



Factors underlying Roma engagement in action for equal rights

Survey report WP3, September 2022

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Executive summary¹

In this report we focus on factors underlying the willingness of Roma people in Slovakia to engage in social movements or actions for equal rights. We carried out a representative survey in June 2022 with 291 Roma participants to address this issue. Our findings suggest that:

- over 80% of participants expressed strong **feelings of injustice** regarding the position of the Roma in Slovak society and more than half of the participants tended to share the **belief in the Roma minority capability to effectively join as a group** in activities to improve their position in society (also known as group efficacy);
- almost half of the participants (46.4%) expressed high likelihood that they would pursue **strategies to improve their own individual socio-economic position** (also known as individual mobility), while more than one fourth (28.5%) tended to disagree with these statements;
- 37.5% of participants reported rather high intentions to engage in **collective action in support of equal treatment of Roma and non-Roma children in schools**, while about a third of participants reported low intentions to engage in collective action;
- the **higher group efficacy** and **the more injustice** the participants perceived, the more likely they were to indicate they would engage in collective action in support of equal treatment in schools;
- pursuing **individual mobility was not mutually exclusive with engaging in collective action**;
- **the more close contacts** with the ethnic majority the participants reported to have, **the more they were willing to engage in collective action** aimed at reducing the unequal position of the Roma. The higher amount of contact with the non-Roma friends or acquaintances was also related with higher perceptions of Roma group efficacy.

¹ For executive summary in Slovak see the Appendix 1.

Objectives of the research

ENGAGE project brings together social psychologists and social intervention professionals from three European countries (Hungary, Slovakia, and Spain) with the objective to address the problem of anti-Gypsyism and indifference among members of the non-Roma majority and increase both Roma and non-Roma activism and engagement. The aim of the Work package 3 was to examine what drives or hinders political engagement of Roma and non-Roma people using quantitative methods, with the emphasis on the effects of contact experiences between Roma and non-Roma people on engagement in social movements or actions for equal rights. In this report, we focus on engagement among Roma people in Slovakia, a country where anti-Gypsyism is widely shared and normatively acceptable.²

Despite facing persisting discrimination and marginalisation in Europe, Roma people have not yet joined in collective action for their rights. Studies in social psychology have shown that sometimes having positive contact experiences with members of the majority reduces minority members' awareness of inequality and willingness to stand up for their rights³. That has been called the sedative effect of contact. Previous research has also shown that when boundaries between groups in society are perceived as permeable, people belonging to disadvantaged groups may cope with having low status in society by psychologically or physically leaving their group, i.e., by individual mobility⁴. Conversely, when group boundaries are perceived as fixed and impermeable, and upward social mobility is harder to achieve, disadvantaged groups may engage in some form of action to improve the situation of their group and fight against injustice. In the context of severe stigmatisation and repeated negative experiences with the majority, Roma people may wish to conceal or distance themselves from the stigmatised identity⁵, thus engage in individual mobility rather than collective action. On the other hand, Roma people that have less positive contact with the majority might have stronger feelings of injustice and pursue collective action strategies. Previous studies focusing on various collective movements showed that when people feel that as a group, they are able to achieve their goals, that is, they experience the efficacy of the group, they are also more motivated to engage in activities connected to the movement.⁶ In this report we focus on the following factors underlying the willingness of Roma people in Slovakia to engage in collective action on behalf of their rights: perceived injustice, perceived group efficacy, individual mobility and contact between the Roma and the non-Roma.

² Kende, A., Hadarics, M., Bigazzi, S., Boza, M., Kunst, J. R., Lantos, N. A. ... Urbiola, A. (2021). The last acceptable prejudice in Europe? Anti-Gypsyism as the obstacle to Roma inclusion. In *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 2021, vol. 24, no. 3, p. 388-410.

³ Dixon, J., Tropp, L. R., Durrheim, K., & Tredoux, C. G. (2010). "Let them eat harmony": Prejudice reduction and the political attitudes of historically disadvantaged groups. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 19, 76-80.

⁴ Tajfel H. & Turner J. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. WG Austin, S Worchel, pp. 33-47. Monterey, CA: Brooks Cole

⁵ Dobai, A., & Hopkins, N. (2021). Ethnic identity concealment and disclosure: Contexts and strategies. *British Journal of Social Psychology*.

⁶ Van Zomeren, M., Postmes, T., & Spears, R. (2008). Toward an integrative social identity model of collective action: a quantitative research synthesis of three socio-psychological perspectives. *Psychological bulletin*, 134(4), 504-535.

Data

Using survey method, we collected data with the help of an opinion poll company in July 2022 on a representative Roma sample⁷ that reflects gender, age, and spatial (region of Slovakia) characteristics of the Roma population in Slovakia (see Table 1).

Table 1

N	291
Gender (% of women)	50.2%
Age	18-78 (average age 39.9) years
Education	Primary: 59.1% Secondary: 39.9% University: 1%
Region ⁸	Bratislava: 3.4% Trnava: 5.2% Trenčín: 2.7% Nitra: 8.2% Žilina: 2.1% Banská Bystrica: 19.2% Prešov: 29.2% Košice: 29.9%

Participants completed a survey in which they rated their agreement with various statements related to their identity, engagement in collective action and contact with the non-Roma on a 7-point scale. For sake of clarity, in this report we present the results using 3 categories of agreement (agree, neutral, disagree) instead of 7 points.

The survey was pre-registered on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io>) platform to comply with the standards of open science. The database was uploaded to the website of the OSF so that it is publicly accessible for future research. It can be viewed using this link: https://osf.io/zrycf/?view_only=5d5362a689514886bf33b05d0e1aa99f.

⁷ The participants identified as Roma by the interviewers took part in the survey. For ethical reasons of not imposing/assigning a group identity on/to participants, only those participants were retained for further analysis who self-identified as Roma either by claiming the Roma ethnicity in the questionnaire (“národnosť” in Slovak, which an additional official label in addition to citizenship), or by identifying to some extent with the Roma community (e.g. by agreeing with statements such as “Being a Roma is an important part of my identity”). We excluded 18 participants who did not meet these criteria and did not self-identify as Roma.

⁸ Distribution of regions is representative of the Roma population in Slovakia ([Atlas rómskych komunít 2019; 2015](#)).

Results

The main objective of the survey was to understand the factors underlying Roma engagement in social movements or actions for equal rights.

Feelings of injustice are considered to be one of the main drivers of participation⁹. We first asked the participants to rate their agreement with several reasons that may have contributed to the lower social status of Roma compared to other ethnic groups in Slovakia (such as “Because people from other groups treat the Roma unfairly”). We found that over 80% of the participants agreed with these statements, and only 3.4% participants disagreed. This suggests that feelings of injustice are strong among the Roma people in Slovakia (Figure 1).

We also asked the participants to what extent they felt that as a group, Roma people can improve their situation, i.e. how they **perceive their group efficacy** (they rated their agreement with several statements, for example: “Roma can together overcome their difficulties”). More than half of the participants tended to perceive high group efficacy, while only 14.1% disagreed with these statements (Figure 1).

We were further interested in how many participants would pursue so-called individual mobility in society - in other words, to what extent they would **engage in activities to improve their own individual socio-economic position**. Participants were asked to indicate how likely it is that they would engage in the behaviours aimed to improve their personal situation in society, such as create connections with people who hold power in society or move to a neighbourhood where there are more job opportunities. Most participants (46.4%) expressed high likelihood that they would pursue such individual strategies, while 28.5% tended to disagree with these statements (Figure 1).

Finally, we asked the participants to rate to what extent they would **participate in activities in support of equal treatment of Roma and non-Roma pupils in school**, for example, sign a petition, join a demonstration etc.¹⁰ Based on our results, about a third of the participants reported low engagement, while a similar percentage of people tended to remain neutral about these statements and 37.5% of people would engage in these activities (see Figure 1).

As our main objective was to understand what **motivates Roma engagement** in activities aimed at reducing inequalities, **we analysed the associations between these factors**, as well as the extent to which participants reported having contact with the non-Roma¹¹. First of all, as expected, the higher efficacy as a group participants perceived, the more likely they were to indicate they would engage in activities in support of equal treatment in schools. Similarly, the

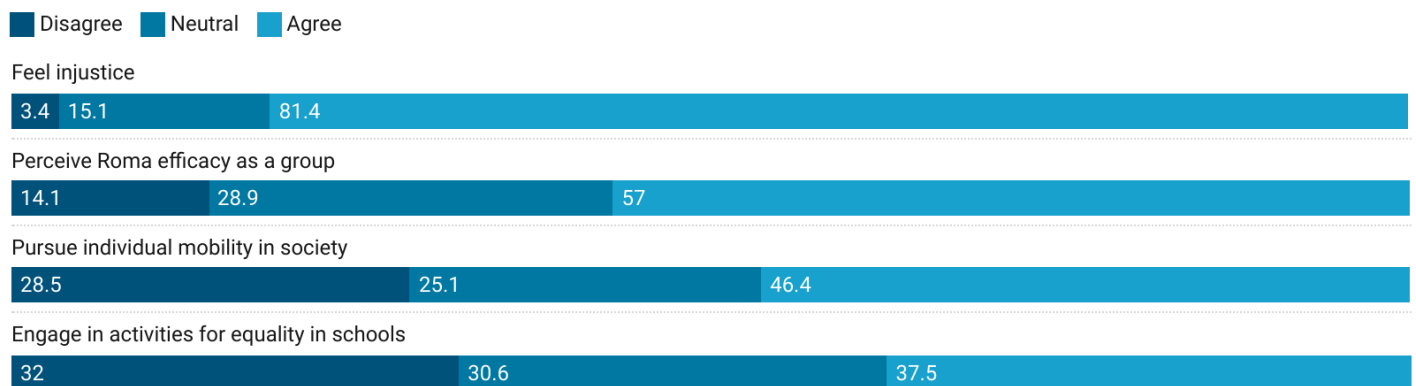
⁹ Van Zomeren, M., Postmes, T., & Spears, R. (2008). Toward an integrative social identity model of collective action: a quantitative research synthesis of three socio-psychological perspectives. *Psychological bulletin*, 134(4), 504-535.)

¹⁰ The issue of inequality in education was chosen after consultation with several Roma advocates as one of the biggest problems today faced by Roma people in Slovakia.

¹¹ For the results of correlation analysis see Appendix 2.

more injustice participants perceived, the more they indicated they would be willing to engage in collective action. Furthermore, pursuing individual mobility, i.e. the likelihood that participants would engage in behaviours in order to improve their own personal situation, was not mutually exclusive with engaging in collective goals. In fact, the more participants indicated they would pursue individual mobility, the higher group efficacy they perceived and more likely they were to report tendency to engage in activities aiming to improve the position of the whole group.

Figure 1



Created with Datawrapper

As positive contact between the members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups has been previously associated with the so-called sedative effect on minority members' awareness of inequality and willingness to engage in action to address their disadvantage¹², we also wanted to examine how the extent to which participants reported having contact with the non-Roma related to their engagement. However, our results showed that the more ethnic Slovak acquaintances and friends participants reported to have, the more they were willing to engage in activities aimed at reducing inequalities. Higher amount of contact with the non-Roma was also related with higher perceptions of Roma people being efficient as a group, and it was unrelated to willingness to pursue individual mobility or feelings of injustice.

¹² Dixon, J., Levine, M., Reicher, S., & Durrheim, K. (2012). Beyond prejudice: Are negative evaluations the problem and is getting us to like one another more the solution?. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 35(6), 411-425.

Conclusion

Our findings suggest that the “sedative effect” of positive contact between the members of disadvantaged and advantaged groups **does not apply** in the context of Roma people in Slovakia. In the context of severe stigmatisation, having many friends or acquaintances among the majority group may be empowering instead and such networks could serve as a resource for future participation. Having connections with the higher-status group does not blind Roma people to discrimination, as more than 80% of participants reported strong feelings of injustice, regardless of their contact with the non-Roma. Additionally, once people from stigmatised groups achieve upward social mobility and improve their personal status in the society, they are more equipped to engage in group efforts for fighting inequality. We conclude that in addition to feelings of group efficacy and perceived injustice which both motivate engagement in social movements, contact with the non-Roma as well as willingness to pursue individual mobility seem to be additional resources for Roma mobilisation to join in collective action for their rights.

Policy suggestions

Future activities aiming at increasing the engagement of the Roma in collective action for social change in context of severe stigmatisation of the Roma should:

- facilitate contact with the ethnic majority while maintaining the awareness of structural inequalities, as contact with the majority seems to be one of the resources for mobilisation;
- promote individual mobility of the Roma as a resource for their subsequent collective engagement in social change;
- strengthen the Roma sense of collective efficacy in achieving social change.

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For more information about the project visit <https://polrom.eu/engage/> or contact Barbara Lášticová at barbara.lasticova@savba.sk.

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Appendix 1 - Executive summary in Slovak

Hlavné zistenia

V tejto správe sa zameriavame na faktory, ktoré vplývajú na motiváciu Rómov a Rómok na Slovensku zapojiť sa do sociálnych hnutí alebo aktivít na podporu svojich práv. V júni 2022 sme realizovali reprezentatívny prieskum s 291 rómskymi respondentmi a respondentkami, ktorého cieľom bolo preskúmať tieto faktory. Naše výsledky naznačujú, že:

- viac ako 80 % respondentov a respondentiek vyjadrilo pocit nespravodlivosti v súvislosti s postavením Rómov a Rómok v slovenskej spoločnosti a viac ako polovica respondentov/iek bola presvedčená, že rómska menšina sa dokáže spoločne a efektívne zapojiť do aktivít na zlepšenie svojho postavenia v spoločnosti (tzv. skupinová sebaúčinnosť);
- takmer polovica respondentov/iek (46,4 %) uviedla, že pravdepodobne budú realizovať stratégie individuálnej mobility s cieľom zlepšiť svoje socio-ekonomické postavenie, zatiaľ čo viac ako štvrtina (28,5 %) s týmito tvrdeniami skôr nesúhlasila;
- 37,5 % respondentov/iek uviedlo, že by sa pravdepodobne zapojili do kolektívnej akcie na podporu rovnakého zaobchádzania s rómskymi a nerómskymi žiakmi a žiačkami v školách; zatiaľ čo približne tretina respondentov deklarovala skôr nízke tendencie zapojiť sa do týchto aktivít;
- čím vyššiu skupinovú účinnosť a čím viac nespravodlivosti v spoločnosti respondenti vnímali, tým viac uvádzali ochotu zapojiť sa do kolektívnej akcie na podporu rovnakého zaobchádzania s rómskymi a nerómskymi žiakmi a žiačkami v školách;
- snaha o individuálnu mobilitu Rómov a Rómok sa nevyučovala s ich ochotou zapojiť sa do sociálnych hnutí alebo aktivít na podporu svojich práv;
- čím viac blízkych kontaktov s etnickou majoritou respondenti/ky uvádzali, tým viac boli ochotní/é zapojiť sa do kolektívnej akcie zameranej na zníženie nerovného postavenia Rómov a Rómok;
- vyššia miera kontaktu s nerómskym obyvateľstvom súvisela aj s vnímaním vyššej skupinovej sebaúčinnosti Rómov a Rómok.

Appendix 2 – Results of the correlation analysis

	Perceived injustice	Perceived group efficacy	Individual mobility	Positive contact
Perceived injustice	-			
Perceived group efficacy	-0.081	-		
Individual mobility	-0.177	0.164	-	
Positive contact	-0.028	0.142	0.104	-
Engaging in action for equal rights	0.142	0.209	0.389	0.242

Note. Values in green are statistically significant, i.e. there is a relationship between the two factors.