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Work Integration of the Roma: Between Family and Labor Market

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Abstract: The social inclusion of the Roma population represents a topical issue that must be considered from both the scientific and social action perspectives. Governments, through their pivotal role in defining societal values and norms, are essential to promoting the social inclusion of vulnerable populations. To argue this perspective, the present study examines some other pivotal social institutions that play relevant roles in the professional insertion of the Roma: family, education, and the residential community. The study uses an interpretative approach, leveraging the institutional ethnography methodology. We found that a key predictor of successful Roma population integration is their occupational integration; therefore, we examined the employment obstacles and barriers Roma ethnics face and the effects of the support of public institutions. The interviewees have an undifferentiated perception of all categories of support provided more by public institutions other than government income sources, and less as social, educational, and social integration resources. The research findings show how employment options for Roma population are dependent on the social practices, customs, and values promoted by their family and communities, with clear consequences on their capacity to enter the labor market and keep a job. Thus, our research supports the necessity for new openings in the study of professional insertion in various work contexts and considering the work perspective, which is derived from the social relations outside the labor market dynamics.

Keywords: Roma social inclusion; work; children and families; education; community

1. Introduction

From a sociological perspective, social institutions represent the foundations of social organization. In broad terms, a social institution refers to a public organization, with legal status and operational rules regulated by the law, founded with the purpose of meeting certain needs of the citizens. However, from a sociological perspective, social institutions regulate the way individuals think, feel, or act through social control, which includes manners of doing, feeling, and thinking. Social institutions have an external constraint force on the individual and organization manners of the social relations based on defending the social values and meeting the needs of society members.

Institutionalization, as a social process, is focused on replacing spontaneous behaviors by constant, predictable, and socially desirable behavioral manifestations. Institutionalization is initiated inside the family. Family is a relational knot amidst the consanguinity, affinity, and alliance relations that last over time. Family meets its members' needs for socialization, reproduction, economy, affection, status, and security. Public institutions aim to ensure the social integration of individuals in the everyday life in accordance with acceptable societal values to address particular issues with specialized instruments and to intervene in crisis or difficult situations. In terms of institutional ethnography, the concept of institution does not refer to a specific organization, function, or structure, but rather to a set of interrelated social practices and intersecting work processes that occur in multiple

sites [1]. Focusing on the Roma ethnics in Romania—a particularly vulnerable population—we aimed to investigate the dynamics of social action and occupational integration as predicated by the interactions between primary social institutions, such as family and residential communities, and some key public institutions in Romania.

Social exclusion is a transpersonal and far-reaching predictor about how social actors perform in the social integration process. Sociological research has reported that institutional dysfunctions are associated with social exclusion. The social model and feminist sociologies place responsibility for this dysfunction on social institutions and sever any causal connection among inborn social statuses (e.g., biological, ethnic, or religious status) and social inclusion [2,3]. The universal principle of social intervention is to make society accessible to any person, regardless of the individual's characteristics and abilities. Through its institutions, the State has at its disposal means and resources to improve social inclusion. Anchored in the theoretical framework presented above, our study aimed to highlight the differences between societal ideals and the individual's unique world perspective [4], the discrepancy between the key goals of the Romanian public institutions and the societal knowledge gathered from the Roma ethnics' social reality.

The consequences of the structural problems and the barriers faced by a person in the transition process to adulthood have “an aggregate effect” in relation to society's overall development [5]. In this respect, the present study highlights the overlap between different core traits associated with the social exclusion phenomenon. Leveraging some of the concepts advanced by feminist studies, research has illustrated how different dimensions of marginalization merge and combine [6]. Studies have also highlighted that belonging to an ethnic group riddled by stigma, having limited access to core education, living in barely habitable conditions, and living in marginalized communities are all self-propelling traits of social exclusion that fuel and amplify each other [7,8].

This study also aimed to highlight that employment options for Roma population are heavily dependent on the social practices, customs, and values promoted by their family and communities. A closer look at the Romanian legislation and social integration policies for Roma population demonstrated that the complexity of these particular elements are not fully considered in the development of social strategies and policies for the Roma population, as these elements are typically associated with the socio-emotional and cultural components of the civil society's ethnicity discourse, and perceived as having a lesser impact on integration policies. This study aimed to analyze the very process of how factors emerging from the main social institutions driving the Roma communities—their family, education, and communities—influence their social integration. Furthermore, we attempted to underline the role of these core social institutions and the problems associated with Roma people during the professional insertion process.

2. Research Methodology

The methodological approach used is anchored by the interpretation paradigm, originating in the explanatory frameworks for how conceptual frames organize social experience: “something that an individual actor can take into his mind” and not the organization of the society [9]. Using the semi-structured interview as a sociological method for institutional ethnography, we aimed to investigate and unfold linkages among the local settings of everyday life, institutions, and processes [1]. We wanted to learn from the subjects and not about the subjects. The purpose of the present study was to learn from the subjects about social institutions, and specifically, their perceived functionality in providing solutions for labor market integration. This relates to the specific experiences to which people are subjected as they move from insular, one-off jobs to steady-state, full-time positions in the job market.

We used the term “institutional ethnography” to tap the knowledge held by the subjects participating in this study. During the interviews, we guided the discussions toward better understanding the social institutions from a naturalistic, everyday experiential perspective from the Roma beneficiaries of those institutions. The investigation approach is part of the subjective

discourse analysis method, which is the standpoint theory formulated by Hill-Collins in the 1990s, and then extended to “include race, class, and gender” in Smith [3] institutional ethnography. In her reinforcement of institutional ethnography, Smith started from the framework of feminist sociology and developed the concept of ruling relations in her work called *Texts, Facts, and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling*, published in 1990. She then laid the foundations of a sociology for the people in *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*. This approach postulated that the multitude of an individual’s social experience dimensions form a point of view through which that individual sees and understands the world [3]. The perspectives of these marginalized individuals, such as the Roma population, can help create more objective accounts of the world, in the sense that the subjects become knowledge creators and reveal to the researcher their perspective on social action patterns that otherwise remain unknown. Institutional ethnography is a type of sociology and a method of investigating the structure of social relations, with a special focus on giving a voice to vulnerable groups of people [10].

A key driver of our analysis was centered around identifying the obstacles and barriers in the access of the Roma population to the labor market, which institutional ethnography labels as problematic [3], which involves a set of factors and mechanisms cause difficulties for the Roma in relation to the labor market, the identification of the relationships among these factors and mechanisms, and their organization. Thus, the qualitative approach by means of the semi-structured interview can paint a clear picture of the interviewees’ efforts to secure and then preserve a job.

The main research objectives were as follows:

O1. Identifying the institutional relations and structural mechanisms underpinning the hindrances and barriers to employment experienced by Roma individuals;

O2. Mapping Roma individuals’ competences, capacities, and experiences with the formal and informal labor market; and

O3. Identifying the roadblocks and barriers to employment encountered by Roma individuals.

This empirical study attempted to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the obstacles and barriers confronted by Roma individuals in their efforts to access or stay connected with the labor market?

RQ2. What are the institutional dysfunctions underpinning the hindrances and barriers to employment experienced by Roma individuals?

RQ3. Do Roma individuals have a thorough understanding of the employment services they can access?

In the period of January–March 2016, the research team conducted a total of 24 in-depth individual interviews with adult Roma ethnics, who are Romanian citizens. The subjects were selected through a non-probabilistic selection process, in two stages: (1) an initial list of subjects with Roma ethnic adult citizens from Romania, who openly assume their ethnic identity and were willing to participate in the present research, was provided by our collaborators from the local authorities and from non-governmental organizations who developed programs and social interventions for Roma communities; and (2) selecting the subjects fitting the criteria from this list of cases regarding a balanced distribution of residence (urban/rural), current labor market status (active/inactive), gender, and age group (24–53 years old). When selecting the participants, we ensured a diverse sampling and a balanced distribution of interviewees for each socio-demographic category: 11 men and 13 women, aged between 24 and 53, 10 of whom were from an urban environment, whereas 14 came from rural communities; 10 of them were active on the labor market, whereas 14 were inactive when the interview was conducted; the number of children per family varied between zero and seven. In terms of educational level, nine of the interviewees did not have any formal education (attended 0–3 grades), five of them had primary education, four graduated lower secondary school, one completed a vocational school (10 grades), four graduated upper secondary school, and one had a bachelor’s degree.

An interview guide was used to ensure all topics were covered as each interview followed its own dynamics and length of time. The interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The texts obtained were encoded, structured in significant categories and meanings and then analyzed and interpreted hermeneutically. The interviewing, recordings, and data processing occurred on the basis of informed consent. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality for the interviewees, all personally identifying information was omitted.

Although not generalizable, these research findings may represent pillars for enhancing addressability and efficiency in future designs for ruling the relationships of the institutional and organizational encounters, and to consider the social situations, education, and occupational tracks possible for the Roma individuals.

3. Results

3.1. The Roma Family

The Roma family model involves living in large families, marriage and childbirth happen at young ages, and families tend to have several children [11]. This model, largely predicated by cultural as well as economic factors, leads to poverty, poor education, even poorer in the case of Roma women, and a lack of employment [12–14].

The majority of the subjects participating in the study experience precarious living conditions, which limit their access to, and integration into, the labor market. On the social inclusion-exclusion scale, the subjects whose families have a salary income or are small business owners represent the positive cases; they tend to have higher academic qualifications, and also have legal work experience in the labor market. Conversely, those who experience extreme poverty, whose household members' occupational profile places them outside the formal labor market, who have no education and no access to social resources are very likely to be subjected to exclusion.

For all interviewees, family represents their fundamental social institution. Family relations have clear economic dependencies and implications, including when a person is financially supported, or when someone takes over some household chores with the intent of having a job, of keeping a job, or in order for one to continue their education. When attempting to find employment, the members of the Roma community mainly leverage their connections with relatives, friends, and acquaintances who already are actively participating in the workforce. Thus, the interviewees mention the following circumstances, social networks, and mechanisms through which they receive support from family members in their struggle to overcome hindrances and barriers to employment:

- (a) Someone from the family or their extended network learns about employment opportunities and informs the others about vacancies: *“(When you left for France, did you leave with other people or by yourself?) I left with three other guys: my brother-in-law and my sister from the village, who are still abroad. They say they have many friends there who help them.”* (see Appendix A);
- (b) A relative or a friend acts as mediator in the relationship with the prospective employer, providing a character reference: *“You’ll have no problems with him because he is my cousin”* (RMI37_6); *“A relative that was an accountant at the Railroad Company and I went to see her: “-Hey, you go there, look her up, tell her I sent you, show her the papers and see, tell her to get you a job.” She went straight to the manager: “-Sir, he’s my neighbor, please hire him, he graduated high school, he has these competences”, and she got me a job right away. She got me a job immediately.”* (RMI47_12);
- (c) Someone from their extended network acts as mediator in relation to the institutions involved in the employment process, usually by knowing a doctor, an employee of the local government, the employment agency, and other public institutions that facilitate professional insertion;
- (d) Relatives offer support throughout the employment process and integration at the workplace: *“My husband supported me to get a job.”* (RFA34_8).

The main focus of the workforce employment agencies is recruiting, training, facilitating professional reconversion, and organizing job fairs. The labor market legal framework and the social policies predominantly reinforce the core activities highlighted above. As a result, services such as professional monitoring or professional counseling post-employment are almost nonexistent, leading to critical gaps in the workforce development process.

Therefore, immediately after securing a job, individuals are on their own; they do not receive any additional job readiness and/or assistance services from the workforce agencies to ensure a smooth transition in their new professional endeavors. Young graduates with strong family networks or individuals with previous work experience have access to critical social resources vital for navigating the employment transition period to ensure successful job readiness and integration. Conversely individuals with no prior work experience, with low family support systems, and fluctuating incomes need more support in the period immediately following their hiring.

All interviewees currently employed indicated that professional insertion has a price tag attached; the individuals have up-front expenses for transportation, employment paperwork, food, and clothing. In the following weeks (four to six weeks) after securing a job, the new employee does not contribute to the family income and, consequently, their transition from being a day laborer, who brings steady income, to the status of monthly paid employee represents a major challenge for the individual's integration into the occupational market. For Roma women, the professional insertion process is even more difficult, as they have to reshuffle how they manage their domestic chores and continue to maintain primary responsibilities for childcare. When navigating the new challenges associated with occupational integration, univocally, the subjects do not access the existing social services offered by public institutions; they rely exclusively on their family and friends to receive the much-needed help during this transition.

The specifics of the Roma family model influence their chances of attracting employment opportunities or to remain employed. The lack of appropriate support systems designed with the Roma population in mind, at the institutional level as well as public policy level, might lead to significant challenges for the Roma population in securing and retaining employment. For example, in the Roma community, there is a special emphasis on passing on a trade from one generation to the next. The vast majority of the Roma youth are trained at home, by their elders in a special trade *"This bricklaying I learnt from my father until he died."* (RMI37_0). To date, the Romanian legislation does not offer any outlets for recognizing or certifying non-formal trade training, skills, or competencies. Essentially, if a Roma youth does not pursue a formal education offered in the Romanian educational system, they will not have access to a decent job in the workforce.

The job retraining opportunities for those whose profession is no longer sought after are very limited under the current Romanian workforce legislation. *"Well, in summer we go hoeing, harvesting corn. But you see, there's no longer any need now, as it was five to six years ago when we went on a daily basis. Now we go only to unload. Because now they do it with these machines."* (RFI25_2). Many of the research subjects indicated that what proved to be a lucrative business in the past is now obsolete, straining their ability to provide for their family. The majority of the laborers working the fields' did not complete the mandatory core studies, so they do not have access to formal job retraining opportunities.

Although, some of the social inclusion policies and the workforce laws allow access to completing core educational requirements or accessing job retraining opportunities through some specially designed educational programs, in reality, social mobility for individuals with limited formal education becomes a reality when more robust social support services are available (i.e., social work assistance, job counseling, etc.) throughout the duration of job retraining.

Within the Roma family, gender prescriptions establish the trajectory of adult life. Young women get married at an early age, often do not have a high school diploma, and abandon the search for a job soon after they become mothers. The majority of young men also do not have a high school diploma or formal qualifications and most likely take on daily and occasional unskilled labor jobs.

In reality, the legislative framework and the public institutions trusted to ensure and facilitate social inclusion for the Roma population are failing to offer an appropriate framework, tools, and the mechanisms for appropriate work force integration for the Roma population. Compared with the total population, the Roma are unemployed longer, more of them have no employment experience, and more of the young Roma are not enrolled in any form of educational or qualification programs [15].

The Roma family is left without the critical means to pursue and achieve the social integration of its members. There are endless examples of interviewees who are well capable of becoming integrated into the formal labor market but who do not work and are not even looking for a salary-earning job, stating that domestic chores and occasional labor learned in the family hold them captive and prevent them from entering the formal labor market. Therefore, these findings tackle the first research objective and identify one of the main structural mechanisms underpinning the barriers to employment encountered by the Roma individuals, namely the gap between the public institutions and the Roma family that deepens, and fuels a reality, where Roma youth have minimal chances for social mobility. The vast majority end up reiterating the same mode they have seen in their family for generations and will fail to access appropriate job opportunities.

3.2. Roma Community

For more than two decades post-communism, the Roma population consistently maintained its status as the poorest ethnic group in Romania [16]. During this period, the living standards have consistently improved in the Roma communities, but they have not reached the nationally-recorded standard of living. Roma communities tend to be more segregated, with households that are poorly fitted for decent living conditions, not offering good sanitation, sustenance, or lifestyle for the residents. According to data presented in the “Roma Inclusion Barometer” of 2007, electricity exists in 84% of households, public water supply networks only reach 17% of Roma households, and only 16% can make use of the sewage system [17]. The nationwide study conducted in 2011, “The Roma Situation in Romania”, showed that the majority of the Roma households are overcrowded, whereas the utilities they have access to were as follows: electricity (91% of Roma households), drinkable water supply (36%), and sewage network (24%) [18]. Someone who lives in poverty is at higher risk of having low-level education and a non-permanent job, or to work in temporary badly paid jobs, to have precarious living conditions and bad health, and overall, to have a generally low community involvement.

The difference between rural and urban living conditions becomes even more pronounced when applied to the segregated Roma communities in the rural environment: *“(Are all the houses connected to electricity?) They are, but there are some that have not yet been connected. (And how do these families get electricity?) Well, they borrowed (see Appendix A) from the neighbors. (Are there many who borrow?) Less than half. (What are the houses heated with?) With wood, with terracotta stoves, branches, clothes, shoes, whatever they find. Trash also.”* (RFA34_8). The field observations and our subjects’ narratives point out that not only do the lack of paved roads, public transportation, and utilities represent major impediments to social inclusion, but also the chronic lack of social resources in the isolated Roma communities. These remote Roma communities have no schools, no health clinics, no pharmacies, no shops, no markets, no economic agents, no libraries, no restaurants, no pitches, and no entertainment facilities, which are all places and institutions where social capital is built. *“(Are there any stores here in the community?) No. (No corner shop?) No, nothing. (Is there a market?) No, there isn’t one in the community. (Is there a dispensary?) No, here, in the community there isn’t. (School?) No. (Police?) No, nothing. (Is there a bus or a railway station in the district?) The railway station is five kilometers away from the community. The school, the dispensary is about three kilometers away.”* (RFA34_8).

The homogeneity of living conditions, poverty, and life in a rural segregated community increases social identity and solidarity. In terms of the social relationships within the community, neighbors help each other with food and clothing, *“borrow electricity from one another”*, and sometimes lend each other money: *“I have helped S. many times. She has seven children. The neighbors collected money, brought*

her cooked food." (RFI25_2). Neighbors facing the same types of problems organize themselves and go together to the public institutions or employers, searching for solutions. They split the travel expenses and share the information they have from their previous experience in terms of the ways to find a job, drafting employment documents, and relating with the employer and the colleagues from the work place. These findings show not only the structural factors that cause social exclusion, but also respond to the first research question about the main obstacles and barriers confronted by Roma individuals in their efforts to access the labor market.

A crucial role in obtaining employment is played by the contact people outside the habitation area; these people are trustworthy and prestigious in the eyes of the community. Thus, the social worker, representatives of the local authorities, and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) members can represent support sources in securing a job. An active member of the religious community to which they belong vouching for another represents a powerful reference in finding a job: *"He is a preacher. So, he called me and he told me: "Look, a center has been built and employees are needed there".* (RFA34_8). For the members of the Roma community, such contact people are important sources of information that they would not be able to access otherwise: *"Look, the child is seven, going on eight. But we have been receiving the money for only about four years. For four years we knew nothing! The Ruhama Foundation came and they told us and they helped us so my wife could get employed. They got us in the car, they took us to the Town Hall, to doctors, everywhere, and that is how we got this money, madam."* (RMI37_6).

Another finding of our research shows that a lucrative activity niche attracts an entire network of Roma acquaintances: *"I found the first job due to acquaintances."* (RMA24_12); *"There was another boy from here, from the village, and he told the boss that he would take me to work, too. The boy spoke for me to be hired as well."* (RFI36_4). Furthermore, insertion into the informal labor market is performed by using the social network within the living community. Roma seasonal workers in agriculture notify one another of the village inhabitants that *"hire day workers"*. In a similar process, illegal income sources are identified through the same channels of communication, and the interviewees who refer to this category of occupation believe that the neighborhood and the entourage that drove them to such activities: *"Because the people in the neighborhood knew I was good with computers and the hackers proposed me immediately to break accounts and I said "no". If I went there again [to the prison], God forbid!"* (RMI24_4). As the analysis of the second research objective shows, each person engaged in an income-producing activity will immediately become a mediator in the employment process for others from their network of relatives, friends and neighbors: *"That's how my boy got there because someone spoke for him. (Somebody spoke for your boy?) Yes, some friend of his. And now he said he would speak for my husband, too. We'll see."* (RFI27_2).

In the employment process, recruitment and selection based on the family and acquaintance network is used frequently to secure poorly qualified jobs. In Romania, this collectivist approach is mainly seen in the organizational culture of construction sites, in industrial manufacturing departments, in agriculture, and other domains of activity that absorb an unqualified and poorly qualified workforce. In other words, the Roma population is subject to this category of employment and finds activity niches in these domains. However, the core problem lies in the density. Tackling the third research objective, our results identified the roadblocks to employment encountered by the Roma: if, for the general population, finding employment based on the family and acquaintance network is one of the several options that can be accessed, for the Roma, this is the only way to achieve professional insertion.

3.3. Roma Education

Educational level influences a person's readiness for adulthood and predicates their success in attracting a fulfilling job. The Romanian National Agency for Employment report from June 2015, showed that unemployed people who are uneducated or who have a primary, lower secondary, or vocational educational level represent the highest percentage of the overall number of the unemployed people registered in the Agency's documents (79.17%), whereas unemployed people with a high school and post-high school education represent 16.02% of the overall number of recorded unemployed people, whereas university graduates represent 4.81% [19].

The social data gathered by the Population Census in 2011 indicates the very low level of formal education of the Roma population. Of the overall population in Romania aged 10 and older, 3% are people with no formal education and 1.36% are functional illiterates. In comparison with these national averages, 20% of the overall Roma population have limited formal education and 14.12% are illiterate [20]. Sociological research showed that in post-communist Romania, there is an ever-decreasing level of education and qualification among the Roma population [8,12,13]. Poor education is reflected in the low competencies of the Roma population, 25% of them being unable to read or write, whereas over 80% cannot browse the internet [21]. In this context, their chances of accessing the work field are clearly lower, due, to a large extent to the lack of qualifications and competencies currently needed on the labor market [17]. Low education diminishes an individual's success chances on the labor market and, consequently, their chances of securing a decent living for themselves and their family [7,18] (p. 39).

The link between the level of education and the occupational status was clearly emphasized by all interviewed subjects participating in the study: *"(What is the reason for you are not looking for a job?) Well, because I am uneducated and I can't manage without education."* (RFI34_0); *"I told my daughter 'Hey, just look, you have to have a diploma, because you don't have to speak anywhere. You just have to show them the diploma when you go to get a job, and it will speak for yourself'."* (RFA37_5) Moreover, when analyzing the socio-demographic data, it became apparent that individuals who graduated from lower secondary school were active on the labor market, whereas those who did not graduate the lower secondary school were unemployed.

The interviewees who dropped out of school stated that their educational trajectory was interrupted mainly because of material difficulties. Although education in Romania is free, the hidden costs of formal education overcome the financial means of Roma families living on the brink of subsistence. Expenses for clothing, transportation, and school textbooks are such hidden costs: *"When I was in school, my mother had no shoes or clean clothes to give me."* (RFI27_2); *"I couldn't attend. My mother had to work for people to be able to raise us, six people."* (RFI27_3).

The analysis of the interviews showed that, concerning premature school drop-out, socio-economic determinants reinforce the gender roles internalized in the family. The interviewees who dropped out of school prematurely stated that they were charged with the care of younger siblings and with lucrative activities in their childhood in order to contribute to the family income: *"My father went in the army and my mother went hoeing and I had a four-year-old brother and they stopped me from going to school to stay at home with my brother."* (RFI27_1). Getting married and raising a family during teenage years represents another cause of school dropout: *"(Did you drop out of school when you met your husband?) I dropped out for good. So, I went to school until 6th grade, but I didn't graduate."* (RFA37_5).

In their effort to find a job, the interviewees admitted that they have to deal with the effects of having low education and the lack of critical social skills key to professional insertion. Usually, the subjects with low education avoid institutional exposure, and when they do engage in institutional relations, they request the assistance of go-betweens: *"There were many people that couldn't read or write, many would look at that sheet but didn't know what to do, what, how to fill it in. They'd give those forms to someone else to fill them in. If they couldn't find anybody, they'd forget about it and go back home saying they failed. That's it."* (RFI44_11); *"Those who don't know how to write must ask somebody to help them. All that's left is to ask somebody, a colleague you are with, or to take the application home to be filled in by somebody else. And then go some other time to submit it."* (RFI36_4).

To increase access to education, one of the effective interventions relies on the partnership between local authorities and specialized NGOs. Some of the interviewees talked about having benefited from integrated and free educational services: *"There was a Romani girl here and she came on Saturdays, and that is how I learned how to read. She taught us, me and others."* (RFI40_6). The sustainability of such interventions managed by local authorities, together with Roma experts and representatives of civil society, depend on the local funding streams after the project implementation period supported by external financing has ended. The biggest challenge for the social interventions implemented by NGOs

targeting Roma's youth access to education is the lack of financial sustainability. Once the project implementation is complete, no additional funding opportunities are allocated for project continuation.

The institutional social actions and interventions are based around ensuring Roma children and youth are enrolled in school; there are some subsidized slots for high school and college for Roma youth, as well as access to educational reintegration programs like "Second Chance" (see Appendix A). The only long-term intervention throughout an entire educational cycle are programs such as Milk and Bread Stick and social assistance scholarships (see Appendix A). However, to boost school participation, and reduce truancy and failure in school, these programs have not yet yielded the expected positive results. Approaching the second research question, these findings emphasize the institutional dysfunctions underpinning the barriers to employment experienced by Roma: financial assistance programs and counseling and family support services are much needed and perceived as having a higher impact, but are completely missing.

The lack of impactful programs and effective social interventions are significantly decreasing the Roma children and youth's chances for successful school participation and overall access to education. *"While the authorities maintain that compulsory education is provided to all children for free, there are consistent reports of "hidden costs" of education, which effectively hinder access to education by families with limited financial resources. Such costs may include, for instance, supplementary tuitions, school supplies such as textbooks, notebooks, and pencils, and school uniforms" [12].*

4. Discussion

Sociological investigation has repeatedly highlighted that family and, in particular, the parents' educational level have a strong impact on the children's level of education, which again influences employment opportunities. Since family is the primary socialization agent, children decode the meanings attached to work by observing their parents' experiences in relation to work [22]. Furthermore, studies showed that, during occupational socialization, the family retains its crucial role in the internalization of work-related attitudes, values, and beliefs, and that the parents' economic and employment circumstances reflect the children's employability [23–26]. Our research findings paint a similar picture: active parents who have a social network extending beyond their habitation area, a much-developed bridging social capital, support their children in finding a secure job on the occupational market. Similarly, parents whose income sources rely on the informal labor market, who live in poverty, and are uneducated represent the core obstacle in their children's access to education and, later, to the labor market. Thus, for Roma ethnics, family represents a social capital that can have a strongly positive or a negative impact on the individual's professional insertion, perhaps much more significant than for non-Roma populations.

Education level strongly influences the Roma individual's access to the occupational market. The investigated subjects who completed the mandatory educational level managed to enter the labor market, to preserve their job, and be successful on their career path. By comparison, most of the interviewees with lower secondary studies encountered difficulties in obtaining a job. Those who did not complete any level of education have no experience whatsoever on the formal labor market, with their subsistence income being provided by occasional and day-to-day labor work: *"My husband goes to work in the village. Day work. When there's work, there is. When there's not, there is not. He was never employed. Nowhere. He only acted as day worker."* (RFI34_0).

Material problems and an unstable family environment did not prepare our subjects for professional insertion that requires adjusting to the needs of the organizational environment. In poor families, the daily activities do not follow a certain routine; the income does not constantly cover basic needs, and there are no action plans outlined for the future. Also, the subjects do not understand the bureaucratic process, or the significance of regulations, procedures and standardized forms. Thus, in the absence of socialization that would anticipate structured work activities, the Roma youth do not have the skills to adapt to the requirements of the organizational environment. The path they follow for succeeding in the professional insertion process varies in terms of persons and not of

institutions. In describing the employment process, the interviewees exposed a network of people they contacted and not an institutional network they might have used. In conclusion, tackling the third research question, these findings show that Roma individuals do not have a thorough understanding of the employment services they can access.

With regard to social services, the interviewees have an undifferentiated perception of all categories of support coming more from public institutions rather than government income sources, and less as social, educational, and social integration resources. In other words, from Roma subjects' perspective, the state institutions represent a necessary but insufficient resource to cover the material deficits they face, instead of being a resource that helps them reduce the deficit in power, abilities, and skills in the process of professional insertion. Thus, the limited resources from the social protection system, poor education, and low information access of the Roma in connection to the rights they have and the social benefits they can access all deprive them of critical resources in the professional insertion process.

Our research makes a strong case for the necessity for new openings in the study of professional insertion in various work contexts and considering the work perspective, given the social relationships outside the occupational market dynamics. The occupational market is incorporated in a societal context, being influenced by the system of family and community social networks, as well as the institutional, political, economic, historic, and cultural networks. Our conclusions force us to call for the attention of social sciences researchers and public policy decision-makers, as both salary-earning Roma ethnics and those who have not entered the formal labor market belong to families in communities and social networks where they learn ways to relate and values and norms for the organization of work and social life, which all play a significant role in their social integration.

Ethical approval for this project was given by the Ethical Commission of the West University of Timisoara, Romania. The researchers from the West University of Timisoara, Romania, collected personal data in compliance with Law No. 677 of 21.11.2001, being registered as personal data operator No. 16364.

For research activities, the relationship between the field investigators and the research subjects is in compliance with the requirements of social research ethics. The collection of the field data and the processing of the data occurred on the basis of an informed consent form containing: the description of the procedure, the guarantees regarding the confidentiality of personal data, the rights of the research subjects (of access, of intervention, of not being subject to an individual decision, to oppose the processing of personal data, to request deletion of the data, to submit a matter to a court of law), as well as a statement of consent signed by each of the interviewees.

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Appendix A

1. The interviewees' identification data is coded as follows: R = Roma ethnic, M/F = male/female, A/I = active/inactive on the labor market; the following two figures represent the interviewee's age in full years, while the final figures are the number of attended school years. For instance, RMI47_12 reads thus: “Roma man, inactive on the labor market, aged 47, attended 12 grades”.

2. *Borrowing* is an illegal practice of connecting to the electricity network in the absence of an electricity services supply contract. The *borrowers* get connected by means of improvised installations to the electricity network connecting the houses in the district; the consumption is not metered. Such connections are very dangerous and often result in fatal accidents for those practicing *borrowing*.
3. The “Second Chance” program is an educational program designed to help children, youth and the adult population to reengage with the formal educational system. The program is open to all those who didn’t graduate various educational levels and who are four years older than the recommended age for a certain educational level. This programs are available in some schools in the urban areas, and they limit access if the potential candidates are not from the existing school boundaries.
4. The “Milk and Bread Stick” program is offered students from pre-kindergarten–middle school and requires that each student gets on a daily basis 200 ml dairy products and 80 grams pastry.
5. Social assistance scholarships are offered from the local budgets; their availability and scope depend on the rules established by the local governing councils. Among the eligibility criterion required for the students to benefit from the scholarship, we mention: students who are orphans of both parents, who suffer from chronic diseases, students from the rural environment who have to go to school in a different community etc.

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