



Roma Youth, Activism & Art

Experiences of young Roma men and women
with international mobilities

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Introduction

The *Roma Youth, Activism & Art* publication follows the international experiences of six young people who went on a stay abroad as part of the *ROMAS: Roma Students and Artists for Society* project. Their stories are the first important contribution to the discussion of how young people who have faced or are at risk of social exclusion in their lives experience traveling and living away from home.

The ROMAS project included a variety of activities designed to enable the participants to explore the world around them while also discovering qualities and skills that the environment and situations that they normally find themselves in do not allow.

A crucial part of the project were international mobilities – both group and individual. From previous experiences, both as organizers and as participants, we know well how beneficial these international events are for the development of the inner world of an individual, for gaining a new perspective on one's own life and the cultural and social framework in which we move. It is also a space for confrontation with new worlds, about which we, as individuals, may have had many stereotypes.

We consider individual internships and stays abroad to be formative experiences that we can facilitate as an organization working with at-risk youth. Young people often find themselves alone abroad for the first time, dependent on their ability to communicate in another language, move and navigate in a foreign environment, and organize their time. It is a challenge that, if managed well, contributes to strengthening a young person's self-confidence and promotes a positive self-image.

The mobility was realized as part of the *ROMAS: Roma Students and Artists for Society* project, which connects young people from the Czech Republic (Gendalos Educational Program), Slovakia (Divé maky) and Hungary (Subjective Values Foundation) and motivates them to express what they find important in social relations and society through art and creativity.

The main organization behind the project is the Gendalos Educational Program, which accompanies students every step of the way to their education and dream jobs. We help them and their families to overcome the daily challenges they face – from lacking school supplies, coping with the stress of entrance exams to preparing for high school graduation. With support, the young people discover what they excel at and who they want to be one day. They grow into committed and confident people who are determined to do their best and contribute to a better world around them.

Methodology

The following chapters contain six case studies of Roma students from different countries who went on foreign exchange stays as part of the ROMAS project. International mobilities are a source of significant development for the participants. We, therefore, want to capture them in a way that helps identify elements that will be applicable to similar work with young people. International mobilities of Roma youth are very rare due to the various barriers these young people face. Thus, the case studies seek to capture the unique international experience of Roma participants to try and enable a better understanding of how socially disadvantaged young people feel, what they experience, how they perceive this experience, how they develop, and what their resources are for resilience to stressful situations. The collection of case studies also serves as good practice, showing which aspects of the stays abroad work well or where there is room for improvement.

The case studies are based on interviews with these six young people. The interviews took place between November 2022 and March 2023, after the students had returned from their foreign exchange stays. Two students were interviewed for each participating country (Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary). The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner; a pre-prepared set of questions allowed all of the main topics to be answered, while at the same time, the interviews were not restricted from veering into other interesting topics.

The interview transcripts were then utilized as a source for crafting individual participant stories, or case studies. The case studies do not attempt to be comprehensive biographies of these young people; they do not include all aspects of their lives. We focused primarily on three main areas relevant to the ROMAS project: the **aspirations, experiences and skills** of the young people, the **international mobilities** and the area of **Roma life experience, identity and community**.

All six interviews and the stories based on them are evaluated as a whole in the final analysis, which aims to highlight the main findings of the case studies. It highlights recurring patterns and statements in the interviews or, conversely, interesting differences between them. In particular, the analysis focuses on the respondents' studies and life aspirations, on the evaluation of their internships abroad, on the identification of their resources to overcome various barriers and fears, and on the way young people think about their own and foreign communities, as well as about various social issues.



Stories of participants

Petr



Petr is a student of economics and management at Mendel University in Brno. He is twenty-one years old. He is very satisfied in his field of study. Apart from his studies he also has an internship with Komerční banka (Société Générale) and is actively involved in the activities of IQ Roma Servis, either by attending its various events or by tutoring English for primary and secondary school students. In the free time he has left (which, as he says, is not much), he also likes to procrastinate sometimes, for example by watching TV series.

Petr has a long-lasting interest in politics. He thinks that politicians do not care about young people, so in return, young people do not care about politics. That's why he decided to start the *Bud' slyšet (Be Heard)* campaign, which he has been intensively working on lately. As part of this campaign, he has been conducting interviews with politicians and presidential candidates and trying to increase the election voter turnout of young people not only from the Roma community. In the future, Petr would like to further focus on the field of economics and on helping the Roma community. One concrete wish of his is to increase the financial literacy of Roma youth.

Petr has substantial experience with foreign exchange stays. Thanks to various organizations and scholarship programs, he has already been to countries such as Belgium, Spain, England, Germany, and the US – he was selected for an internship by the American Embassy. Petr does not doubt the benefits of the stays: „It always gives me so much. Also, the people I meet there. In addition, it's really nice to compare things, for example, my Czech background with the culture of other countries, or to compare other countries with each other. It always enriches me.“

Even when abroad, Petr does not lose touch with his own roots and community. While on his trips, he was often interested in topics connected to the Roma people and their position in local societies. During his mobility in Hungary, he reflected on the differences between the life experiences of Roma in Hungary and in the Czech Republic and the state of the *Olah culture*² in these countries. Petr tries to share his experiences and impressions from the stays with the people back home: „Every time I go, I definitely take something from it and then pass the experience on.“ A source of great inspiration for Petr were also the peers and friends he met at the mobilities. In Malta, for example, they helped him to shape the form of his campaign. To this day, Petr still keeps in touch with many of the friends he met during his stays.

Another benefit of attending the foreign exchange stays for Petr is the fact that he got more used to speaking English: “During my first stay in Belgium, I began to understand that I don’t have to feel ashamed when I speak English, and that it is OK to make some mistakes. From that point, my English has kept improving, and now I even tutor it. I don’t feel so ashamed about my English anymore, and even if I make a mistake from time to time, I don’t really care.” This is also an attitude he tries to pass on to others. About his tutoring, he says: „I enjoy it. I think it’s nice to give something back to my community. I think of it as helping others, too.“ Petr also talks about how the mobilities have made him more independent, and that each trip abroad has definitely pushed him further.

Petr also sees his latest stay in Budapest very positively. He enjoyed getting a glimpse into the workings of the Subjective Values Foundation and comparing it to the activities of IQ Roma Servis. He also got acquainted with



Photos of Petr and the Czech president Pavel within the Be Heard! campaign and Petr in the European Parliament.

the situation of Roma in Hungary, and attended a workshop on the ethics of photography, which he found very interesting. According to Petr, Budapest has its beauty, and he also discovered that Hungarian cuisine is much closer to Roma cuisine than he had previously thought.

When reflecting on why some of his peers don't take advantage of the opportunities to participate in *foreign exchange stays*³, Petr mentions that they or their families might be afraid of the unknown, or that they might not have good enough English to handle such an internship. But Petr hopes that as many people as possible will overcome these fears and take advantage of the opportunities, which he says are many. He himself tries to motivate other students to go for it: "I have talked many times at many meetings about my experiences from abroad, where I told my peers to make use of their opportunities to go abroad for a stay as well."

Petr's family is very supportive of his many activities and pushes him to study. Ever since he began studying at university, he has become more independent, but he still feels pressure from his family to keep up his studies. Despite some initial caution, his parents have always supported Petr to participate in foreign exchange stays. And now, with all of his experience, his family is not afraid for Petr anymore. Petr realizes the importance of this support and appreciates it very much: „I have to say that I often hear from people that they don't have that kind of support from their family. I guess I'm actually lucky that my family supports me like this."

1 Civic engagement

Being an engaged citizen means to be actively participating in social and political events and not being indifferent to things that affect us and our society. Civic engagement can take many forms, from participating in social and cultural events, discussions, and protests, to volunteering, voting, joining various organizations or groups, creating your own socially beneficial projects, and much more.

2 The Olah Roma

The Olah Roma are one of the subgroups of the Roma people. They came to Central Europe from the Romanian principality of Wallachia in the middle of the 19th century. Approximately 25,000 Olah Roma live in the Czech territory. They have their own dialect and other cultural differences.

3 International mobilities and other stays abroad

Going abroad even for a longer stay is now easier than ever before. Erasmus+ is the most well-known program for international mobilities, the ROMAS project was carried out within Erasmus+ as well. With the Erasmus+ program, any young person can travel abroad for varying lengths of time, and the program usually covers the full cost of travel, accommodation, food, and health insurance and sometimes even gives participants extra allowance. Other options are the European Solidarity Corps, which allows anyone aged 18 to 30 to go abroad, other scholarship offers (youth exchanges and training), and various forms of work and travel programs.



Kája

Kája is a nineteen-year-old student of social work in Brno. She has a younger sister who also cooperates with IQ Roma Servis. She says that throughout her life, her attitude towards studying has not changed very much – she has always perceived school as a place where she simply must be going. But at the same time, she says that she cannot imagine not going to high school and does not understand those who decide to sit at home and be dependent on other people after the compulsory nine years at school. She feels it is important for her to finish high school, which should happen in the spring of 2023. After that, she would like to enroll in the Social Pedagogy program at Masaryk University in Brno. She is also not opposed to other fields related to pedagogy or social work, as she has always enjoyed communicating with people. Among other options, she is considering working in a kindergarten in the future.

Currently, her hobby is watching movies and series of various genres. Although she mostly watches movies in Czech, she says that some foreign movies have such bad dubbing that it is better to watch them in the original and practice the foreign language.

Kája recalls that when students from IQ Roma Servis were first offered the opportunity to go on a foreign exchange stay, many of them were excited about it. However, surprisingly only a few of them ended up going. Kája,



*Kája during her stay
in Bratislava.*

on the other hand, says about herself that since she was a little child, she always took everything head-on and always had to be „everywhere where something was happening“. For this reason, she decided to go for several days to Budapest, where she spent time with students from Hungary and Slovakia. She also went to a camp and took an individual internship in Bratislava. She perceives these as outstanding opportunities which would be a shame not to take advantage of: „To travel somewhere for a week with everything taken care of and also to learn new stuff in the process, you don't just get that every day.“ She enjoys when she is allowed to co-create and participate in the daily program and pick the places she wants to visit herself. However, so far, she does not dare to go abroad for more than two weeks and avoids traveling by plane, which she is afraid of.

Because Kája feels that she doesn't speak English very well, she welcomed the opportunity to go to Slovakia also because she could speak Czech there and be easily understood. She was also reassured by the thought that if anything were to happen, she could easily get back to Brno from the neighboring countries.

At first, Kája's parents were worried about her before she left for abroad. However, she didn't allow that to discourage her, even though she herself did not know what to expect: „Going to Budapest, I roughly knew how it was going to be, but when I went to Slovakia alone, I didn't really know what I was getting into. I just knew it was going to be fun, that's all. I couldn't imagine what was going to happen there, but what I ended up experiencing was really worth it. It was indescribable experience.“ In addition to her parents' worries, Kája had to overcome other obstacles before leaving, and at one point it even looked like she wouldn't be able to go. But in the end, she was not discouraged and successfully set off for the stay.

During her mobility in Bratislava, Kája realized that both positive and negative *prejudices*⁴ about Slovakia exist among people from the Czech Republic. Thanks to her stay, she was able to form her own opinion about Slovakia

and its culture. As part of her project, she met Roma people in Slovakia, found out what their dreams were, and wrote down their stories. She concluded that Roma people have a lot in common, no matter what country they live in. She also visited, among other places, the Roma settlement in Plavecký Štvrtok, a place she says she would probably not get to visit on her own. The story that stuck in her mind the most was that of a girl who had successfully completed high school but still felt strongly connected to the settlement: „She just did what she felt was right. When I asked her if she wanted a change, she said she couldn't leave the settlement and live somewhere else. That she was just so used to it.“

Kája also shared a story of how she managed to meet and take a photo with a popular female Slovak influencer in Bratislava. Thanks to this experience, she confirmed to herself that people are often completely different in person than how they present themselves on social media.

During her stay, Kája says she met a lot of great people who positively influenced her view of the world and with whom she has a lot of fun memories: „It's unforgettable, it's really literally unforgettable what you can experience there. Like when they were sending us to sleep and we were running away. We always went to bed late. There's nothing you can do when they're playing music and when they're singing.“ She is still in contact with some of these people to this day. She considers these cross-border relationships special also because of the rarity of meeting in person: „We don't really get the chance to see each other more times a year, we only get the chance once a year. And maybe that's what makes it different.“

Kája realizes that she is now more independent thanks to the foreign exchange stays. She says that if she ever has the opportunity to go somewhere again, she will gladly take it, despite a possible language barrier that would make communication harder. In the future, she would like to see London, Paris, and Amsterdam, or enjoy a holiday in Bali. She would like to pass on her experiences from abroad to other students and, if she had the chance, talk to them about why she thinks it is a good idea to undergo such an experience. To those who still can't decide whether to go abroad for a stay or not, she says the following: „They shouldn't hesitate. At least they will get to know themselves more, what they can do and what they are good at.“

4 Prejudice

Prejudice is a strongly rooted opinion that is not based on true knowledge of reality but on mere assumptions. Prejudice can be very harmful if it somehow pre-judges other people based on their membership (real or perceived) in a particular group or category of people. Thus, prejudice can be an unjust negative opinion about members of ethnic minorities or people with different political views, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, physical ability, occupation, and so on.



Janka

Janka is a 20-year-old student in her final year at a bilingual high school in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. Despite her original interest in chemistry and physics, she is now mostly focused on languages and history. After high school, she is considering studying law, Roma studies, or ethnology. In any case, she already knows that she wants to work with people. She is also tempted by the option of starting her own publishing house, as it seems to her that the existing big publishers in Slovakia do not provide sufficient space for emerging and lesser-known authors.

In her free time, she enjoys reading, painting, and photography. She also likes to spend time with her friends. Overall, she tries to get actively involved in the Roma community as much as possible. Janka works as a *volunteer*⁵ counselor for Roma children who are adopted into non-Roma families: “We mostly work with these children because they came into their new families at a very young age. Sometimes they don’t even know they are Roma, and we prepare them for the fact that one day someone will tell the child that he or she is a Gypsy, or that they will laugh at them, or point out that they are different from their parents. At the same time, we teach these children to find their way back to the Roma community – for example, by listening to Roma songs together, watching Roma films, or using Roma expressions in conversation with them. We try to connect the two worlds and make the

children feel comfortable in both of them. At the same time, we also work with their adoptive parents when they have questions.”

She is also a scholarship recipient of the Divé Maky organization, where she prepares a program for the Roma festival in Bratislava every summer: “I am a part of the theatre section. We usually prepare a half-hour performance with a Roma theme, for example about Roma history, to educate the majority population.”

Janka has already been to several foreign exchange stays. At the age of fifteen she spent a month in Spain and at seventeen she went to the USA for a year, where she studied at a local high school. In addition, she has been on shorter week-long mobilities in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Within the ROMAS project, she went to Hungary for a one-week stay. Her main focus was on comparing the Slovak and Hungarian Roma communities, interviewing local Roma, and taking photographs. But her goal was also to get to know Budapest more because she says she loves traveling and getting to know other cultures. When visiting several Roma families in the area near Debrecen, Janka was surprised to find out that for several reasons, the Roma culture in this place is not as actively preserved as she is used to seeing at home in Slovakia: „In Slovakia, it is common to have Roma festivals and summer camps, there is a Roma folklore ensemble, but here in Hungary I perceived the situation completely differently.” She was also surprised that Roma communities in Hungary are not very widespread throughout the country, that they are rather concentrated in certain localities. Overall, she took away from her experiences abroad that „Roma communities always deal with the same problems, and it doesn't matter what kind of Roma they are, whether they are Olah or different. There is always *racism*⁶ and there are always people who want to mark others off and who want to be better than somebody else.”

Janka did not manage to finish her project while at the stay, and she thinks it would be better if she had started preparing the interviews earlier before the trip. Now she plans to continue the project by writing articles from the interviews with Hungarian Roma, which she would gradually publish on her blog, along with the photos she took. This whole form of expressing herself is new for Janka. She has written articles for the media before, but she has never published them herself, nor has she written directly about her experience. She says the whole project has definitely given her a lot of space for self-realization: “I always wanted to use photography and write in this way, and in Budapest, I had the chance to do it. So, we'll see what comes of it when I finish it.”



Janka and Petr during their internship in Budapest.

When asked if she met any inspiring people during her mobility, Janka replied: „The most inspiring was one of the Roma families I interviewed during my stay. That’s when I truly realized that there are poor people who really need help and there is no one who will give it to them. If Istvan (social worker in Hajdúszovát, ed. note) hadn’t been there, I don’t know how things would have turned out for them. It’s already bad enough and I can’t imagine what they would do without help. Yet they love each other, they still try and the husband still goes to work. Even for the interview he came directly from work. They also talked about the health problems their children have, and what problems their mom had during pregnancy. They were inspiring to me, the love they have for each other despite all the bad circumstances.“

She had many more memorable experiences during her stay, such as a boat trip, a drive through a large part of Hungary, and a tour of Budapest, where she visited the House of Terror Museum, which contains exhibitions related to the fascist and communist regimes in Hungary. Janka appreciates that the program was flexible and she could decide which activities she wanted to participate in or what she wanted to change. Her only complaint is that one day the daily program was not clear in advance, but otherwise she said that everything went very well during the internship.

Janka also enjoyed the fact that she could speak English a lot during the mobility. Even though she was already fluent in English before, she was using a lot of professional and academic terms in Hungary, which took her English a step further. She is also glad that she met new people during her stay whom she will be able to contact again any time. Knowing people from abroad is overall very important for Janka: „I like their perspective very much; they often see a lot of things in a completely different way than me. I really enjoy comparing things with them and also finding similarities. As advanced as their country may be, in the end, we all have to tackle the same problems.“ Another advantage for her is that since she now has friends in many different countries, she can visit them at any time and maybe even stay overnight at their homes, and therefore feel more at home in a foreign country.

In conclusion, Janka tells her peers: „You should definitely go on a foreign exchange stay. It’s an amazing experience and in part, it’s also a vacation. You get to see all the tourist places and meet new people. And if the stay is focused on something you really like, you’ll have an absolutely amazing time.“

5 Volunteering

Volunteering consists of carrying out a socially beneficial activity without the entitlement to a financial reward. For the volunteer, the value in the work done usually lies in the knowledge that they are doing something meaningful and needed. This could for example be helping other people, improving the environment, or advocating for change in a particular area. Volunteering can take place within non-profit organizations, but also outside of them.

6 Racism

Racism is a form of discrimination that is characterized by prejudiced attitudes towards individuals or groups on the basis of their race or ethnic origin. This attitude is often based on prejudice and stereotyping. It can take various forms, from racism at a personal level to racism rooted in society-wide structures – structural and institutional racism. Racism leads to inequality and marginalization of racial and ethnic minorities and is contrary to the principle of equality and human rights.





Majo

Majo is a nineteen-year-old freshman student of Slovak language and literature in combination with aesthetics at the University of Prešov Faculty of Arts. He has a strong passion for writing, which he says is mostly inspired by everyday life. He mostly writes poetry, but he is also trying to write short stories.

He also has a fondness for teaching. In addition to his studies, he also works with Roma children. When asked how he developed this interest, he replies: „When I was reviewing books for a book club, they offered me a position as an animator at their summer children’s university. And I didn’t know then that these were children from marginalized localities who lived in segregated areas and who were very little. These were kids up to about seven, or eight years of age. I spent a week there with them, and I thought at the time that it was nice, and that I could do something more to help. And eventually, the work with the kids grew on me so much that I decided to study teaching.“

Therefore, in the future Majo would like to either write or teach, and as he says, „If I do both at the same time, that would only be a big plus.“ At the moment, he also has a job at the Radio and Television of Slovakia, where he works as an external editor.

Majo’s stay in Brno within the ROMAS project was not his first stay abroad. He had previously been on Erasmus in Toulouse, France, in Prague as a young delegate at the EU Youth Dialogue conference, and in Brussels to intern with a Slovak member of the European parliament. While on his stay in Brno, Majo wrote poems about homelessness and racism as a form of making *engaged art*⁷. These poems were then printed, laminated, and hung up in appropriate public places in Brno. The project was a success, and Majo said he later even received photos of passers-by looking at and reading the exhibited poems.

This was the first time Majo had tried this way of spreading his work, he got the idea during his stay in Brno. And since he sees that it generated a good response, he is considering continuing this form of publishing poetry in Slovakia as well. The focus of these poems was also new for him: “The stay was enriching for me in the sense of discovering that *anti-discrimination poetry*⁸ is also good, and that I might write more of it in the future. So, I found that I don’t just have to write about some feelings and experiences, but that there are topics that I work with that are very alive for me and that I can translate into poetic language.”

Overall, Majo enjoyed his stay in Brno very much and the city has grown close to his heart: “I was amazed by all of it. It was very nice.” For example, he liked the local street art, which he says goes beyond the „ugly graffiti“ he is used to seeing in other cities. He also liked the fact that Brno seemed quite multicultural. During his stay, he experienced many different things, for example, he visited the Museum of Roma Culture, the Observatory, and the old penitentiary, where he attended a jazz concert. He also got a glimpse into the workings of the IQ Roma Servis organization, where he enjoyed seeing „what kind of activities are happening and what are all the different things they are thinking of”.

Majo met a number of interesting people in Brno, he emphasizes a very inspiring meeting with musician Gejza Horváth: „I work with children who live in segregated and poor conditions. Mr. Gejza is also from eastern Slovakia and grew up in a similar environment. He worked on himself and today I dare to say he is quite a well-known artist, and musician. So I tell the children that it doesn’t matter what is around you, but what is inside you. And that you need to work on yourself and keep layering new knowledge and experience and sooner or later the result will come.” Overall, Majo tries to pass on his experiences from the trips to others, so that they can be an inspiration for his community and students as well. „I like to come back with an idea or a thought, which we then work on so that it has an impact on the community, on the children, and then it helps them to develop further.”

He was not only inspired by specific people in Brno, but also by the life of the local Roma community: „I was definitely influenced by Brnox, that is, the part of Brno where the Roma community lives. It more or less confirmed my belief that Roma people are – I don’t want to say that they are the same everywhere – but that they are often very open in a positive sense. My peer at the stay in Brno was doing interviews, where it was necessary to do photo documentation. And the people were very willing to talk, to let her take pictures and stuff, so I left with a very nice feeling that really people are not bad.”

Not only in Brno, but also on his previous stays, Majo made a lot of friends living in different countries, and he is still in contact with some of them. Such relationships are very important for him, not only because of the opportunity to practice English with them: „For me, it is important to have relation-



Obrovský vesmír,
mily milióny hviezd,
nespočet planét,
a jeden jediný svet,
Rôznorodosť tak rozmanitá,
až mám pocit,
že jedna planéta je málo.
Celý vesmír by som chcel
iba pre všetkých,
ktorých nazývate inými...
dávajú mimu šablóny,
kultúru, umenie,
a vy ho nemilosrdne beriete im...
dávajú mu život,
Ja potrebujem ďalší vesmír,
kde nájdem silu
na vyrovnanie sa
všetkým rasizmom,
ktorý drví moju dušu.



Majo hanging his poems
in the streets of Brno.

ships with people living outside Slovakia, perhaps even for the purpose of comparing different countries, and understanding what works or doesn't work in each place. Sometimes it opens my eyes that things are never so bad that it couldn't be worse."

Majo's family always supported him in his trips and stays, despite the fact that they sometimes did not see Majo for quite a long time. He also finds understanding among his friends who, like his family, are interested in what Majo does on his stays, what topics and activities he pursues, and what places he manages to travel to.

Majo also appreciates the fact that he had enough time and space for self-realization during his internship in Brno: „Self-realization during this project was extremely necessary for me. We had a lot of free time to work on whatever we wanted. For example, an IQRS worker showed us around his university, or different parks and places where we could go and think quietly. The space for self-development was really nice. And there was plenty of it.“

Overall, Majo would recommend going to a similar stay to his peers. „I find it useful to get out of one's comfort zone, to not be at home, but in an unfamiliar environment, meeting new people who can give you something interesting.“ He also recommends that students should be as stress-free as possible about going to international mobilities and that they should go with an open mind: „They would not be on a stay only for one reason. For example, I knew I wasn't going to Brno just to do engaged art, but also to see a new city and experience something interesting that I hadn't experienced before. They should be excited to see something, not to stay stuck inside, but to go out and see what the city has to offer.“

7 Engaged Art

It is a form of art that, in addition to the goal of artistic expression, adds another goal – to have a certain critical effect on the surrounding society, to challenge or address it in some way. It is therefore a combination of art and activism that is meant to inspire debate, to promote social or political change, or to connect groups that are otherwise far apart. Depending on the intention and preferences of the artist, engaged art can take very different forms, from classical art forms to modern and experimental forms. It can also be presented in very different spaces to very different groups – from well-known galleries to cultural and social events, to streets and other public and non-public spaces.

8 Anti-discrimination poetry

Discrimination is one of the most common forms of human rights violations. It consists of treating someone differently, in a worse way, simply because they are a member (or are perceived to be a member) of a particular group or category of people. The basis for discrimination is therefore usually a person's actual or perceived identity or a certain part of it. Anti-discrimination poetry is a response to discrimination; it is one of many forms of engaged art. It aims to draw attention to discrimination and thus fight against it.



Debi

Debi studies Communication and Media at the János Kodolányi University in Budapest, she is twenty-seven years old. She originally comes from Hajdúhadház, which is a town near Debrecen. When she has the time, Debi always likes to return there to be with her family. Overall, she has a very good relationship with her family and says that she had a good childhood in a healthy environment.

Alongside her studies, she is also doing an internship at Romaversitas, which is an NGO focused on supporting talented Roma youth in Hungary. When it comes to her professional goals, she is taking her time to figure out what exactly she wants to focus on. As she says: "I think it is very difficult to find a job which will fit your personality and which you will love to do, and of course you also have to think about making enough money so you don't starve. So I would rather spend years figuring out what exactly I want to do, rather than to spend my life in a job I don't even like." So far, she knows that she likes writing, and she is also interested in the NGO sector, so she

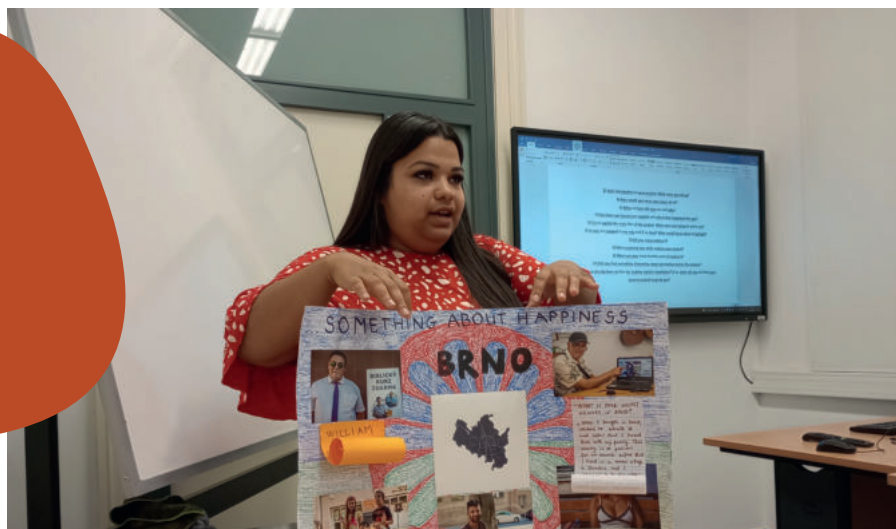
can imagine herself focusing further on these two areas. In her free time, she likes to be with her family or friends. She also likes reading, watching movies, and going to museums and theaters.

Debi took part in the ROMAS project, within which she went for an internship in Brno, because, as she says: "I'm always interested in doing new things, and I like to be around people. I really like making new friends, I like speaking English, and I was curious what this program was all about. It was pushing me out of my comfort zone and I was also a bit afraid that I might not fit in with the group or that they might not accept me, so at first, I was hesitant to go. But everybody told me that it will be OK, it will also be like a small vacation for me, I will meet new people... So yes, these were some of the main motivations for me to go." In the end, overcoming her doubts and fears definitely paid off for Debi. She says that she does not regret going to Brno at all, and that she feels very enriched by the experience. "I would definitely do one of these internships again. And I highly recommend it to other people as well."

In Brno she worked on her project, which focused on people living in socially excluded localities in Brno and aimed to illustrate what makes them happy in their lives. Debi wanted to express that although people from these localities often live in substandard conditions, this does not necessarily mean that they are generally unhappy. She interviewed people she met in the streets, took pictures of them, and also created a poster for the project. Overall, she says she really enjoyed doing the project. She is also glad that she tried a new way of expressing herself, as she had never interviewed people before. One of the interviews that particularly stood out for her was the one she made with the musician Gejza Horváth: "I did it in a very simple way, but he really liked it and even thanked me. He said he was very grateful for this interview because I asked questions that no one had asked him before. So that was a big highlight of the whole stay for me."

When talking about Brno, she says she was feeling good around the people she spent time with, while she had mixed feelings about the city itself: "There was too much concrete in the city for me. Honestly, I didn't like the atmosphere of the city, but the people I met made it beautiful. We would always go to Gendalos for breakfast and talk and they really made the experience. I felt really comfortable and accepted with them."

Debi also mentioned some things that did not suit her during her internship, for example, she would have preferred to have more time to complete her project. But in the end, she managed to finish it and she is very happy with the outcome. Besides that, she also said: "At the time when I was in Brno, it was really hot there, we walked too much and the city was too hilly for such hot weather. I would prefer to go by public transport in these conditions – one thing you should know about me is that I get angry when I'm hot. It also bothered me a bit that everybody from the group always wanted to go to vegetarian restaurants all the time, but I like meat. But after all



Debi with a Gendalos student and with her project during her internship in Brno.

I also ate vegetarian and I survived, so I didn't have that much of a problem with it. And after I told them, they took me to some restaurants where I could have meat as well. But other than this, I can't tell you any other negatives of the internship, most things went really well."

After Debi saw Brno's *excluded localities*⁹ and compared the situation with Hungary, she got the unfortunate feeling that the non-acceptance of Roma people is just as common in the Czech Republic as it is in Hungary. However, she also has a more positive thing to say about the situation of Roma people living all around the world: "All of the Roma people – it doesn't matter whether you are from the Roma community in Hungary, Slovakia, the United States, Sweden, or anywhere else – share the same Roma anthem, flag, and language. We just don't have a country. So, when you talk to a Roma person, even if they are from a different country than you, you still feel some kind of bond."

9 Excluded localities (social and spatial exclusion)

Socially excluded people and groups are very often concentrated in certain areas, which creates so-called socially excluded localities. Socially and spatially excluded people generally live in stigmatized parts of the city, in substandard housing, and with inadequate access to common services. Residents of these areas tend to be exposed to many negative influences, such as poverty business, a significantly reduced chance of attending good schools, and finding good jobs or quality housing outside excluded areas.

Saci

Saci is twenty-four years old. For the last four years she has been attending a Waldorf teacher training course at the Waldorf Pedagogical Institute in Solymár, Hungary, now she is in her final year. In addition to studying, she also works – she sings in a band called Romano Glaszo. In her free time, she loves traveling – when she has enough time to do so. When she has less time, she likes reading romance books, watching Netflix, and taking care of her jewelry.

In the future, she would like to sing on stage as much as possible and make money by doing art. Later on in her life, she would like to keep singing and performing at least as a hobby and teach at the same time. She would also like to have at least one child, which she hopes would be manageable without having to give up singing and art. But as she says: “Obviously a nursing mother doesn’t go on a tour that much”.

As part of the ROMAS project, Saci traveled to Bratislava. Overall, she was really happy with the stay and the events she participated in: “Most of the program was related to art, but there was also a part which focused on social issues. I enjoyed it all very much. There was dance, music, learning to speak better in front of people, and going to concerts where we had a great time. I really liked everything. And it was also nice to meet new people.”



Saci and her band Romano Glaszo.

Compared to Budapest, Bratislava seemed much calmer to Saci. During her stay in Slovakia, she wasn't only in Bratislava, she also went to see a smaller village: "When we arrived in the village, we walked around a little and it was really nice, I loved it. The old buildings, the church, I think it was very beautiful. I really liked the atmosphere of the place, it felt like it was made for people to truly enjoy each other's company there." She also tried *halušky*, a traditional Slovakian dish, which she really enjoyed.

Saci's only regret is that according to her, her English is not good enough: "I've had a poor sense of language since I was a young child, which is a great pain for me. I always wonder why I've been given a life where I have the opportunity to travel so much and yet it's so difficult for me to learn a language. But always when I'm abroad, it's nice to see that no matter where we come from and what language we speak, we all know that we are human, and we understand each other when we try. And everybody was really nice to me, they helped me to communicate with others when I needed it."

Saci also found inspiration in Bratislava: "There was this little boy who was so brave – he had no problem singing and performing in a play in front of many people, I think he showed great courage". She also says that she felt inspired by many of the musicians she talked to within the program. And overall, Saci feels that while she was in Slovakia, she came in contact with many people who don't like to give up, which, as she says, felt very enriching for her. Saci also made some new friends during her stay, and she has even kept in touch with some of them after she returned home.

Overall, she feels that her experiences from abroad definitely shaped and affected the way she views her own life in her community and in Hungary. She thinks it is very important to travel to gain new perspectives on things that might otherwise be considered natural and not questioned. "I feel like Roma in Hungary experience more negativity than in some other countries. I also think that there is this atmosphere in Hungary, which is not healthy for anyone, no matter if they are Roma or not. A lot of people here put too much importance on being Hungarian above anything else, they have a very strong pride about it, which sometimes even leads to belittling others. And somehow, I feel that living a life and starting a family in such a country is not good and healthy." Because of these feelings, Saci is even thinking about moving to a different country.

Considering all the positive things she experienced during her stay in Slovakia, and also considering the realizations one might have when abroad, Saci would definitely recommend other students to participate in similar stays abroad. When asked what advice she would give them, she said: "Have courage. That's the most important thing."





**Analysis
of the stories**

Within the analytical part, we try to look at the stories as a whole and highlight the main findings of the case studies. We point out recurring patterns and statements in the interviews as well as observe the differences between them.

The analysis focuses mainly on the following areas:

- the young people's studies and life aspirations,
- evaluation of international mobilities and projects,
- internal and external resources to overcome various barriers and fears,
- the students' view of their own and other communities and of various social issues.

Studies, volunteering and future plans

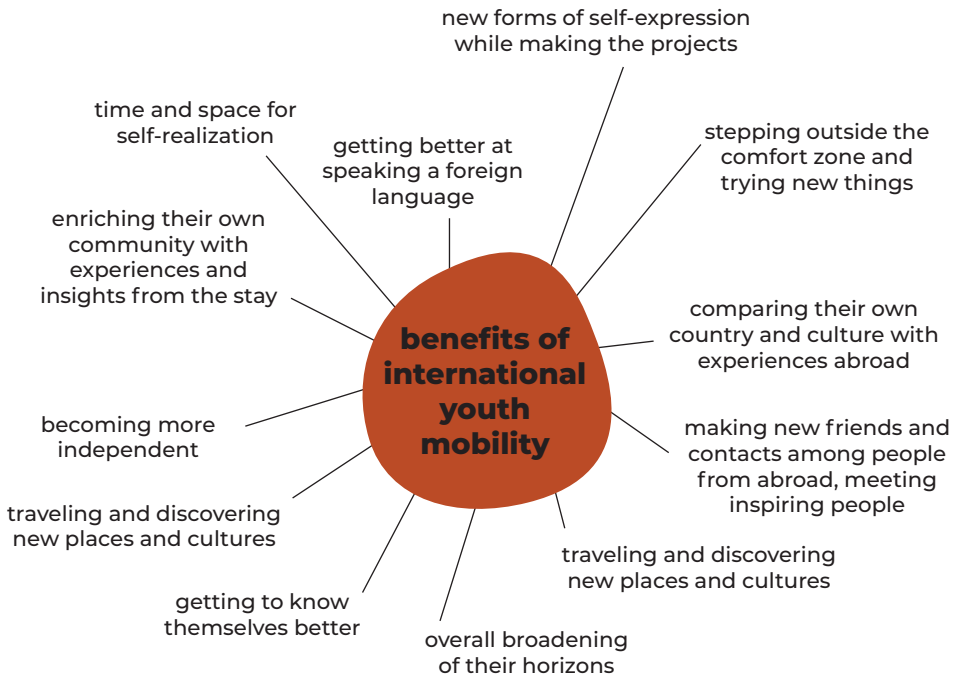
All of the young Roma men and women involved in the internships took part in the project when they were between 19 and 27 years old and were active in some form of education at the time – two students attend high school, three students study at university, and one student attends a Waldorf teacher training program.

Most of the participants are actively engaged in other activities besides their studies. Janka, Petr, Majo, and Debi are involved in various NGOs, either through volunteering, internships, or paid work. All four of them focus on working with Roma children and youth in these organizations, thus trying to help the Roma community in their cities. Saci, Majo, and Petr are also active outside the civic sector – Saci sings in the band Romano Glaszo, Majo works as an external editor for Radio and Television of Slovakia, and Petr is interning at Komerční banka (Société Générale).

A large part of all the interviews concerned the life aspirations of the young people and their plans for the future. All of them are thinking in depth at least about their future direction of study, if not directly about the specific goals they want to achieve in their lives. Some of their most ambitious plans include starting a publishing house (Janka), performing at concerts for a living (Saci), writing (Majo), or addressing important societal issues such as civic engagement of young people, segregation issues, or financial literacy (Petr). Kája and Debi are still looking for ways of self-realization, although it is clear from interviews with them that they often think about their future path and that one day they would like to do work that will be meaningful to them.

International mobilities

Most of the interviewees are quite well-traveled, some of them have already done many other foreign exchange stays. Participants see the benefits of the stays (including stays that were a part of the ROMAS project) in the following areas:



In addition to the abovementioned, Petr, Majo, and Saci also appreciate the program of the ROMAS stays abroad, during which they went to various workshops, concerts, museums, and other interesting places, and were able to get a glimpse into the work of local NGOs. Janka and Kája appreciated the flexibility of the program, as they could choose which activities to participate in, and which places they wanted to see.

In the interviews, there were also a few criticisms or suggestions for improving the internships. Janka and Debi did not have enough time to prepare their projects, they suggest that next time it would be better to start preparing projects before the trip or to have more time for their preparation during the stay. Majo, on the other hand, describes that there was a lot of free time during the internship to work on whatever they wanted. The remaining suggestions were rather minor in nature. Janka mentions that on one occasion the students were not clearly informed about the program for the following day; for Debi, a trip to the countryside in the extreme heat was challenging.

All the students talked about how they would definitely recommend a similar stay abroad to others. They would tell their peers, for example, to be brave when going abroad (Saci), not to hesitate and to go in order to get to know themselves better (Kája), to overcome their fears, and take advantage of the opportunities they have (Petr), and not to stress too much and go with an open mind (Majo).

Internal and external resources to overcome fears and barriers

For some of the participants, the trip abroad was not without problems or initial uncertainty. Kája, for example, mentions that she had to sort out some personal issues before departure which almost prevented her from going at all. But she did not let this discourage her and went abroad after all because she was able to stand up for her wishes: "I can say that until the last minute, I was not even sure whether I would go or not. But I always stand up for myself, and that's just the way it is." Debi, on the other hand, felt insecure about having to step out of her comfort zone before leaving and was also worried about not fitting in with the group. But in the end, her desire to try something new, meet new people, and practice her English prevailed. It also helped that she had the support of people close to her, who reassured her that her decision to go was the right one.

For Kája and Saci, their limited ability to communicate in a foreign language was also a reason for their uncertainty, but they both decided to face their insecurities. Even though Kája is not satisfied with her English, she would not hesitate to travel anywhere, because she says she can always communicate nonverbally using gestures and such. Saci was reassured by the fact that, despite the language barrier, people have always been helpful

and friendly to her abroad. She was also able to find help from friends or other people around who assisted her with communication.

Petr, Majo, and Janka – students who have been on a number of international mobilities in the past – did not mention any obstacles or uncertainty they may have experienced before their trip –the foreign language is not a barrier for them, either. The fact that this was not their first experience with staying abroad probably played a role in this, as they already knew exactly how to behave in such a situation. As they confirmed in the interviews, previous mobilities also helped them to speak better English.

In the interviews with the students, we found various resources that helped them to overcome their fears about going abroad. An example is the abovementioned previous experience with foreign stays – those students who had already been on a stay abroad before did not feel any discomfort now in the ROMAS project. Saci, Debi, and Majo were also encouraged by the feeling that people abroad are usually kind to them and will help them if needed. For Debi and Kája, their extroverted nature and their desire to experience new things outweighed their fears. For Majo, Petr, and Debi, the support they felt from their families was also an important resource.

With these identified resources, we can see what needs to be done when trying to get other students to go on international mobilities:

- motivate and support especially those young people who have never been on an international mobility before,
- support the language and communication skills of those who cannot speak a foreign language well enough,
- support those students who do not have a supportive family background or have other barriers preventing them from going abroad,
- encourage young people who do not think they have the appropriate aptitude or character for a stay abroad.

Projects of the students

One of the aims of the mobilities was to enable young people to realize their own ideas and to embody them through engaged art. Each of them had to think about the content and form of their project and then implement it with the support of the organizing team.

Most of the participants chose interviews as a base for their project, which they further used for different types of output – posters with photographs, reportage, article, as well as a photo project. Petr focused on the differences between the life experiences of Roma in Hungary and the Czech Republic and on the Olah culture in these countries. Debi worked on a project in which she asked people living in socially excluded localities in Brno what

makes them happy in their lives. Kája's project involved discussing dreams and wishes with Roma people in Bratislava, while Janka focused on comparing the Slovak and Hungarian Roma communities, interviewing Roma people in Hungary and taking photos. Only Majo chose a significantly different format, writing anti-discriminatory poetry about homelessness and racism.

Some of the projects were successfully realized, completed and presented. Some projects, however, remained only in a work-in-progress phase. Kája conducted and recorded several interviews during her internship, but after returning home she was so overwhelmed by other situations that she did not get to the final processing of the recordings. Janka, who also managed to conduct several interviews and take a set of photographs for them, speaks similarly about her project, but unlike Kája, she felt that there was little time to complete the project during her internship. Some of her photographs also could not be used because of the low quality caused by poor lighting conditions. Nevertheless, she would like to finish the project gradually and publish the resulting stories and photos on an online blog. Petr started to work on his project, but because he went to the internship as a last-minute substitute, he didn't have enough time to prepare the project, so in the end it didn't turn out as he wanted.

Majo and Debi brought their projects to a successful end. Majo wrote several poems about homelessness and racism during his internship, which he then printed, laminated, and put up in public spaces in Brno. The project was a success, and Majo said he even later received photos of passers-by looking at the poems and reading them. Overall, Majo has a good feeling about the project. He was pleased that his poems attracted attention in the city. He also appreciated the opportunity to try a new form of publishing his poetry and writing in a genre in which he had not written before. Majo would like to continue in a similar vein in the future, perhaps in another city.

Debi would have appreciated more time for her project, yet she still managed to finish it on time. Based on interviews with Roma people living in the so-called Bronx in Brno, she created a poster with photographs in which she presented answers to the question of what makes these people happy. Overall, Debi is also satisfied with her project and its creation process.

Roma communities and the world through the eyes of young people

Based on the interviews, we can compare how the participants view the situation of Roma people living in different countries. Debi sees similarities in the shared culture and history of the various Roma communities. According to Debi, these shared elements form a certain bond between Roma

from different countries, which establishes their closeness to each other. Majo observes that the Roma people he has met abroad were always very open and kind. Janka reflects that Roma people face similar problems and exclusion across borders: "They are always dealing with the same problems, and it doesn't matter what kind of Roma they are, whether they are Olah or other. There is always racism present and there is always somebody who wants to split people and who wants to be better than others."

In addition to shared elements across Roma communities from different regions, participants described how they perceived the differences between them. Petr and Janka compare their stay in Hungary with the conditions they know from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Petr says: „It seems like in Hungary, there has been more assimilation than here. It seemed to me that they had already lost a bit of their language and traditions. That was interesting compared to the Czech Republic“. Janka had a similar impression from her stay in Hungary. Saci, who lives in Hungary, thinks that Roma people there experience more condemnation and discrimination than in some other countries and that lately there is a growing intolerant atmosphere in the country, which has even led Saci to talk about her reluctance to start a family in such a society and about possible emigration from the country.

Most of the students mention that the importance of travel for them lies in the opportunity to compare life in different parts of the world, which allows them to see their own country and community from a new perspective. For Petr, Janka, and Saci, traveling abroad helped them to see their surroundings in a new way – they began to experience more belonging and similarity with people across cultures. Saci reflects: „Whenever I'm abroad, it's always nice to see that no matter where we come from or what language we speak, we all know that we are human beings, and if we make an effort, we will understand each other.“ Thanks to a trip to Poland, where she met Roma from Morocco, Janka realized that even though countries vary in their wealth and economy, they are still dealing with very similar problems. Similarly surprising to Petr was the fact that Brussels – in his mind a wealthy city – was struggling with poverty and homelessness. Kája also reflects on the stereotypes of her own community, describing that before her trip, she had heard many things about Slovakia and Slovak Roma which turned out not to be true.

Majo, Saci, and Kája took back from abroad the experience of meeting inspiring people, which helped to support their effort to never give up and not to succumb to negative influences from their surroundings. For Janka, the most inspiring experience was meeting a certain Roma family in Hungary: "That's when I truly realized that there are poor people who really need help and there is no one who will give it to them. If Istvan (social worker in Hajdúszovát, ed. note) hadn't been there, I don't know how things would have turned out for them. It's already bad enough and I can't imagine what they would do without help. Yet they love each other, they still try

and the husband still goes to work. Even for the interview he came directly from work. They also talked about the health problems their children have, what problems their mom had during her pregnancy. They were inspiring to me, the love they have for each other despite all the bad circumstances.”

Reflections of the organizers

Although the experiences of the participants are relevant in their own right and form the main part of the publication, the perspectives of the three organizers help us to see the mobilities in a broader context. Each of the organizers was the person responsible for the mobility implementation in the place of stay of the participants from abroad – Brno, Bratislava, and Budapest. As they spent the most time with the young people, they also have the greatest opportunity to reflect on the mobilities up close. We asked how the organizers assessed the fulfillment of the aims and purpose of the stays, what obstacles the team encountered, and how the preparation and communication with the participants and their families went.

Nikol

Mobility organizer in Brno (CZ) for Majo and Debi

We have set ourselves a lot of goals. We wanted the participants of the stays to step out of their everyday reality and try to venture into an unfamiliar environment. There, they were to be given a creative space to realize a committed artistic project. The interns who came to Brno were already quite mature personalities and had experience with such things, so they managed to complete their projects and created beautiful things. At the end of the stay, we read a series of positive ministories from Brno's excluded localities and put up poems in the streets, which also served as a source of inspiration.

But beyond this tangible goal, there are of course many other, longer-term ones. For students from the Roma community, foreign exchange stays are rather rare. That is why these mobilities, aimed directly at them, were all the more valuable. Thanks to the stays, they were able to meet other students from the community and share their experience. Of course, they also practiced communicating in a foreign language and learned about local cultural specifics. But the most important thing, in my opinion, is that they confirmed to themselves that even if they go abroad alone, they will definitely not feel alone and will come back with a positive outcome, enriched with new contacts and experiences. This is harder to evaluate, but I hope that these goals have also been largely fulfilled.

Probably the most challenging thing for us was to find participants at all. The students had gotten used to going to camps within the project, where they always go with a bigger group and probably feel more comfortab-

le than when they have to go to a foreign environment all by themselves. They were not used to this and were understandably scared of the idea. That's why it was also challenging to convince them of what the stays can actually give them.

Of course, we also struggled with time during the stays themselves. We wanted the participants to experience as much as possible, but eight days is a relatively short time to include the work on the project at the same time. So those eight days were quite intense for us and for the participants. But in retrospect I think that it's a good thing, and I believe that it's what they think as well.

When the project was being prepared, it was established that the stays would last eight days. On one hand, it would probably be useful to have at least a few extra days to let the students fully immerse themselves in creative work. But on the other hand, I think all of us commonly finish our work feeling that we would have done a better job if we had more time to do it, regardless of how much time we actually have. Plus, I worry that with each day added to the stay, the likelihood that someone would actually go would decrease. It's easier to go away for a week than for two, and a lot easier than for a month. That's why a week seems like the optimal start. And next time, maybe some of the students will dare to stay longer.

Even for a one week stay, however, intensive preparation was needed. We communicated with our foreign partners about the program so that we could best convey to the departing participants what they could prepare for. Before the stay, we organized an online call with the partner organizations so that in this way the participants could see those they would be spending time with on-site. We also had several meetings with the participants to prepare for the project they will be doing abroad. Precisely because of the time limit of the mobilities, it was necessary for the students to go abroad with at least some idea for the project.

The participants were over eighteen years of age, so communication with parents did not have to be as intense. Where necessary, we made calls to make sure they knew that the stays abroad were actually happening, what was going to happen during them, and where they could call if they could not reach their children. The parents were mostly appreciative of the fact that their children could go somewhere for a stay like this.

Sidi

Mobility organizer in Bratislava (SK) for Kája

The aim of the stays was to give the students a closer look at the functioning of the Divé Maky organization from its foundation to the present day. We also wanted to introduce them to the functioning of other organizations in Slovakia or to describe the institution of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities. Another goal was to connect the participants with new people, bring them new contacts, and help them learn about cultural differences and traditions.

Before the mobility, the participants had already come up with their own project that they wanted to realize during the internship. This brought them new competencies, experience in project management, planning, and organizing. The internship also allowed the participants to develop their independence, as they traveled unaccompanied and had to stay and move around in a foreign city on their own. From our point of view, the mobilities were a success. Not only the one held in Slovakia, but also the stays in the Czech Republic and Hungary. Our students were very enthusiastic and satisfied, they learned a lot, saw a lot, gained new contacts, and are now both involved in work with Roma children and youth.

The biggest problem for us in the Divé Maky organization was to fully devote ourselves to the participants during the week, as our staff capacity in the Bratislava office was only 3 people in the summer and at the time, we also needed to ensure the organization of the Summer Academy and work on other projects. However, we managed to partially solve this by hiring a new colleague for an internship during the summer, who accompanied the ROMAS participants everywhere and attended to them. The downside was that the intern herself was new and not so experienced.

A one-week stay was basically the maximum for our organization, because we could not devote more than a week to the students. We designed the program of the event to be varied and attractive for young people in particular. From a professional point of view, we focused on giving the participants the opportunity to get to know the functioning of more organizations in Slovakia that are dedicated to Roma children and youth, to see the work in communities and settlements in Slovakia, which is different from the Czech Republic, where Roma settlements are not such a big phenomenon. On the other hand, we wanted the young people to get to know Bratislava and Slovakia, so we prepared some leisure activities for them. From this point of view, there was limited space for the students to realize their projects.

We selected students who had already had experience living abroad and had been on an exchange trip in the past, as well as those who were proficient in English. Therefore, we did not have to prepare them for the mo-

bility in any extra way. The preparation consisted of two individual online meetings where we explained the conditions of the mobility, logistics, and organizational issues (arrival and departure, accommodation, etc.) We then had a joint online meeting with each participant with the organization they were sent to. Here they learned more about the objectives of the stay and had to think about the project they wanted to realize. We didn't have to deal with communication with family and parents, both participants were over 18 years old, they had already been abroad and their parents were already used to it and open to it.

Kriszti

Mobility organizer in Budapest (HU) for Janka and Petr

We wanted to organize a stay in which the participants would get a glimpse into the life and situation of the Roma people living in Hungary. We wanted to give them the opportunity to meet and talk to members of the community in person. In addition, our aim was to help the participants work on their own projects, to provide them with all the necessary information and opportunities, and also to support them in developing their independence when going abroad. It was a great pleasure for us that we were able to organize a trip to the regions where the young people got a little insight into the life outside the capital and met members of the Roma community living there.

The biggest challenge was when a student withdrew a few days before the start of the stay in Budapest and the Czech team had to look for a replacement. In the end, Petr arrived, for whom it was more intense, but also definitely meaningful.

As part of the preparation of our participant Debi, who was on a stay in the Czech Republic, we had two online calls. The first one was kind of a short introduction to the mobility, talking about the expectations of the student, and in the second one we talked with the host organization and discussed the program and details of the trip. Since Debi is an adult, there was no need to communicate with her family.



**Partner
organizations**

IQ Roma servis

IQ Roma Servis is a non-governmental organization founded in 1997 by a group of active Roma citizens in Brno, Czech Republic. It provides social services to people who are affected by or threatened by social exclusion. Most of them are people of Roma ethnicity. Its workers help more than 1,000 people every year in Brno, Břeclav, Vyškov, and other municipalities of the South Moravian Region.

The organization supports the possibilities, opportunities, and commitment of Roma men and women on their path to growth and social inclusion. It protects their rights and dignity within society.

IQ Roma Servis works with people of all age groups – from families with young children, to whom it offers preschool education, through older children and young people, who have the possibility to spend quality leisure time in the organization and cooperate in the education of themselves and others, to adults and families, who can address their life situation in the areas of housing, employment, and relationships.

The Gendalos Education Program of IQ Roma Servis supports Roma male and female students on their educational journey. It works with motivated young people, their parents, and their teachers to help the young people find a meaningful field of study, master all the challenges of high school or university and then find a good career. Through individual cooperation, it is possible to expand the potential of each student and respond to their needs. Through tutoring, preparation for entrance and final exams, language preparation, and the development of key competencies, the program helps students to complete their education successfully. Students in the program have the opportunity to apply for financial support from the Gendalos Scholarship Fund to help pay for necessary educational expenses. Last but not least, young people can participate in a number of group activities and meetings where they meet other students and guests both from the Roma community and the majority population.

The educational program cooperates with about 70-80 students per year, mainly from the South Moravian Region. Gendalos students are also involved in the running of the program and the whole organization – they volunteer, work as interns and tutors, run workshops at schools, and help organize campaigns and fundraising events. The program enables them to realize their ideas, for example, a campaign to increase youth participation in elections.

Divé Maky

Since 2005, the Slovak organization Divé Maky (Wild Poppies) has actively sought out and supported gifted Roma children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in developing their education and talent through its scholarship program. Through this program, the organization helps to shape the future of Roma children, improves their social status, and helps to create positive role models in their communities. It strives to ensure that its activities and presentations of talent and Roma culture help in building a successful generation of Roma.

Scholarship recipients are supported by donors who give a specific amount to a particular child to support his or her studies and talent development. It is a simple way of providing support that allows transparent and efficient use of financial resources. Currently, 38 students are enrolled in the Divé Maky Scholarship Program.

Divé Maky organizes many different educational and cultural activities, events, and projects. The main ones are the Summer Academy, the Gypsy Bashavel (Cigánsky bašavel) festival, and various art workshops. The Summer Academy is organized every year for the Divé Maky scholarship holders, who have the opportunity to develop their skills and talents in collaboration with well-known artists. The results of the Summer Academy are then presented to the general public at the Gypsy Bashavel Festival, an international one-day festival of Roma art and culture that Divé Maky has been organizing since 2009.

Subjective Values Foundation (Szubjektív Értékek Alapítvány)

Subjective Values Foundation was founded in 2002. The primary goal of its founder was to highlight racism and discrimination in Hungary. Today, it provides opportunities for young people to realize their creative ideas that highlight cultural diversity. The organization also supports students from disadvantaged backgrounds and promotes their social inclusion, resolving conflicts arising from inequalities, creating a sustainable society, and promoting European ideas in Hungary. It promotes civic participation and active involvement in the democratic processes.

Subjective Values Foundation works with non-profit and other organizations across Europe and is actively involved in international projects in the field of education and personal development of young people.



Conclusion

The aim of this publication was to present the experiences of six young people who went on a foreign exchange stay within the *ROMAS: Roma Students and Artists for Society* project and to highlight the opportunities that these stays open up for the participants.

Petr, Kája, Janka, Majo, Debi, and Saci had the opportunity not only to get to know new cities, partner organizations, and interesting people but also to learn about themselves and try to realize their ideas and projects.

Foreign exchange stays, during which a person is mainly dependent on himself or herself, provide everyone with a space to get to know their strengths and areas for development. Although the participants involved in this project were given a helping hand by colleagues from partner organizations, they all found that they were able to take care of themselves and cope with situations they had not known before. Through the interviews, we also confirmed the idea that the fear of problematic communication abroad decreases with each trip and that people are able to understand each other even without perfect knowledge of a foreign language.

For all of the above-mentioned participants, the mobility was a unique opportunity to broaden their horizons. The fears and insecurities that individuals felt before the departure were always overcome by positive experiences. They all agreed that they would recommend a similar experience to other young people. It is starting to show that this type of experience allows young people to have a better idea of how to help their own community and be active in this direction themselves. This is also one of the reasons why projects targeting individuals at risk of social exclusion make sense. Apart from one's own commitment, the trust and support their social environment is also crucial.

We hope that the stories shared here will be a source of inspiration and encouragement for many other young people who want to travel but are hesitant to go abroad for some reason, and for youth workers who are wondering whether the effort invested in organizing these projects is worth it.



ROMAS

Roma Students
& Artists for Society