



CASE STUDY

Youth work in Slovakia starts to take Roma perspectives into account

This case study was developed by Glopolis and it captures the story of the most significant change that happened to the civil society organisations (CSOs) network thanks to the Stronger Roots Program. The network was awarded EUR 32,000 under the project and was provided with 27 hours of capacity development support.

Network

Slovak Youth Council

Country

Slovakia

Period when the change was observed

November 2021

The most significant change that the network achieved

The Slovak Youth Council (SYC) is made up of 27 member organizations that work with youth, but **minorities have never been well represented** in its structure or member organizations. Youth organizations are often perceived as exclusive environments and their members tend to be children from the majority population. There are for example some Roma scout centers, but mixed youth groups containing children from both the ethnic majority and minority population are not common in Slovakia.

However, there is well-documented evidence of the benefits of racial and ethnic diversity for all young people. **Diverse collectives exhibit reduced racial bias and stereotypes, improved leadership, problem-solving, and complex thinking skills.** The SYC had never tried to analyse Roma needs or perspectives before. The member organisations had involved them in their activities, but had not considered specific strategies to reach them or to adjust working methods to welcome more Roma children and youth and to adapt to what they need.

With Stronger Roots, the SYC was able to **open up the topic of including Roma in member organisations' activities and the SYC structure**, which is important to its strategic goal of broadening its membership base and becoming a truly inclusive umbrella organisation for youth organisations.

The SYC first spoke with various youth work organisations to learn why it is so difficult to include Roma children in their activities. The biggest obstacle is that these **organisations lack strategies for reaching out to Roma youth.** Youth leaders and workers often want young Roma to participate in

RADA MLÁDEŽE SLOVENSKA



METODOLÓGIA PRÁCE S RÓMSKOU MLÁDEŽOU

Handbook on inclusive youth work, created as a result of a joint initiative of experts and practitioners from Slovak Youth Council member organizations and partner youth organizations.

leisure activities for example, but just **don't know how to motivate them to join or they are afraid and insecure because they have not worked with them before.**

To make use of what was learned, the SYC brought together 17 practitioners to develop a **handbook about how to include Roma youth in youth activities.** The team had 10 people from SYC member organisations and 7 Roma inclusion/youth work specialists from advocacy CSOs, Roma youth service organisations and state institutions.

The handbook is meant for teachers, youth group leaders, godparents or parents or school cafeteria employees. It offers **ethical guidelines** based on respect for others; **inclusive practices** like leading youth to think critically about their environment and to resolve



“Finally, young Roma can take an active role in shaping youth work instead of just participating in activities that someone else has developed.”

Tatiana Petříkovičová, Slovak Youth Council

conflicts calmly; and techniques such as an **empathy map** that can deepen understanding of other people’s lived experience. It is intended as a hands-on workbook that people can use to develop inclusive ways of working that fit their specific contexts.

Two of the Roma youth work organisations that were consulted about the handbook later became SYC observer organisations in November 2021 and then applied to become SYC members. The SYC will include them in regular meetings of youth organisation directors where they can voice their interests and help shape policy decisions.

How the project contributed to the change

By directly involving Roma youth organizations, the SYC was able to understand what Roma youth work in Slovakia looks like, in real places and situations. It also became more aware of **how youth policy**

could help bring about change. For the first time in the history of the youth council, it was able to take a long-term view of inclusion of Roma in youth work organisations.

As a result of meeting and talking with Roma youth about their priorities, the SYC is taking steps to bring them into SYC decision-making processes and ensure that **Roma youth issues are well articulated in both Roma and non-Roma policies.**

Another big step was that the **Roma youth organisations gained more trust and confidence in the majority population** youth organisations by working together on the handbook. They saw that participation can be real, not just something written on paper, and that there is genuine interest in their lived experience.



*Consultation meeting with a group of external experts and youth organizations to co-create an inclusive youth work methodology.
Photo by: Slovak Youth Council*

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The Stronger Roots Program is jointly implemented by a consortium created by Open Society Fund Prague (CZ), Open Society Foundation Bratislava (SK), Glopolis (CZ) and the NIOK Foundation (HU). The Program aims to increase the resilience of civil society organizations and their networks in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, strengthen their social capital and embed them in the communities and societies in which they operate. Within the Program, the concept of transversal collaboration was developed and tested on 9 networks of civil society organizations.

| Nadace **OSF**



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Glopolis is an analytical and networking center with an 18-years long outstanding think-tank experience in research, policy monitoring, advocacy and campaigning, relationship development, resource mobilization and facilitating collaboration at the Czech, CEE and EU-wide levels. Glopolis mission is to support transversal collaboration beyond the non-profit sector towards resilient civil society and sustainable democracy. Therefore, it seeks out and expands the field of shared aspirations of the CSOs, governmental and business representatives and engages them in solving common, societal challenges.