel, the recruitment work is also greatly reduced. In case this method does not lead to a sufficient number of applicants, the ad can still be republished through other channels.

When selecting a recruitment agency, we might want to assess their previous experience and performance in reaching a specific group. How does the company react to our needs for a Roma target group? How can we support their work with the knowledge and experience we have accumulated?

Seeing that applicants with less experience, with communication disadvantages, and lower self-confidence might easily underperform in the standard selection process (i.e., CV, application, interview, AC) **alternative selection tools** might be considered. Such as a test job or a test day allowing the candidate to show his/her skills and expertise in a real work environment, as well as giving a longer time slot as well.



More **flexible forms of employment** could be considered in case the right skill set of the candidate is still not proven or entering into an employment relationship seems risky. Being aware of the many disadvantages of being a leased employee, we would be reluctant to recommend this form of employment in general. However, if this is seen as the solution, for example, in times of hiring freeze or in case of uncertain competence of the applicant, it might certainly be more appropriate than rejection.

# **V. How to support the integration of Roma employees?**

Social inclusion is a rich and complex topic, but this chapter is not intended to provide even a brief overview. Furthermore, we know a lot less about the special context we call corporate environment when discussing inclusion practices and experiences in Hungary. Several reasons can be identified: consciously planned inclusion practices have a relatively short history here, as opposed to several decades of experience in Western Europe and North America, and the monitoring of these practices is even more sporadic and the results of those are rarely accessible. Before presenting relevant experiences from other countries and some general recommendations, it might be valuable to first clarify the concepts of integration/inclusion/diversity.

All the substantial literature on integration (in terms of overall social integration) describes the concept of integration in the context of characteristic developments. In other words, integration is not a static, permanent situation but a process with many participants, “external” and “internal” conditions, which include aspects driven by individuals, corporate culture, custom, and norms, as well as broader social conditions. Thus, the integration process means the actors interact and communicate, mutually provide feedback, and adjust to each other. Integration and inclusion are typically explained as two-way (or multi-way) reflexive processes.

This chapter attempts to look at how these “external” and “internal” conditions can be fulfilled, thereby supporting the process of successful inclusion. These conditions are listed and detailed below along with relevant tools that could augment the desired conditions. International examples and experiences are provided to support the arguments.

### **Major barriers to entry**

Compared with other vulnerable groups, such as people living with disabilities or immigrants, the entry of Roma employees does not require any infrastructural adjustment or similar, larger-scale functional adaptations. For the vast majority of Roma staff, no objective factors would hinder their participation in the operation of the organisation.

However, as the majority of Roma colleagues might face economic and social challenges, subsistence issues could make their entry more difficult. Resettling to another town could be a major difficulty, while others choose daily long-distance commuting. Obtaining proper clothing to start work could also mean a major financial burden. Measures that could ease these financial issues can significantly reduce those risks that could actually prohibit the employee from starting the job or would force one to leave during the trial period.

### **Housing**

Currently, very few companies can offer accommodation facilities for their employees, while a significant part of the potential labour force lives far from the location where most firms with labour shortages are concentrated. One of our partner companies could solve the resettlement problem of a Roma single-mother from the countryside to Budapest by an exceptionally flexible departure from

its housing protocol and offering her a flat in its guesthouse for several years. By doing so, the company not only solved a serious factual barrier to the recruitment of the employee but also "secured" her loyalty to the company for years.

State-benefits are available to support resettling if a registered job-seeker is recruited from a remote location. However, most of the candidates are not aware of this financial support, so the recruiting staff providing information could be a major proponent for the applicant to accept the job and start on time.

### **Transport**

A government decree regulates the obligations of the employer to reimburse the commuting expenses of its employees in Hungary. In case of more than one person commuting from a settlement, the employer can apply for support to cover the group transport costs. Some companies transport their employees by company buses from a broad catchment area, which is especially practical in case of settlements with very poor public transport connections.

### **Clothing**

Many companies provide some financial support towards clothing for their employees. If this benefit is not available from the beginning of employment, appearing properly in the first month or even on the first day of work might cause a problem for some.

Communication about such financial problems can be difficult as one might easily be ashamed. Employees might pretend there is no obstacle to start the job, but still not turn up on the first day or later because they could not solve their transport or clothing problems. Therefore it is important to approach these issues in a sensitive, emphatic and proactive way - ensuring trust and credibility.

In addition to the above-mentioned objective considerations - housing is not guaranteed, transport is costly, etc. - there are many more subjective aspects that are also very important. Many employees, regardless of origin or background, might face many discouraging feelings and thoughts during the first period of work.

- Am I fit to do this job for sure? Will I be able to prove it to myself and others?
- How will I be able to integrate into this team as a newcomer?
- Should I ask questions, raise problems with my manager and colleagues? Or should I just listen so they don't see how many things I don't understand, don't know?

### **My identity is my choice!**

These initial difficulties may be even more fundamental for Roma candidates who might have faced numerous disadvantages, conflicts or discrimination, and are troubled by low self-esteem. These concerns can be aggravated when entering a new, homogenous team, where they might be the only Roma. No matter how one communicates about one's identity, they will initially regard the other as "non-Roma", while they will be identified as a Roma. Still, it is very important for many Roma employees to have the freedom to express ethnic identity where, when and to whom they so wish. It is very important to emphasize that in case the HR manager or the direct supervisor is aware of the new employee's ethnic identity, the employee's identity should not be communicated under any circumstances without consent or permission.

### **Inclusive work environment**

The first and perhaps most important condition of an effective integration process is the inclusive nature of the workplace environment. It is such a comprehensive goal that can only be

achieved through many smaller steps and intermediate goals with the aid of specific tools. For example, a diversity training might be one efficient tool for achieving the overall goal. The exact details are of course also important.

An example from the US<sup>16</sup> illustrates how complex this area is. In 2015, a US-based organisation created a high management position for Diversity, Education, and Outreach, and later conducted an internal survey on the perceived space and opportunity for discussing diversity-related topics within the company. A diversity training program had been developed, one that is structured around central issues such as power, hierarchy, gender, race, and ethnicity, and serves a twofold goal: promote inclusive teams and positive workplace culture; and create a community for those interested in fostering equity.

Leaving this specific example and returning to more general issues, numerous practical and theoretical questions do arise in regards to diversity trainings:

- Who should take part in the trainings? How often should these be held?
- Shall the training be compulsory or voluntary?
- Should diversity issues be embedded in other professional trainings, or is it more efficient to organise ones specifically focusing on diversity issues?

There is no single answer or any "sure solution" to these questions. The methods should largely depend on the profile of the company and the scope of its activities. The common characteristics of the employees to be integrated also determine the best inclusion methods (e.g. if disadvantages are due to ethnic origin, or they are

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<sup>16</sup> <https://hbr.org/2018/03/5-things-we-learned-about-creating-a-successful-workplace-diversity-program>

coupled with social disadvantages and other geographical, educational segregation, etc. just to mention the most important ones). Internal company surveys and employee satisfaction indicators reflect that compulsory trainings are often not successful, supposedly because they can evoke aversion. Participating in a diversity training on a voluntary basis seems to be more viable. However, it raises concerns that volunteer participants would be anyway interested and receptive to the subject and the training will not reach those whose attitude and openness need shaping. There is a clear consensus based on Hungarian and other practices that the involvement of higher management is essential in these trainings.

The results of follow-ups show that unconscious bias trainings for top managers can lead to strong commitment, which could initiate a more regular and widespread use of diversity trainings at the company. One could easily be unaware of unconscious prejudices or beliefs, but these still influence the routines of everyday life. Various training techniques can improve self-awareness, and group-communication and individual beliefs can be recognized and re-evaluated.

A frequent question is how and where diversity training is best served in a company. According to practice, it fits well into talent-management programs, or can be an integrated element of training on other topics, such as culture development or sustainability. Some organisations offer it as a module in the compulsory yearly training program, as part of the topics on "coexistence of people from different cultures" or "unconscious bias". It is important to keep participation voluntary and allow for personal engagement, so participants can gain personal experience of being affiliated with another group and can acquire a higher level of social sensitivity, empathy, and even social responsibility.

Training has been offered mostly in personal form, and sometimes as online training. The effectiveness of the latter is far behind that of personal training. Our corporate partners expressed the opinion that diversity training is best embedded in professional training. The advantage of this approach is that diversity and sensitivity are not discussed as the main focus points, in an “ethical” context, presupposing some “deficit” of the trainee in this area, as if the organisation is aiming to convey a sort of ideology. If these topics are linked to professional training with a different focus, it can better motivate those who would show resistance to direct attempts to alter their view. For example, there is a difference between having a discussion with your staff about the Roma in general and examining how your staff in customer service or HR can become efficient employees, dealing with Roma costumers or colleagues.

Furthermore, a training offering personal engagement is more successful than a one-sided information transfer. Personal experiences can result in emotional and attitude change. A good example was mentioned by a company representative, to utilize wheelchair exercises or other interactive games for sensitizing people towards those living with disabilities. Another example was a day-trip organised by the Employers Forum on Equal Opportunities for its member companies to an employment and care centre for people living with disabilities, to engage in joint activities. The visit was very successful. Participating companies have since regularly offered job opportunities to disabled applicants.

Diversity training is part of compulsory on-boarding training at some companies in Hungary, usually 1-2 hours of a full-day training, drawing attention to the importance and value of diversity in the corporate culture. Some Hungarian companies mentioned "sensitizing the environment" as a condition for successful inclusion. The following quote is from a multinational company representative, describing the successful employment of people living with disabilities:



*“... In order for this to work, strong prior sensitising activity was needed. The issue was discussed with colleagues, including low-level management...we outlined the plan for cooperation, so they will first start to work in the background, then slowly, as they gain experience, will gradually appear in the front line and help the others in this part of the store. You should have seen the first astonishments...but eventually, it became a huge success. (...) because they experience as success those tasks that are tedious and boring for others, such as cleaning the shelves or other time-consuming duties. They experience achievement. Presently we are looking for an internal mentor to work with the group independently ... The staff realized they could do valuable work such as flawlessly packed containers.”*

A well-planned voluntary action could also be a less direct but effective tool for sensitisation. One of our partners, an energy service provider company, organized a two-day volunteering project for mid-managers in a Roma settlement with the help of Autonomia Foundation. The staff members worked in teams with the Roma residents and NGO people for the renovation of severely dilapidated houses of Roma families. In addition to team building and volunteering, the two days gave managers an insight into the living conditions of the potentially most problematic customer pool. Personal encounters often lead to a better understanding and acceptance of the other party. This effect is also illustrated by the fact that employees of the company who regularly met the "difficult" clients, proved to be more accepting and understanding towards disadvantaged groups, according to an internal survey, as compared to white-collar employees having no contact with these groups.

High management/leadership commitment to diversity and integration has been already mentioned several times. International literature describes inclusive leadership by 6 important traits<sup>17</sup>:

- (1) Managers provide a sufficiently open atmosphere, listen to their employees, who are encouraged to stand for their opinions;
- (2) listen to new ideas, appreciate new initiatives;
- (3) encourage group members to make independent decisions;
- (4) accept advice and build on feedback;
- (5) provide feedback that is easy to transfer and practice;
- (6) share success with their teams.

Obviously, this list defines a broad interpretation of an open-minded leader, which is a basic condition for openness towards workforce diversity. An inclusive leader is able to create the kind of fundamental corporate culture that can be the basis of targeted diversity trainings, which might lead to stronger openness and inclusivity of the entire workforce towards employees from disadvantaged groups.

Thus, the training and sensitivity of managers and employees in diversity topics can be an important tool. However, it might be really controversial to sensitize the actual team, the direct work environment into which a new Roma staff member is about to arrive. There are no tried and tested practices in the sensitization of the actual colleagues of Roma employees. Although many of our partners raised this issue, for example, to prevent potential conflicts, we strongly recommend not to implement direct sensitization of the close

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/topics/talent/six-signature-traits-of-inclusive-leadership.html>

colleagues. Mostly because that would put a strong focus on the ethnic origin of the new staff member, which is strongly disapproved by Roma employees. They, just like anyone else, want to join the team as an individual, without the “Roma label” and have the freedom to communicate their ethnic affiliations according to their decision, maybe at a later point.

### **Support and Development of vulnerable employees, including the Roma**

Appropriate and timely support and development tools are further important conditions of successful integration. Roma employment practices and the use of integration tools in Hungary have a rather short history. Individual mentoring is the most frequently mentioned practice for facilitating the integration of vulnerable, disadvantaged groups. It is an apparently labour-intensive and time-consuming method, but on the medium and long term, the energies invested bring ample returns. Mentored (vulnerable) employees are more likely to stay at the organisation, integrate more easily and quickly, and deliver higher performance even in the short term. Various forms of mentoring can be chosen. A mentor can be a colleague or a direct supervisor or a person specifically designated for this task. The choice may depend on the nature of the work, on the corporate structure, and on the available capacities. But, according to our experience, it mostly depends on a committed leader.

At one of our partners, a Budapest-based company employing a relatively large number of Roma white-collar employees, a senior HR manager oversees the integration process of newly admitted Roma staff. They hold monthly, informal talks where challenges, difficulties, successes, tasks and interpersonal relationships can be discussed. At the same organisation a Roma HR trainee also facilitated the integration of new Roma staff for a period.

Some companies set up buddy<sup>18</sup> systems to help and integrate newly entering employees (not only the Roma). Some prefer to designate an independent staff member as a mentor, different from those colleagues who support functional integration. The reason presumably is that while professional mentoring is provided by a more experienced colleague with higher authority (i.e. there might be a hierarchical relationship based on professional inequality), organisational (social) integration is better done by someone closer in the hierarchy and independent from the future advancement of the newcomer. *“Ideally, a mentor-buddy should be a hierarchically independent person, thus be able to give advice and listen, regardless of the power relationships”*. Thus the flow of information and the discussion of the problems is less restricted. The buddy should also be able to choose the mentee voluntarily, to avoid any hostility in their relationship which would make their operation counterproductive. Obviously, the separation of these tasks (professional and social integration) is not always easy, and it is often not possible in a small team. Optionally, the integration of the newcomer may be an HR task if there is available capacity.

Others have pointed out that a special buddy system or any affirmative measure targeting the Roma can be only successful and effective if it functions unnoticeably. We should remember the principle mentioned earlier that affirmative tools should work on a voluntary basis, without the slightest possibility of stigmatising. One solution could be to make the affirmative action – e.g. mentoring - available for other, non-vulnerable staff as well, based on justified demand.

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<sup>18</sup> The buddy is usually an informal mentor, a supporter on an equal level, who is more focused on organizational integration and less on professional development

Social isolation is also a risk for newly recruited Roma employees, as newcomers do not know the corporate culture, customs, and daily routines. Many people find it difficult to spontaneously engage and communicate with colleagues coming from a social environment different than the "normal" middle-class standards. However, any other newcomer might encounter similar challenges when integrating into established teams, even if there are no ethnic, social, or other differences between the team members.

Participation in internal developments such as skill development or other special trainings can alleviate integration difficulties and accelerate the process. As with mentoring, the initial investment in training quickly returns better performance. Due to the special situation of Roma employees - namely, many faced prior discrimination at school or in the workplace on the base of ethnic origin, and have often come from segregated environments and low-quality schools –there may still be disadvantages that the educational system could not equalize, despite their secondary or higher education. Some of them might find it difficult to communicate in an alien environment, to relax among unknown people, and others might have shortcomings in foreign language skills, especially in spoken form. Some employers try to overcome these shortcomings by personal mentoring and additional training, the investment consistent with the expected benefit.

*"What is needed [in case of the Roma] is to hold their hands for a while. We enrolled someone from one of the Roma programs. He had been on board for 3-4 days, we visited all departments of the company together....If he were left alone in this "meat grinder", easily anyone would have dismissed him with "your English is weak " and he would have been out soon. Even though his English was weak, our financial manager sat down with him for a talk and realized that it would be OK...he said "you are going to get a half year intensive English course financed by the company". So what does it tell us? How we approach the issue. We can say good bye in case your English is not sufficient or we can say it is OK, you will be able to improve it."*

## **Conflict prevention and management**

New corporate partners of the HRom program frequently raise their concern about expected conflicts and how to prevent such situations around a Roma newcomer.

The question is perfectly legitimate and well-founded in light of today's social conditions in Hungary. However, our experience of many years with white collar positions and employees in the multinational corporate context reveals that incidences of conflicts are insignificant compared to our original anticipations. Of course, the lower the skill level of the employees, the smaller a company, or more deeply embedded in Hungarian social context, the more the conflict patterns may differ from what we have experienced.

Some of the concerns relate to expectations on how the Roma employees will be accommodated by their colleagues, and the extent they will project their stereotypes on them.

In such situations, it is recommended to designate a colleague who is not part of the immediate team of the new employee, such as an HR staff or an equal opportunity manager, who is accessible for the new staff member to discuss any conflict or inconvenience that may arise.

A young Roma employee at one of our partner companies experienced serious conflicts and a relatively hostile environment during the first few weeks of her employment. Her immediate quitting could be prevented by the availability of the HR manager for her, who could assess the situation realistically, identify real conflicts between the staff members and suggest her a transfer to another position. Thus a loyal, well-performing employee could be successfully retained and she is still with the company for years.

Similar conflict situations might necessitate the designation of an internal employee or the requisition of an external mediator to manage the conflict if transfer to another position or team is not the preferred solution.

Other types of conflicts may be due to the inappropriate integration or insufficient performance of the Roma staff member.

A partner company enrolled a Roma student in a trainee position in a small and heavily overloaded team. In a few weeks, the trainee demonstrated lack of motivation and showed poor performance. Nonetheless, because maintaining the inclusive environment was very important for the team, it took the company months to decide to lay off the trainee. The result of such situations could be a long-standing negative experience in the team and can also slow down the diversity initiatives of the company. Therefore it is important to emphasize that the employment and internal development of a Roma staff member is effective as long as the person concerned is able to, or can rather easily be enabled to perform the designated tasks. However, if the person is quite far from meeting the standard expectations of the company and its staff, neither recruitment nor retention should be enforced, as it will inevitably lead to negative impact, both for the employee concerned and to the attitudes of the company and its staff towards Roma employees.

The integration of Roma employees might also be facilitated by considering the optimal workforce management, such as team composition for example. Let's examine for example a case of blue-collar Roma workers. What would be the optimal team composition? Would their integration best served by placing each individual separately to different teams, with no other Roma colleague? Or a few Roma members in one team would support each other? Or maybe they are part of an established brigade that already worked as a team previously, so keeping their team composition could be the best? We have met a case when a company enrolled a large number

of Roma newcomer staff without significant prior work experience. They had been organised as one team and an external Roma staff had been designated as the team leader. That case proved to be unsuccessful, the team dissolved after a short while. It might be concluded that it is not optimal to enrol members of a given community (e.g. from the same village) into one team who did not work previously as a team. On the other hand, it might be optimal when they belong to an established brigade or there is a person among them who has prior experience in organizing their joint work efficiently. Therefore in the former case, the formation of diverse teams may lead to better integration and performance. Furthermore, the designation of a Roma colleague as team leader of a Roma team might not necessarily be the best option, especially if the person concerned is also not yet perfectly integrated.

Another case illustrates a controversial recruitment example. A company enrolled an applicant from a Roma recruitment program, despite the fact that her immediate superior did not support her hiring. The new staff member performed well, handled the small conflicts that arose, but more than a year later it became clear that her superior did not support her progress. The equal opportunity manager of the company only became aware of the issue at that time, as the Roma newcomer was not followed-up after enrolment. It points out two important conclusions. We might not want to “shadow” a new Roma employee, but still, a regular follow-up on the status of their integration, performance, and progress is recommended, especially if recruited through a targeted program. Another lesson is that enrolling a candidate against the preference of the immediate manager can lead to counterproductive effect. There is a great difference between the senior HR management highlighting the benefits of the candidate and thus persuading the local management or enforcing a Roma candidate against the local preferences. The latter case could easily trigger a process that would hinder the inclusion of Roma staff, despite their good performance.



It is important to state that members of vulnerable groups are often inclined to interpret conflicts as due to negative attitudes towards them. *"They don't acknowledge my performance, they don't share a table with me, I am not promoted, and so on, because I'm Roma."* Some of the conflicts could indeed be based on ethnic affiliation but many others can arise due to other professional or human factors. It is very important to clarify the background aspects for the Roma staff members and aim at taking steps to identify and resolve the real causes.

### **Internal communication, events, communities**

Integration, diversity and corporate culture in general can be strongly influenced by internal communication messages and corporate events and by the way the community of employees can engage in shaping diversity initiatives.

Employee resource groups or affinity groups - voluntary groups or initiatives, based on shared interest of a cluster of employees - can be effective in boosting interactive internal communication and community engagement. Employee resource groups can be organised along shared interests, hobbies, or even along identities of those involved. For example, several companies have a group for parents with young children or an LGBT group. One company initiated a group of Roma employees. These groups usually receive a small budget from the company. Their activities might engage mainly their members but in some cases may organize events or initiatives that target other employees of the company or even external groups. The initiatives of these groups are beneficial because employees can experience the importance of their chosen topic in the corporate context beyond activities pertaining directly to their job, and they might also shape the communication of the company concerning their group. Namely, communication based on the principle of "nothing about us without us" will be more credible,

so for example communication on mothers with young children or Roma should preferably not be planned exclusively by male managers or non-Roma respectively.

Still, it might be important to include themes focusing on diversity and the Roma in internal communication, to shape the attitude of the majority of employees and to attract and retain Roma staff. If these topics are really important for a company, the company should communicate about them. As we have seen, while the Hungarian society is generally not very receptive towards the Roma, they show much more positive attitudes towards positively presented characters and success stories. People are not rational beings, their decisions are only partially rooted in rational reasons, while also strongly influenced by emotional factors. Therefore communicating facts and data from social sciences or rational arguments, “lecturing” the recipients from a superior position is generally less successful. On the other hand, discovering engaging personal stories opens possibilities to recognise fundamental similarities of people.

Thematic events of the company might include diversity days, exhibitions or clubs, which could shape the attitude of the staff towards one or even more sensitive groups. In the case of the Roma, musical and gastronomic events often might seem the obvious choice. However, it is also important to consider how our initiatives could avoid strengthening stereotypes and rather emphasise the diversity of the Roma and their similarity to any members of any other groups. Emphasising the “exoticness” of the Roma could lead to the same communication trap as presenting exclusively the poverty ghettos. However, presenting something about the Roma that is interesting, surprising, personal, and colourful, organizing programs where employees are not only passive observers but active participants, gaining personal experiences, is much more effective. If the organisation has Roma employees, their opinion should

definitely be explored and opportunity for their participation in the organization and implementation offered. However, it should not be an obligatory task for a Roma employee to be involved in the organization of a Roma-thematic event because of his/her Roma affiliation. There might be some, who are willing to openly take on their identity, some are less, but usually very few people appreciate highlighting their ethnicity, even if guided by the best intentions. Most people would like to avoid receiving the "Roma label", having their activities judged based on their ethnicity and facing the obligation of dealing with Roma affairs.

### **The "Roma Label"**

Roma people generally experience more discrimination when the "Roma label" is forced on them. Either in the form of disadvantages or by gaining certain advantages, which then lead to hostile reaction from their environment. The same way as one should be very careful about communicating the ethnic identity of a newcomer during the admission process, caution should be exercised when communicating about them in general. Although 'positive characters' and personal stories can be the most effective way to shape the attitudes of people, this beneficial goal should never put our employees in an uncomfortable situation.

A short video had been shot in a corporate setting with the participation of a Roma employee. He consented but asked the shooting not to take place at his work environment, among his immediate colleagues. Despite his request, recordings were done in these settings, putting him into the spotlight of attention at the company and his Roma identity was given extra emphasis. The company used the video partly to communicate about its Roma program, which raised his concern about being used as a "marketing tool" in this respect.

Thus it is recommended to pay attention when communicating about the Roma in general and about our Roma staff as well. It is

more effective to focus on their activities, results, professionalism, and not on their identity and origin. It makes a huge difference to talk about Hugo, the Roma engineer, or Hugo, the engineer who happens to be Roma.

However, negative attitudes may arise among many employees if members of a vulnerable group are provided additional opportunities. An example can illustrate this: a company organized an excursion for a group of employees with disabilities. The plan was not communicated towards the other staff members, because of fear of the potential negative impact described above. However, silence can lead to confidence loss. The situation is different if the additional option is provided for an employee resource group for example and not to members of a vulnerable group. A non-Roma or a non-disabled worker cannot become Roma or a disabled by choice, so they feel excluded from opportunities linked to characteristics. However, the possibility of forming a resource group is open to everyone, along many shared traits or interests, and can also organize programs with financial support from the company.

There might be common goals that bind Roma and non-Roma employees. In case the goal is related to a group identity, it must be openly declared and taken on by members. For example one of the companies mentioned an internal competition where teams showing best results in integrating people living with disabilities had been rewarded. Co-workers, with and without disabilities had been working together for a common goal that strengthened group cohesion. However, an initiative focusing on groups that best integrate the Roma would not be an option, as Roma staff members would unintentionally receive the “Roma label”. On the other hand, we can initiate for example a soccer tournament where Roma and non-Roma workers can work together to achieve a common goal, but the difference between them is not in the direct focus. Common successes, win-win situations can bind members of different social groups effectively.

# VI. Organizational and strategic aspects

## **Organizational aspects – major conditions for an inclusive corporate culture**

We might want to look at the organisation from a distance to get a better picture of its present status and the realistic directions for progress. The following list describes the factors that could promote workplace diversity; the lack of such conditions can hinder the creation of equal opportunities, prohibit the creation of a level playing field, and can make it difficult for such initiatives to progress at the company.

1. Leaders are committed to diversity and the employment of disadvantaged groups;
2. The organisation possess an equality plan and/or diversity strategy, which is broadly known and actively used;
3. There is a dedicated diversity/equal opportunity expert with adequate capacity;
4. Sufficient budget is available for the developments in his field;
5. Management consciously and proactively delegates the topic to one of the relevant departments (HR, CSR, PR);
6. The corporate culture is fundamentally inclusive and supports the creation of a diverse workplace; and,
7. The organisation strives to take diversity and equal opportunities into account in all processes.

This is a rather exhaustive list. Presumably more elements are likely to be available at multinational corporations than at local medium-sized companies. However, the advantage of a smaller company is that it can make decisions and implement changes faster than global organisations, therefore initiatives towards diversity are relevant within all companies.

And while the above aspects all contribute to this process, not all companies need to meet all of the above criteria. For example, if there is no special equal opportunity expert, the HR department can fulfill such tasks; this way significant results can still be achieved. The lack of a specific diversity strategy does not prevent an organisation from implementing good practices to promote diversity.

It is recommended to review potential areas to be developed and relevant tools. For example, if management commitment is weak, significant steps and communication of diversity initiatives are hardly realistic. If no budget is allocated for this topic, tools that do not require additional resources are recommended, which, if successful, would lead to the assignment of more resources. Thus any initiative for stronger diversity should not be dismissed due to lack of executive commitment or budget. We have seen several companies take steps towards diversity as bottom-up initiatives, especially from HR experts. However, it is important to emphasize that achieving systemic change is quite difficult if a corporate diversity strategy is not applied; various initiatives might arise within the company with differing directions or bottom-up initiatives can quickly be halted if the responsible staff member leaves.

It is crucial to analyze which departments “own” the issue of diversity and equality opportunity - HR, PR, communication, or CSR. In CSR, the primary goal is to communicate about diversity and to explore initiatives and developments that can be disseminated, rather than transforming the culture, operation, or workforce composition of the company. Promoting social equality is a rather

complex area. Thus to achieve significant results on a local level, developments should not solely be based on international examples planned by communication professionals but rather consider local circumstances and areas other than communication.

In most of the companies that are open to Roma employment, the HR department is responsible for equal opportunities and diversity. Although an existing strategy requires the approval of senior management, it is primarily developed by the HR department. Besides top management support, this seems to be the main guarantee for ensuring priority and action to promote corporate diversity.

HR and communications teams need to work cohesively to ensure that corporate diversity and Roma employment occurs. If the communications team is predominantly involved in diversity, other departments might not see tangible effects, such as recruitment, inclusion, or training. It is difficult to modify operations within the company if inclusivity and diversity efforts are focused on communication, regardless of how much they support beneficial developments and campaigns.

Experts of the working group shared the opinion that the coordinated work of PR and HR can greatly advance diversity both in internal and external operations. Indeed, a company is considered to be reliable and attractive to potential applicants or investors if the values broadcasted externally are also prevalent within internal functioning.

### **Monitoring and follow-up of the strategy implementation**

Any strategy, plan, or corporate policy is only worthwhile if implemented and functional. Implementation can and should be assessed frequently. However, most of the companies that were interviewed do not closely monitor the implementation of their equal opportunities/diversity strategies or the targets related to Roma employment.

Some companies monitor the achievement of equal opportunity goals in the framework of employee satisfaction assessment and produce statistics on recordable protected characteristics – e.g. gender, age, or disability. However, there are hardly any measurement metrics for Roma people, including within companies that explicitly target them. One of the main obstacles is seen in the difficulty of defining ethnic identity, as it is *"impossible to know who is Roma"*. There are almost no organisations collecting or managing data on ethnic affiliation because their perception is that this is prohibited by law. The legal environment in Hungary strictly regulates cases where the collection of ethnic information is conducted, as sensitive data might be collected. Thus, although it is quite unusual in the Hungarian context, it is legitimate and possible to ask the employee or the candidate about their ethnic identity if data provision is voluntary and the aim of the data collection is clearly defined. There are many examples throughout the world where job applications collect data on ethnic origin and other sensitive data through voluntary and anonymous questionnaires to assess the composition of applicant pools.

Despite the help they might receive in potential workplaces, the conclusion from the Roma youth focus group was that many of them would be reluctant to express their ethnicity in the application-employment context, even if they openly express it in their private lives. Many do not trust that the information will be treated confidentially by HR staff, and they are afraid that personal data could be leaked from HR to their direct team members, which would negatively impact their situation. They mentioned, as an example, a former system in Hungary that provided extra scores for disadvantaged candidates applying to university and mentoring after admission, which publicly revealed their disadvantaged situation. Furthermore, admission by these extra scores questioned their objective performance compared to their peers. Thus, any such data collection system must be able to communicate its purpose and



processing methods very clearly and expect a low rate of declaration (like in the census) due to perceived or real discrimination. So, although ethnic data collection would be an important basis for development in many aspects, we cannot expect a significant number of Roma applicants willing to express their ethnic identity in the short term.

Many companies assume their grievance process based on their Code of Ethics would reveal cases not in compliance with the principles of equal treatment. However, it is clear that the ethical and grievance processes do not substitute monitoring of the equal opportunities/diversity strategy, as these can only deal with very specific, individually reported complaints. The purpose of monitoring the equality plan and the ethical process is different: the former assesses the implementation of a corporate strategy and identifies elements to be corrected and strengthened, or it might evaluate satisfaction; the latter investigates and sanctions actual violations of regulations. The equality plan is a management process that aims at prevention and systemic changes, whereas the other is a legal instrument for the management of specific issues from disadvantaged employees.

Nevertheless, discrimination is widespread. According to an employee survey by a Hungarian company, 55% of their staff belonging to a sensitive group felt discriminated against in employment. While the problem is real and prevalent, employees only report it in severe cases with legal ramifications. It is not clear what share of complaints reach actions of conflict management or legal redress, and what further impacts such procedures might have (e.g. are they preventing offenders from committing such acts in the future and are they helping victims in discriminatory situations to speak up and initiate internal procedure?). All Hungarian companies interviewed have anonymous grievance management systems; and if there is a designated diversity officer, this expert is also managing

complaints. New entrants, especially those belonging to a sensitive group, are informed about the complaint and redress system. These companies report a small number of cases because victims might be concerned with the potential disadvantages or inconveniences that their complaint might lead to, they might not identify these situations as violations, or that in actuality the number of discriminatory cases is quite low. The last option is unlikely, when referencing the broader social environment that has a strong inclination for discrimination and prejudice. Grievance submissions can be preceded by internal conflict management at some organisations, when the employer can turn first to his/her immediate supervisor, then to the next level of management. Some cases that we studied had been resolved by the intervention from a direct manager. We did not hear about any internal cases of discrimination among our corporate partners that had to commence legal proceedings.

In conclusion, it is essential to monitor practices that grow out of diversity corporate strategies to achieve successful inclusion. According to a survey by Hudson Research & Consulting<sup>19</sup> - based on six interviews with diversity and inclusion managers - feedback from various levels of the company and coordinated, multi-faceted initiatives play a key role in success. It is not intended here to provide any summary of monitoring techniques, but the continuity of the diversity/inclusion process is emphasized, with multiple stakeholders as opposed to a one-off exercise to be ticked off. Only such an approach can achieve lasting success.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.hudsonrc.com/solutions/diversity/>

# Summary

In this paper, we have reviewed numerous aspects why a corporation in today's Hungary could be interested in strengthening diversity and inclusion, and how it can broaden its ability to recruit and integrate Roma staff. The attractiveness of inclusive and diverse workplaces is growing among vulnerable groups as well as mainstream applicants. Employees are more committed to companies that are open to diversity because typically it results in higher performance and lower fluctuation. The presence of sensitive groups can increase creativity and innovation while also appealing to vulnerable customers. Most of the above benefits - depending on the company's profile – are attainable by the integration of Roma employees.

It is worth examining how realistic the concerns or fears are that come up in the recruitment process for Roma candidates, and designing selection tools to reduce or eliminate these perceived or real risks.

The Roma population is very diverse, but most Roma people experience disadvantages and discrimination. By acknowledging the effects of these experiences, we could assess the aspects during recruitment that are important for us: the real personality, skills, and potential of the candidate.

Most companies, in accordance with the Equal Treatment Act, aim to eliminate any form of direct and conscious discrimination against Roma candidates. However, indirect and non-conscious discrimination is still present. In order to recruit Roma employees, we can choose a non-discriminatory approach to filter out non-conscious or indirect discrimination. Regardless, we can support Roma candidates through various affirmative measures to ensure that despite social disadvantages they can be properly included and successful in the recruitment process.

Integration is most effectively promoted by a well-planned strategy coupled with management commitment, however, successful initiatives can also grow from bottom-up attempts. In any case, it is important to pick our measures carefully, as even well-intentioned tools can hinder the process of integration if not in accordance with the needs and problems of that particular organization.

The question of determining Roma affiliation is difficult to solve on a practical level, although it will be essential for the effective targeting of affirmative actions and the investigation of potentially discriminative practices. These dilemmas were previously discussed in this publication.

Companies that communicate their commitment to diversity will be more successful in reaching out to Roma candidates. A company that effectively conveys not only its non-discriminatory practices but the possibilities it provides for successful employment by being an attractive and fair employer and service provider for the target group, can expect a growing number of Roma candidates. Organisations and media channels that reach out to the Roma communities can be valuable partners in targeted recruitment.

In recruitment, we might aim to improve complex anti-discrimination policies and practices with objective tools that weaken the subjective aspects of the selection process. Roma candidates can also be supported with affirmative measures to compensate for disadvantages. Preparation for the recruitment process, introductory interviews, and flexible assessments of some selection criteria are a few examples. However, it is important to select and recruit only the candidates that are capable or can easily be empowered to perform the task of the given position. Otherwise, we risk negatively impacting the company and its staff's attitudes towards Roma inclusion, as well as the self-assessment of the Roma employee.

The integration of Roma staff is a multilateral process in which the company, the employees, and the new entrants all have important roles. Attitude-shaping and non-compulsory training can be useful primarily at managerial level, but we do not recommend sensitizing the Roma newcomer's immediate environment before entry. The ethnic identity of the Roma employee is also to only be communicated internally with his/her explicit consent.

Volunteer actions and other social responsibility initiatives can also increase the receptiveness of the staff towards the Roma. A well-informed and sensitive HR employee can help a lot in removing the objective obstacles that can hinder the entry of newly hired, socially disadvantaged Roma candidates (e.g. housing, commuting, resettlement). The integration of the new employee can be facilitated by a mentor or a buddy. Weaker skills that are essential to the position can be improved by (internal) training. Roma staff, like any other groups, might form employee resource groups if so desired. These not only provide networking and support for their members but might be a good resource in shaping the internal communication of the organisation on Roma-related topics. The achievements of Roma staff might also be incorporated in the communication of the organisation, but only in cases of explicit consent.

# Final thoughts

The benefits of diversity and inclusiveness at the workplace and the employment of Roma staff have been reviewed in this paper; in addition to describing relatively new, Hungarian practices, we tried to give an insight on international experiences, presented achievements, good practices, and lessons learned so far. We sketched out a rather brief description of the very diverse community of the Roma in Hungary and looked at the procedures of reach-out, pre-development, selection, recruitment and in-house integration. It has become evident that significant changes can be achieved by setting strategic goals, engaging higher management and communicating effectively on the issue. Any action is better than none, even if Roma employment can only be promoted on a lower level by smaller, experimental tools. After all, these initiatives might be the pioneers for future systemic changes. It is important to take into account a broad set of aspects, such as the needs of the company and the characteristics of the surrounding social environment, and by learning the potentials of a wide range of tools, opt for the ideal direction for our organisation. We can choose complex non-discriminatory approaches or apply affirmative measures, to aim for total objectivity or respectful subjective considerations.

We do not claim that there is one infallible method that leads to success, and another direction that is doomed to total failure. We hope that the knowledge you can gain from this paper will help you avoid dead ends.

We don't promise that this is an easy task if you decide to set out to promote Roma employment, after reading this paper, but you will encounter exciting challenges that might mean a breakthrough for the mid- and long-term perspectives of your organisation. If you decide to set off, you don't have to walk it alone. The authors are happy to support you with their expertise, services, and recommendations if you need them. Also, you are welcome to share your future experiences and results. It is important to broaden our common knowledge base, so we hope this publication will continue to expand in the future, which is only possible through your cooperation.

We would be happy to join more and more people on this road to a world where everyone - regardless of origin - can work, study and live together according to one's desires and abilities.

We wish you a good trip and good luck!

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The associates of the HRom program are ready to work with employers on diversity and Roma employment. If this publication raised your interest, do not hesitate to contact us. We are happy to answer your questions, help you to consider Roma integration tools at your organization. Use our extensive experience!



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### ***Employers' Equal Opportunities Forum Association***

The Employers' Equal Opportunities Forum Association is Hungary's first professional and advocacy organization, bringing together employers to emphasize the importance of equal treatment and equal opportunities. Our activities aim at helping employers to create diverse workplaces and become attractive to all target groups on the labour market.

We welcome all the employers to join, who identify with our goals and wish to promote equal opportunities.

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