

SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF THE ROMA ETHNIC GROUP IN SELECTED AREAS UNDER STUDY IN THE EAST OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Abstract

According to the relevant estimates, there are around 1.5 million Roma in western Europe and more than 3 million in eastern Europe. The Roma in Europe are concentrated in two areas. Two minor Roma concentrations are located in south-western Europe, in Spain and France. The largest number of Roma are located in central and eastern Europe (Matlovič and Michaeli 2004; Matlovič 2005), where the concentration belt spreads from the Czech Republic (300,000) across the Slovak Republic (430,000), Hungary, Bulgaria (1.6 mil.), part of Ukraine, Romania (2.5 mil.), Macedonia and Croatia (500,000). In most European countries the Roma have adopted a settled way of life. Nomadic groups only exist in Spain, France, Great Britain and the Balkan Peninsula.

Key words: the Roma, quality of life, Slovak Republic.

INTRODUCTION

The Slovak Republic is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in central Europe. Information from the 2011 census shows that 17 different nationalities live in Slovakia. The Roma community is the second largest ethnic minority.

According to Horváthová (1964), the first appearance of Roma in the territory of what is modern day Slovakia, cannot be stated precisely. However, it can be assumed that in the first third of the 13th century a group of Roma came with King Andrew II to the territory of southern Slovakia. The first written document about the Roma in Slovakia is from the Spiš region from the year 1322.

The first accurate data on the number of Roma in Slovakia comes from the late 18th century. At that time, about 20,000 Romany people lived in Slovakia.

The Hungarian census of 1893 reports around 40,000 Romany people. The census of 1921, with questions related to mother tongue, showed that there were 8,035 Romany people in Slovakia. The following census conducted in 1930 recorded 31,188 people of Roma origin (Horváthová 1964). Other records of Roma populations were made after World War II. According to the first post-war census from 1947, there were 84,438 Roma in Slovakia, mainly concentrated in southern and eastern Slovakia. The nomadic Roma population (the Olah Roma) was the subject of a census in 1959. This census, legalized in 1958, was carried out because of a new law concerning the permanent settlement of nomadic people, and it identified 27,933 Romany people. During the years 1966-1968, a census of the Roma was carried out at a national level in Slovakia. This census identified 164,256 Romany people. According to records related to social welfare payments in 1989, there were 253,943 Roma in

Table 1 Development of the Roma population in Slovakia according to censuses, government records and other surveys in the years 1893-2004. Sources: Horvátová (1964), Vaňo (2001), Podolák (2000), Statistical Office of the SR (2000).

Year	1893	1921 ^a	1927	1930 ^a	1947	1970	1980
Number of Roma	36,231	7,284	62,192	30,626	84,438	159,275	199,853

Year	1989	1991 ^a	2001 ^b	2001 ^a	2004 ^c	2010 ^d	2011 ^a
Number of Roma	253,943	75,802	379,200	89,920	320,000	352,923	105,738

Notes: ^a data derived from censuses, others are from special records;

^b estimate according to B. Vaňo (2001);

^c data according to Jurásková et al. (2004);

^d estimate of the pre-research conducted for the planned update of the *Atlas of Roma communities* in 2004

Slovakia (however, this number includes only those Roma who were receiving a certain type of social support). The numbers of Roma based on censuses, government records, and other surveys are listed in Table 1 from Matlovičová et al. (2012).

Romany people represent a specific group of the population for several reasons. Specifically, this minority is of non-European origin and does not have a home state. The Roma population is very specific and in many cases it is a closed and separated community from the majority of the population. Moreover, within Roma communities, there are different levels of integration into mainstream society (Matlovič 2005). 51.3% of Romany people in Slovakia are integrated and spread around. The second, smaller group of Roma live in segregated rural or urban neighbourhoods, on the outskirts of towns/villages and in spatially separated settlements (Michaeli 2004).

Roma (1.97% of the total population; 107,210 people) are the most populous ethnic minority after the Hungarians (9.44% of the total population) in Slovakia (Statistical Yearbook of the SR, 2011). The changes in the registered Roma population were as follows: 100,069 Romany people (1.86%) lived in Slovakia in 2006; 101,960 (1.89%) in 2007; 104,034 (1.92%) in 2008, 105,681 (1.95%) in 2009; 107,210 (1.97%) in 2010 and 105,738 (2.00%) in 2011 (Statistical Yearbook of Slovak Republic 2007,

2008, 2009, 2010, 2011). However, it is estimated that actually 430,000 Romany people live in Slovakia. The highest number of the Roma population is concentrated in Prešov and Košice self-governing regions (according to official statistics, there are more than 60,000 people). This situation reflects the reluctance of the Roma to show their connection to any specific ethnic group. We assume they have made that decision voluntarily (Michaeli et al. 2003). If we compare the official number of people claiming Roma nationality with the populations of other ethnic minorities in the Slovak Republic, the Roma minority and its problems seem unimportant in our society (Michaeli et al. 2002).

INVESTIGATED TERRITORIES

A comprehensive geographical analysis of the Roma community in Slovakia was carried out on a national level. In several regions densely populated by Roma, only partial research was conducted. That is why a consistent mapping of these issues also needs to be carried out at the micro level. However, such research would be very time consuming. It would require detailed field research in Roma settlements and research across the Roma population scattered among the majority population. Consequently, such research would also require a large team of workers. The quality of life of the Roma was, and still is, influenced by many factors and circumstances. Based on our field research conducted in the

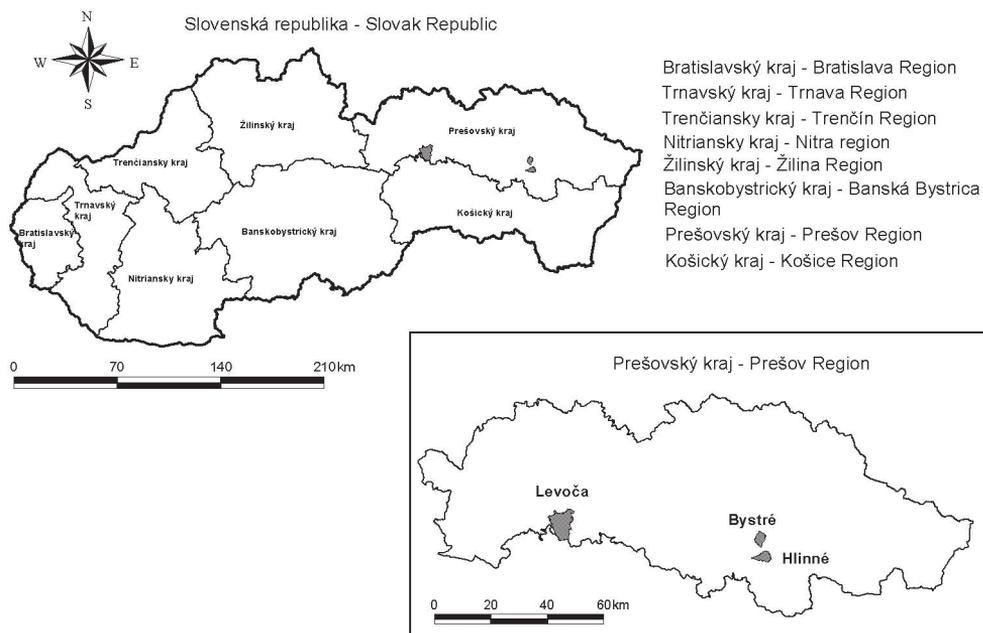


Figure 1 Researched areas.

selected areas under study of eastern Slovakia, the current quality of life of this ethnic group is very low. Detailed field research of the Roma communities was carried out in three places of the Prešov Region: two rural areas **Hlinné** and **Bystré** and one urban area **Levoča**.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the research was to gain a general idea of the community under study and of the quality of life in the selected areas under study. The research focused on demographic data, employment, educational and religious profile of population, the quality of the Roma families' housing, the behaviour of the Roma, and local infrastructure in the various areas. We assume that the quality of life in the selected areas is most significantly affected by the existing educational structure of the Roma minority. Education is currently one of the most important preconditions for a successful application in the labour market. Another important factor influencing the quality of life is poor quality housing.

METHODOLOGY

During the field research, which used a basic research method, we took into consideration the geographical nature of the site, the real number of the Roma population in the area, the number of Roma registered as Roma, the birth rate, the employment, educational and religious profile of population, the quality of housing, the behaviour of the Roma in the area and other factors. We used the following methods: geographic description of locations, geographical analysis, comparative method, statistical analyses, interviews, and surveys.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In terms of settlement type, area under study **Hlinné** is a separate Roma settlement located near the village of Hlinné. Between 1771 and 1773, two Roma families (each consisting of three members) lived in the settlement and were blacksmiths. In the year 1930 (census 1930 in Horvathová 1964), there were 67 Roma. Based on the census of 1991, there were 504 Romany people living in the settlement.

Table 2 Age structure of the Roma community in Hlinné (2008). Source: field research.

Category	Age group	Number of people	Share in %
Pre-productive age	0–14 Total	279	35.00
Productive age	15–54 Female	223	27.97
	15–59 Male	253	31.74
Post-productive age	55+ Female	32	4.00
	60+ Male	11	1.38
Total		798	100.00

In 2004 there were 797 Roma and in 2006 there were 824 people of Roma nationality (in 2010, 950 Romany people lived in the Roma settlement in Hlinné). Birth rates tend to rise and the natural increase in the settlement is about 8.5 times higher than in the majority population. The average age of the local Roma is 21.1 years. Generally, the Roma have a negative attitude towards education (Dubayová 2001), and this has its roots in the family environment. Education is considered to be unnecessary. It is common that in one school year about 50% of Roma pupils fail and 10% end compulsory education at the first stage of primary school. The biggest problems Roma children have are with behaviour, sanitation practices and communication (in most families the Romani language is used). Based on the questionnaire carried out in the settlement, the largest number of people achieved only a primary education and a significant part of the community did not provide any personal information about education.

The biggest problem for the community is the high unemployment rate. Most Roma women do not work. There are 223 women at a productive age; however, only 18 of them are employed. In total, there are 271 unemployed people in the settlement and 130 of them receive social welfare payments. A substantial proportion of Romany people have informal work (collection of recyclable materials, berry picking, occasional or illegal work). The life of the Roma in the settlement is also affected by

usury. Usury is a source of livelihood for 4-5 families, and they are the richest families in the community (Vravec 2005).

From the point of view of religion, most of the Romany people in Hlinné are Greek Catholics, as are the majority population. Approximately 3% of the Roma are Jehovah's Witnesses. It is an interesting part of the Roma community, different from the rest of the Roma.

The quality of housing was critical in the year 2008, when it was assessed during the field research (see Table 2). The dwellings of the Roma were divided into three categories: poor, adequate and above standard (Table 3).

Poor and inadequate dwellings are usually on land that is not their property, have only one or two rooms, are built of mud bricks, stones, and blocks, and are unfenced. The roofs are made of metal sheets, the houses are unpainted, the windows have no glass (instead of glass there is paper, plastic or cloth). The furniture is only basic and there is no bathroom, no toilet and no tap water. Cooking is done on a stove, which is also used for heating.

Adequate homes do not share the common characteristics of simple sheds. They are usually single-storey houses with several rooms and fences. Approximately 50% of these houses are built on

Table 3 Housing quality of the Roma community in Hlinné (2008). Source: Municipal recordings and field research.

Types of dwellings	Number of houses	Number of facilities	Number of members
Group 1: Poor	17	81	279
Group 2: Adequate	27	96	357
Group 3: Above standard	25	25	144
Outside the settlement	2	3	16
Total	71	208	797

their own land, but without a building permit. The building material is similar to that of inadequate houses, although the houses are painted and the windows are glazed. These houses are connected to the water supply system. Some are also connected to the sewage system. Stoves or tile stoves are used for heating.

Houses above standard are usually multi-storey buildings. Their exteriors and interiors are very similar to those of the majority population. These houses have a complete infrastructure, are built on the owners land and have obtained building permits. The owners also have a car. Today the overall situation in the settlement has improved. The municipality makes an effort to remove particularly poor and inadequate Roma dwellings.

Bystré is the rural researched area. From historical sources, it is not clear when Roma first settled in the village. According to the census of 1869, three Roma families (8 Roma) lived in the village at that time. By the end of 1950, their number had grown to 120 and in 2004 to 433. Only one third of the total Roma community said they were of Roma nationality. Demographic indicators in Bystré are similar to those of Hlinné (there is a high birth rate and a prevalence of the pre-productive and productive age groups). The educational structure in Bystré is at a higher level than in Hlinné. Local Roma identified themselves as Roman Catholic (the same as the majority population). Criminality (including hidden crime) and usury rates are lower in this area under study. Traditionally the Roma in Bystré were blacksmiths and plumbers, however most of them also did small agricultural jobs.

The current employment rate is higher and the professional structure is more varied compared to Hlinné. The quality of housing is relatively high. Romany people in Bystré live in two locations. They live either in apartment houses on the estate in the village or scattered among the majority population. Most families live in dwellings categorized as above standard. The highest housing quality is typical of families who live within the boundaries of the village and are scattered among the majority population in legal housing. All of these houses have a complete infrastructure. The peculiarity is that these Roma raise crops and livestock on the rented land. They have adapted their behaviour to the norms of the majority. The problematic group of the Roma population has no place in the village. This is because of pressure from the majority population, but it is especially because of the Roma themselves, who do not want problematic Roma in their village.

Levoča is an urban area under study. The Roma population is concentrated in two locations in the city. Some of the Roma live scattered among the majority population, mainly in the historic city centre (Michaeli et al. 2008). According to the census, 178 Romany people lived in Levoča in the year 1924. Based on the census of 1991, 1,268 people identified themselves as Roma, 10% of the total population (12,645 residents). In 2001, 1,609 people registered as Roma, 11.1% of the total population (14,409 residents). In 2006, Levoča had 14,509 inhabitants, 19.7% of them were Roma and in the year 2011 Levoča had 14,539 inhabitants and 21.34% were Roma. Pre-productive and productive age groups also prevail in the age structure of the Roma population in this urban area. There are only a few people at the post-productive age.

Table 4 Age structure of the Roma community in Bystré (2008). Source: field research.

Category	Age group	Number of people	Share in %
Pre-productive age	0–14 Total	139	31.5
Productive age	15–54 Female	120	28.5
	15–59 Male	135	32.4
Post-productive age	55+ Female	20	5.2
	60+ Male	9	2.4
Total		423	100.0

Table 5 Housing quality of the Roma in Bystré – group of Roma living on the estate (2008). Source: field research.

Types of dwellings	Number of houses	Number of facilities	Number of members
Group 1: Poor	1	5	31
Group 2: Adequate	2	4	25
Group 3: Above standard	5	12	58
Housing units	23	39	184
Total	31	60	298

Table 6 Housing quality of the Roma in Bystré – group of Roma scattered among the majority population (2008). Source: field research.

Types of dwellings	Number of houses	Number of facilities	Number of members
Group 1: Poor	1	1	6
Group 2: Adequate	3	4	18
Group 3: Above standard	15	31	101
Total	19	36	125

The religious profile of the Roma minority follows the pattern of the majority population. Approximately 80% of the Romany people are Roman Catholic; only a small group of 30 Romany people are Jehovah's Witnesses. However, because the conditions of *modus vivendi* are strictly defined in this company, Roma are leaving this religious society (Dravecká 2012). The educational structure of this Roma ethnic group is very unfavourable. Most of the Roma have only completed a primary education. Despite the fact that primary education for the

Roma in Levoča is provided by three special schools, a significant proportion of the Roma have not even completed primary school. Only a very few Roma continue to high school. Generally, after completion of compulsory schooling, they leave school and are included in a social program which provides the option of receiving social welfare payments. At the moment this process is financially advantageous for Roma families. However, from the aspect of the prospects of success on the labour market, the situation is rather unfavourable. The lack of education

Table 7 Age structure of the Roma community in Levoča (2008). Source: field research.

Category	Age group	Number of people	Share in %
Pre-productive age	0–14 Total	1,044	33.63
Productive age	15–54 Female	894	28.80
	15–59 Male	980	31.58
Post-productive age	55+ Female	114	3.68
	60+ Male	72	2.31
Total		3,104	100.00

creates conditions for increasing criminality, drug addiction and negative influences on the cultural development of the Roma population.

The lack of interest in education is a serious problem for the young generation. The young and middle-aged generations of Roma do not have working habits. Roma women are mostly registered as women in households and have no qualifications. Employment opportunities for Roma are very limited in Levoča as well as in the whole Spiš region. This problem cannot be solved by so-called activation work. Many Roma families live on social welfare payments and often work illegally (Dravecká 2012).

The quality of housing has a significant impact on the overall quality of life of the Roma. The overall character of the locations that contain Roma houses and flats was assessed, based on the buildings' physiognomy, interiors, connection to the infrastructure and their legality.

The first group includes houses (multiple-room or multi-storey buildings) with exteriors very similar to those of the majority population. The interior is furnished with expensive furniture and appliances. These houses are also connected to the infrastructure. The owners have a car. House maintenance is at a high level. The children attend school and play various sports. The owners of these houses are mostly Roma entrepreneurs. However, there are

only a few such families scattered around the historic town centre as well as in the area of Levočské Lúky (Dravecká 2012).

The second group of Roma live in average conditions. Their properties are not fenced, the interiors are modestly furnished and the exteriors are slightly shabby. From the point of view of hygiene, they do not correspond to the desired level, but house maintenance is on a good level.

The third group includes untidy houses (there is typically an accumulation of household waste and bio-waste as well as an incomplete infrastructure) which require extensive repairs. These houses are inhabited by the socially most vulnerable Roma (families with many children, dependent on social support). For this group of people (especially for non-payers living in houses in the historical town centre), new low standard flats are being built outside the historical town centre (Dravecká 2012).

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The assessment of the quality of life of the Roma community on the basis of field research in selected areas under study of the Prešov Region shows a certain consistency in some of the aspects considered. This consistency is generally valid for the Roma communities throughout Slovakia. In other aspects, some differences between areas under study were observed.

In the field of demographic characteristics and demographic behaviour of the Roma ethnic group, there are minimal differences between individual areas under study. A high birth rate accompanied by large families is characteristic. Pre-productive and productive age groups prevail in the age structure. In contrast, there is a low representation of people in the post-productive age.

In general, within the Roma ethnic group, there is a reluctance to report their membership of the Roma ethnic community, and this is also a nationwide problem (Uherek and Novák 2002). The employment situation of this community is alarming. The primary source of income for most Roma is social welfare payments and they do not look for work. They justify such behaviour as the discrimination of the labour market. The educational structure is at a very low level. The majority of Roma have only primary education and often an unfinished primary education. The younger generation in particular is not interested in education because they do not consider it as necessary for a better position in the labour market. This phenomenon has its roots in the family environment. From the aspect of religious profile of population, all analysed areas under study are the same. In general, the religious profile of population of the Roma population is very similar to that of the majority population. The exceptions are only the small groups of Roma that recorded different religions. Most of the Roma who are members of a religious community of Jehovah's Witnesses can be found in Eastern Slovakia, in Michalovce, Kráľovský Chlmec, Sabinov, Vranov nad Topľou, and Spišská Belá, and in the central part of Slovakia in municipalities such as Liptovský Mikuláš, Liptovský Hrádok, Jelšava, Revúca, Hnúšťa, and Tornaľa. In western Slovakia, the Roma members of Jehovah's Witnesses congregations can only be found in Piešťany and Senica. Currently, many of these communities are stable and in several locations, there is already a second and a third generation of Roma who were guided to this faith of Jehovah's Witnesses by their own family (Podolinská and Hrustič 2010). According to the census of 2001, 1.69% of Roma living in Slovakia are Jehovah's Witnesses (Rác 2014).

Quality of life is a multidimensional concept. Our research on the quality of life of the Roma living in the selected areas under study was based on objective aspects (Vaďurová and Mühlpachr 2005). We mainly focused on the quality of housing, which we consider a fundamental element of a sustainable quality of life. It affects the social status and physical health of the population. In the last two decades, the Roma have begun to move from integrated city quarters to ghettos and rural settlements. The domain of housing is certainly the problem which is evidenced by the growing gap between the Roma and the majority population (Government Resolution No. 1/2012 of 11 January 2012). Roma dwellings are mostly substandard and do not meet technical and sanitary standards (according to estimates, the number of such dwellings is approximately 150,000 in the Slovak Republic) and are often without basic infrastructure. A particular problem in this regard is the transport and management of municipal waste.

Some differences between areas under study were observed in the field of housing quality, which is higher in Levoča. We understand this higher housing quality is primarily a result of the town authorities' efforts to improve the quality of Roma housing, especially in the historic city centre, since Levoča is a major tourist destination (especially for foreign tourists). The worst housing quality is in the separate Roma settlement in Hlinné. Most Roma there live in unsuitable dwellings. In the Bystré, the Roma families who live within the boundaries of the village and among the majority population have the best quality of housing. Satisfactory behaviour is also a characteristic of this group. Their attitude towards economic activity is also positive, which is rather unconventional for the Roma. This factor can be considered as a suitable means of eliminating the problem of Roma marginalization and their poor quality of life in general. But of course, other complementary factors are also needed.

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Résumé

Vybrané aspekty kvality života rómskeho etnika v niektorých polygónoch na východnom Slovensku

Hodnotenie kvality života rómskej komunity na základe terénneho výskumu vo vybraných polygónoch Prešovského kraja vykazuje určitý súlad v mnohých aspektoch. Tento súlad je všeobecne platný pre rómske komunity na celom Slovensku, ale v niektorých aspektoch sme pozorovali určité rozdiely medzi skúmanými polygónmi. V oblasti demografických charakteristík a demografického správania sa rómskeho etnika, sú rozdiely medzi jednotlivými polygónmi minimálne. Charakteristická je vysoká pôrodnosť sprevádzaná vzorom veľkých rodín. Vysoké je zastúpenie skupín obyvateľstva v predproduktívnom a produktívnom veku, naopak nízke v poproduktívnom veku.

Všeobecne platí, že v rámci rómskeho etnika, dominuje nechut' hlásiť k svojej etnickej skupine, čo je aj celoštátny problém (Uherek a Novák 2002). Alarmujúca je situácia v oblasti zamestnanosti rómskej komunity. Hlavným zdrojom príjmov pre väčšinu Rómov sú sociálne dávky. Rómovia si nehľadajú prácu. Toto konanie väčšina z nich ospravedlňuje diskrimináciou na trhu práce. Vzdelanostná štruktúra v skúmaných polygónoch ako aj v celoslovenskom meradle je na veľmi nízkej úrovni. Väčšina Rómov má iba základné vzdelanie a často aj nedokončené základné vzdelanie. Najmä mladšia generácia nemá záujem o vzdelanie, lebo ho nepovažuje za dôležitý predpoklad pre lepšie uplatnenie na trhu práce. Tento jav má svoje korene v rodinnom prostredí. Z hľadiska konfesionalnej štruktúry všetky analyzované polygóny majú rovnaký charakter. Všeobecne platí, že Rómovia sa hlásia k vierovyznaniu majoritnej

populácie v danom polygóne. Výnimkou sú len malé skupiny Rómov, ktoré vybrali iné vierovyznanie. Veľa rómskych členov náboženskej spoločnosti Svedkov Jehovových nájdeme na východnom Slovensku v okolí Michaloviec v Kráľovskom Chlmcí, v okolí Sniny v Sabinove, v okolí Vranova nad Topľou, a v Spišskej Belej. Na strednom Slovensku sú početne zastúpení Rómovia u svedkov Jehovových v Liptovskom Mikuláši, Liptovskom Hrádku, v Jelšave, v Revúcej, v Hnúšti a Tornali. Na západnom Slovensku majú Rómovia zastúpenie v zboroch svedkov Jehovových iba v Piešťanoch a v Senici. V súčasnosti sú mnohé tieto spoločenstvá stabilné a vo viacerých lokalitách nájdeme aj druhú či tretiu generáciu Rómov, ktorí už boli k svedkom Jehovovým socializovaní v rodinnom prostredí (Podolinská a Hrustič 2010). Podľa cenzu z roku 2001 sa na Slovensku k náboženskej spoločnosti Svedkov Jehovových hlási 1,69% Rómov (Rác 2014).

Kvalita života je multidimenzionálny pojem. Výskum kvality života Rómov vo vybraných polygónoch na východnom Slovensku sme uskutočnili na báze objektívneho aspektu (Vaďurová, Mühlpacher 2005). Zamerali sme sa najmä na kvalitu bývania, ktoré považujeme za zásadný prvok udržateľnej kvality života, lebo bývanie je jej základnou materiálnoú bázou. Ovplyvňuje sociálny status a fyzické zdravie obyvateľstva. V ostatných dvoch decéniách sa Rómovia začali presídľovať z integrovaných mestských štvrtí do mestských get a vidieckych osád. Oblasť bývania je nesporné jedným z problémov, ktorý indikuje na prehľbujúce sa rozdiely medzi rómskou a väčšinovou populáciou. Rómske obydlia sú prevažne neštandardné a nesplňajú technické a hygienické normy (odhadom je ich okolo 150 000), sú prevažne bez základnej infraštruktúry (Úrad vlády Slovenskej republiky 2011). Osobitným problémom v tomto smere je odvoz a nakladanie s komunálnym odpadom.

Medzi skúmanými polygónmi sú významnejšie rozdiely v oblasti kvality bývania, ktorá je vyššia v Levoči a je dôsledkom snáh mestskej samosprávy. Prejavuje sa najmä v historickom jadre mesta. Kvalita bývania je najhoršia v samostatnej rómskej osade v Hlínne. Väčšina Rómov tu žije v nevyhovujúcich obydliach. Rómske rodiny v polygóne Bystré,

ktoré žijú v intraviláne obce roztrúsene medzi väčšinovým obyvateľstvom majú najvyššiu kvalitu bývania a ich správanie je tiež uspokojivé. Vhodný je aj ich postoj k výrobnej poľnohospodárskej činnosti, netradičnej pre Rómov. Na prenajatých pozemkoch pestujú plodiny na samozásobenie. Rozptýl Rómov medzi obyvateľmi sídla Bystré sa osvedčil. Pomáha zmierniť marginalizáciu rómskeho etnika a zlepšuje kvalitu života, ale samozrejme je potrebné v tomto procese využiť aj ďalšie doplnkové faktory.

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