

*RomIdent Working Papers*

## **Paper No.20**

# Roma and Romani in Lithuania in the 21st century

**RomIdent**  
Working papers

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2013

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The project RomIdent is financially supported by the HERA Joint Research Programme ([www.heranet.info](http://www.heranet.info)) which is co-funded by AHRC, AKA, DASTI, ETF, FNR, FWF, HAZU, IRCHSS, MHEST, NWO, RANNIS, RCN, VR and The European Community FP7 2007-2013, under the Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities programme.



**Funded under Socio-economic Sciences & Humanities**

## Roma and Romani in Lithuania in the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This study was made possible through a HERA grant for the RomIdent-Project (09-HERA-JRP-CD-FP-030).

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## **Abstract**

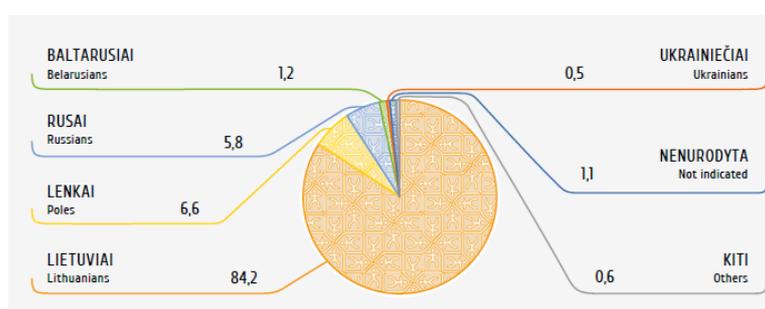
In this paper, we provide an overview of recent policy initiatives regarding the Roma minority of Lithuania. We focus on local initiatives taken by Romani organisations and by different levels of government in Lithuania. We devote attention to the four major challenges identified in, for instance, the Decade of Roma inclusion initiative: housing, health, education and employment. These four challenges are of special importance for people's satisfaction with life, including Roma. We also take a special look at initiatives regarding the recognition of the Romani language, especially in Lithuanian society and in education. Different projects and programmes that were initiated in Lithuania for the integration of Roma in the society are also discussed in the paper. They provide insights in the changing situation of Lithuanian Roma.

## **1. Minorities in Lithuania**

The total population of Lithuania was 3 483 972 according to data of 2001 by the Department of Statistics (Open Society Institute 2006, 31). The survey of national activities and documents in the same year (2001, 523) indicated that the total population of Lithuania was higher – 3 704 000. The biggest minority groups were Russians (304 800, or 8.2%) and Poles (256 600, or 7.0%). Other minority groups formed 0.7% of the population and were composed of Belarusians, Ukrainians, Jews, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Germans, Latvians, Moldavians, Karaims, Tatars, Roma, Georgians, Romanians, Greeks, Estonians and Uzbeks (Igarytė 2004, 34; Survey of national activities and documents 2001, 523). The EUMC (2004, 5) and Vidrinskaitė (2004, 110)

indicate that Poles and Russians represent the largest minorities (6.7% and 6.3% respectively).

In 2011, the figures changed and, according to the latest population census, it decreased by 12.6 percent, from 3 483 972 to 3 043 429 people living in Lithuania (Statistics Lithuania 2012, 20). More than 150 minorities are present in Lithuania today (or 154 different ethnicities in *Balsas* [The Voice] (2013)), whereas minorities comprised 115 groups in 2001 (Igarytė 2004, 34; Pilipavičienė 2009, 3; Statistics Lithuania 2012, 21, 2013, 1). The Poles (6.6%) and Russians (5.8%) still constitute the two biggest minorities (see Figure 1) (Pilipavičienė 2009, 3; Statistics Lithuania, 2012, 21, 2013, 1).



**Figure 1.** *Population by ethnicity, percentages* (Statistics Lithuania 2012, 22)

Unofficial estimates of the number of Roma in Lithuania are considerably higher than those found in the official statistics. Tcherenkov and Laederich (2004: 510) estimate that there are 5000-6000 Roma in the country, and Kučinskaitė (2005, as quoted in Tenser 2005) provide even higher numbers, between 5 000 and 7 000.

Since 2001, the total population of all ethnicities decreased (see Figure 2) and the number of Roma also decreased from 2 571 (0.07%) in 2001 to 2 115 in 2011 (ECRI 2003, 31; EUMC 2006, 33; Igarytė 2004, 72; Pilipavičienė 2009, 3; Poviliūnas 2011, 6; Statistics Lithuania 2012, 20, 2013, 8), a decrease of 18 %. The capital Vilnius is the most multicultural city, which hosts 128 different nationalities (*Balsas* [The Voice] 2013), including Roma.

Tautybė	2001	2011	Pokytis palyginti su 2001 m., proc.	Ethnicity
Iš viso	3 483 972	3 043 429	-12,6	Total
Lietuviai	2 907 293	2 561 314	-11,9	Lithuanians
Lenkai	234 989	200 317	-14,8	Poles
Rusai	219 789	176 913	-19,5	Russians
Baltarusiai	42 866	36 227	-15,5	Belarusians
Ukrainiečiai	22 488	16 423	-27,0	Ukrainians
Žydai	4 007	3 050	-23,9	Jews
Totoriai	3 235	2 793	-13,7	Tatars
Vokiečiai	3 243	2 418	-25,4	Germans
Romai	2 571	2 115	-17,7	Romany
Latviai	2 955	2 025	-31,5	Latvians
Armėnai	1 477	1 233	-16,5	Armenians
Azerbaidžaniečiai	788	648	-17,8	Azerbaijani
Moldavai	704	540	-23,3	Moldovans
Gruzainai	437	372	-14,9	Georgians
Estai	419	314	-25,1	Estonians
Karaimai	273	241	-11,7	Karaites
Kitos	3 517	3 508	-0,3	Others
Nenurodyta	32 921	32 978	0,2	Not indicated
			Change, compared to 2001, per cent	

**Figure 2.** *Population by ethnicity 2001 and 2011* (Statistics Lithuania 2012, 20)

### 1.1. The Roma minority in Lithuania

The number of Roma in Lithuania is rather small (see Figure 2) (Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 3; OECD 2002; Poviliūnas 2011, 4; True Lithuania, n.d.). Even though the 2001 census (Statistics Lithuania 2012, 20) estimates that 2 571 Roma live in Lithuania, the real number may be higher (around 3 000 or even 4 000) (Bakker 2001, 427; Bukisa 2010; Council of Europe 2004-2006, 77; ECRI 2003, 19; EUMC 2006, 33; European Commission 2011, 16, 2013; Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 3; Kallonen 2004, 3; Leončikas 2006, 87; Malinauskaitė 2007, 69; Open Society Institute 2006, 31; OSCE/ODIHR 2008, 64; Poviliūnas 2011, 6; Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 38; Simoniukštytė 2008). The biggest community, consisting of about 500 Roma, are settled in ‘Kirtimai’ near Vilnius city international airport (see § 2.1.) (Council of Europe 2004-2006, 60; ECRI 2003, 19; Leončikas 2006, 87; Pilipavičienė 2009, 21; Poviliūnas 2011, 6; True Lithuania, n.d.), but the number of inhabitants change, as Roma families move in and out. Many Roma are living there under difficult conditions (see § 2.1.), mostly in wooden shacks (the only of that kind in the Baltic States) (True Lithuania, n.d.).

Different numbers are provided by Vildžiūnienė (2001, 2011), which are also based on official statistical data. She indicates that 2 135 Roma were living in Lithuania in 2001 and 1 715 in 2011. The largest communities of Roma in 2001 were found in Vilnius (640 Roma) and Kaunas (364 people). The number of Roma decreased in 2011 to 619 Roma living in Vilnius and 230 in Kaunas.

## ***1.2 Historical background***

According to Poviliūnas (2011, 5), the Roma arrived in Lithuania from Poland in the 14<sup>th</sup> century; other authors mention that they arrived in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century through Poland and Belarus (Baršauskienė and Leliugienė 2003, 1; Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 82; Simoniukštytė 2008). Toileikis (n.d.) also writes that the Roma travelled to Lithuania in the 15<sup>th</sup> century through Gudia (nowadays Belarus). However, there are also Roma who arrived in Lithuania from Moldova and Russia (Malinauskaitė 2007, 12) in a more recent period. The Council of Europe (2008, 1) indicates 1501 as the year of the first arrival of Roma in Lithuania. In the same year on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May in Vilnius, the Roma were granted freedom and right of movement by Lithuanian Grand Duke Alexander (Baršauskienė and Leliugienė 2003, 1). However, the Roma have also been persecuted. The means used for oppression began with the anti-Gypsy laws of 1471 in Lucerne (nowadays Switzerland). Oppressive anti-Roma laws spread through Europe and reached Poland and Lithuania in 1557 (Kenrick and Puxon 1972, 42). For more details on the early history, see Griškaitė (1998).

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Roma were identified as a nation based on an ethnic distinction, with a particular language (Matras 1999b), rather than groups of nomadic families. The scientific study of the Roma also started in Lithuania in that period, following international trends, when two works about Roma were published in Lithuania: “Apie čigonus” [“About Gypsies”] (1824) by Ignotas Danilavičius (Ignacy Daniłowicz) and a book in Polish (at the time the language of the elite in Lithuania) translatable as *Historical outline of the Gypsy people* (1830) by Teodoras Narbutas (Teodor Narbutt). After this, it took a long time until the next work was published on Roma in this country. A brief article was published in English more than half a century later (Dowojno-Sylwestrowicz 1889). The publication of the book “Čigonai” [“Gypsies”] by Antanas Salys and Izidorius Kisinas only took place in 1936 (see also Jopson 1939). It provides an overview of the history of Roma in Lithuania and Europe, and briefly, their culture and language (Simoniukštytė 2003, 861). Ficowski (1965) deals with Polish Roma, but the author also refers to Lithuanian Roma.

Many Roma acquired Lithuanian citizenship and passports in the independent state of Lithuania, during the period 1918-1940 (Simoniukštytė 2008), although the persecution of Roma reached a highlight during the Nazi occupation in World War II, when a large number of Roma was murdered in Europe, including Lithuania

(Baršauskienė and Leliugienė 2003, 1; Poviliūnas 2011, 5; Simoniukštytė 2003, 880, 2008; Toleikis, n.d.).

To the extent that the Roma people were living a nomadic way of life before the 1980s, by 1980 all Lithuanian Roma lived in houses (Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 82; Malinauskaitė 2007, 12; Toleikis, n.d.). Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis (2010-2011, 15) mention that massive forced settlement took place directly after World War II. Also according to the Centre for Ethnic Studies in Lithuania, or CES, (2008, 8) and Poviliūnas (2011, 6), the Roma are living a sedentary life in today's Lithuania, and in the meantime they retain many aspects of their traditions and language (see § 3.) (Baršauskienė and Leliugienė 2003, 1-2). Poviliūnas (2011, 6) mentions that the wave of emigration from Lithuania also affected the Roma community. This emigration has led to a decrease of the number of Roma in Lithuania.

Lithuanian Roma are sometimes called 'Polska Roma', due to the similarity of traditions and language to Polish Roma (Malinauskaitė 2007, 12; Toleikis, n.d.), and a shared origin. However, many of the local Roma call themselves Lithuanian Gypsies (Malinauskaitė 2007, 12; Simoniukštytė 2008). According to Poviliūnas (2011, 5), there are three Roma groups in Lithuania:

1. The biggest group, 'Litóvska Roma' ['Lithuanian Roma'] reside in the region of Vilnius; they call themselves 'Polska Roma';
2. The second group is called ' (Lotfítka Roma' ['Latvian Roma']; they reside in northern Lithuania;
3. The third is 'Kotliŗy', who originate from Moldova; they reside in a suburb of Vilnius. They arrived after World War II.

The first two groups are Catholic, while the third is orthodox (Bukisa 2010). The Roma experience a set of problems, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## 2. Problems faced by Roma

The Roma minority is one of the most vulnerable ones in Lithuania. Roma often encounter problems related to housing, health care, unemployment, policing and education (Andriukaitis 2008, 6; Baršauskienė and Leliugienė 2003; Coalition of the Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights, Center for Equality Advancement and Roma community Center 2011; ECRI 2011, 28; Gelūnas 2012; Igarytė 2004; Malinauskaitė 2007, 75; Pilipavičienė 2009, 6; Poviliūnas 2011, 13; Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 8-9; Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 8; Štuopytė 2008, 147). Some of these are the outcome of a housing situation with bad hygienic conditions, diseases, illiteracy and uncertainty about their rights (Josif Tychina, a local community leader, p.c., 2001). The negative stereotype and discrimination of Roma is evident in the Lithuanian society (Andriukaitis 2008, 6; Andriukaitis and Kliukas 2009-2010, 8; Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 90; Kallonen 2004, 31; Kučinskaitė 2002; Pilipavičienė 2009, 4; Vidrinskaitė 2004, 110-111). For example, Roma children could not go to a café and receive food there, because the owners of the café did not allow Roma to enter (Kučinskaitė 2002), so that the Roma children were forced to receive food in the settlement. Such and similar examples often affect Roma only and no other minorities.

According to Andriukaitis and Kliukas (2009-2010, 8), the language barrier is the main hurdle for the successful integration of the Roma (40% cannot speak Lithuanian), followed by lack of education (only 17% have higher education) and unemployment (only 8.7% are working in regular jobs). Malinauskaitė (2007, 45) also agrees that lack of education, and limited knowledge of the Lithuanian language contribute to the lower position of Roma in society. Also the fact that the Roma spent time in their communities, communicating with other Roma, is sometimes considered a hurdle on the way to the integration of Roma. The different challenges are closely related, for example:

- Health care and housing: ambulances are not able to find a house they are called to in order to provide first aid, due to the fact that the houses are not officially registered (Kučinskaitė 2002);
- Education and unemployment: many Roma adults are illiterate and thus they are unable to find regular occupations. The inability to fully understand information

in public institutions and the fear of running a risk when signing documents are also contributing factors (Baršauskienė and Leliugienė 2003, 3).

Štuopytė (2008, 145) mentions that the isolation of the Roma as an ethnic group is connected to a desire to preserve their history, traditions, language, national identity, and norms. But it is not always easy for them to become an integral part of Lithuanian society. Many Lithuanians do not want to communicate, work or be neighbours with Roma as the latter are living in terrible conditions and experience a high poverty rate (Andriukaitis and Kliukas 2009-2010, 10; Farkas 2007, 13; Poviliūnas 2011, 14; Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 8; True Lithuania, n.d.).

There are several grounds for the segregation of Roma in society. One of them is the public opinion about the Roma people as found among Lithuanian citizens and civil servants. An anti-Roma attitude is widespread and can be attributed to the influence of the media, particularly the press and the Internet, where Roma are often represented negatively (Beresnevičiūtė and Frėjūtė-Rakauskienė 2006, 43; Beresnevičiūtė 2010, 100; Council of Europe 2004-2006, 64; ECRI 2003, 16, 2006, 20; Kučinskaitė 2002; Poviliūnas 2011, 4; Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 53). Specifically, in the media, the Roma are often connected to crime, especially drug trade and theft, or to other problems experienced by the country (Beresnevičiūtė and Frėjūtė-Rakauskienė 2006, 31; Beresnevičiūtė 2010, 100; ECRI 2003, 16; European Commission 2010, 7; Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 53; Tereškinas 2001-2002). However, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (hence ECRI) (2003, 23) encouraged the Lithuanian government to solve the problem by creating a better image of Roma in the media and thus promoting a more tolerant society.

A significant problem for Roma is the connection between the city and their homes (Halász 2007). For that reason, they experience poor access to health services and schools (Halász 2007; Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 24). Another reason for limited access to civil services is also a lack of Lithuanian citizenship (Corsi et al. 2010, 102; ECRI 2003, 8). Not all Roma have citizenship due to their mobility. Most official documents were destroyed during World War II or are missing. Moreover, many Roma could not acquire citizenship as, according to the rules of the Lithuanian Citizenship Law of 1991, Lithuanian citizens must have had “ten years residence in the country, permanent employment (or other legal source of support), and must pass an exam testing knowledge of the Lithuanian language and provisions of the Constitution”

(U.S. English Foundation, n.d.). Most of them have difficulties in speaking Lithuanian and do not have a job and, therefore, they are unable to acquire Lithuanian citizenship and thus they are not eligible to public housing or unemployment benefits (ECRI 2006, 26). Hernesniemi and Hannikainen (2000, 82) estimated that there were around 600 Roma who did not have Lithuanian citizenship. Corsi et al. (2010, 102) mention that “according to the data of the Department of Migration in 2004, there were 1,870 Roma with Lithuanian citizenship and 150 were issued permits to live in Lithuania”. The ones who do not have citizenship are considered “illegal immigrants” (Corsi et al. 2010, 101).

The success of Roma integration depends to a large extent on the financial support started by the government and the government’s point of view about the challenges facing Roma (Pilipavičienė 2009, 8). The Roma in Lithuania are in need of employment and better housing (Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 91). The Lithuanian government is actively trying to assist Roma in solving problems related to housing, health, unemployment and education through different projects and programmes (see § 4.2.), e.g., the Roma Integration Programme. However, more active participation on the side of the Roma is needed (Bakker 2001, 427; Pilipavičienė 2009, 14).

## **2.1. Housing**

One of the biggest problems for Roma is housing, which is mainly very poor. Many of their houses lack electricity, gas, water and a sewerage system (see Figure 3) (ECRI 2003, 22; Halász 2007, 13; Poviliūnas 2011, 12; Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 14).

The housing conditions of Roma are worst in the Vilnius region. The majority of Roma live in a settlement ‘Kirtimai’, which lacks sanitary facilities (Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 83; Pilipavičienė 2009, 9; Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 3; Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 35). According to Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis (2010-2011, 15), the Roma were forced to settle and live there “half a century ago, during the times of Soviet occupation”. All the houses in the settlement are registered under one address (Pilipavičienė 2009, 9). In case of emergency, valuable time is lost in locating a person or a specific house, when for instance an ambulance is called for (ECRI 2003, 22). As many Roma lack the necessary documents (e.g. Lithuanian citizenship), they are not able to register their house in the settlement and

thus they have no other choice than to live in unrecognised and unregistered dwellings (ECRI 2003, 22; Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 15).

	Roma population	National average
Housing constructed prior to 1946	35%	27%
Useful floor space per person	10 m <sup>2</sup>	22.8 m <sup>2</sup>
Gas or electric cooking facilities	65.6%	95.3%
Piped water	41.3%	79.9%
Connected to a sewer system	37.2%	77.3%
Flushing toilet	33.7%	68.6%
Piped hot water	26.5%	67.8%

**Figure 3.** Roma housing conditions in 2001 (Poviliūnas 2011, 11)

The settlement ‘Kirtimai’ is also a place which regularly suffers from police raids (ECRI 2003, 22), which also affects innocent residents. Some Roma report inappropriate behaviour against them by the police, who often do not show a search warrant (ECRI 2003, 22). Therefore, the Lithuanian government is trying to solve this problem by organising meetings with members of the Roma community in order to inform the Roma people about the procedure that they can follow, when they notice inappropriate behaviour by the police (ECRI 2003, 22-23).

The ECRI (2003, 22) became aware of the Roma living conditions and urged the Lithuanian government to manage the issue by improving the housing situation in the settlement. A household of Roma normally consists of six or seven people (Poviliūnas 2011, 4-6), which suggests hard living conditions, as space in their houses is often limited and families larger than average. In the third report by the ECRI (2006), the means that were used in order to improve the living conditions of Roma in the settlement have been discussed. Even though many Roma were put on the waiting lists for social accommodation, most of them preferred to stay in the settlement in legalised houses or to move to rural areas (ECRI 2006, 25; Poviliūnas 2011, 28). This suggests that some Roma wish to avoid living in close proximity of native Lithuanians, as they fear to suffer discrimination and experience harsh behaviour by their Lithuanian neighbours. Roma families who were able to obtain accommodation from the state are mainly living in single-room flats (Poviliūnas 2011, 11).

The decision taken by officials of the Vilnius city municipality was considered arbitrary, when illegally built houses in the ‘Kirtimai’ settlement were forcibly demolished (ECRI 2011, 7; Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 16). In September 2010, the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania announced a final verdict by which the Vilnius city municipality had to pay 44 700 LTL (~13 000 EUR) to Roma victims of demolition.

The ECRI (2011, 32) reports that a delegation had visited the ‘Kirtimai’ settlement in November 2010 and had noticed that Roma there are still living under poor conditions. Such poor and unhygienic living conditions also affect school attendance by Roma children (see § 2.4.) (ECRI 2011, 33).

## **2.2. Health**

Problems of health care are often related to housing conditions. Many people do not live under optimal hygienic conditions, and citizenship is a necessary in order to benefit from medical services. But, as mentioned above, many Roma lack the documents required for applying for citizenship.

Even though “all inhabitants of Lithuania are covered by obligatory employer health insurance or, in the case of unemployment, by the state health care system, free of charge” (ECRI 2003, 21), many Roma are not able to use these services as they lack the relevant documents. Only in emergency situations they can sometimes receive a medical review free of charge (Poviliūnas 2011, 4; Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 38). However, the Lithuanian government informed ECRI (2011, 34) that most Roma have Lithuanian citizenship or residence permits, but they also have to be registered in the Labour Exchange in order to receive health services free of charge. But many Roma are not registered in the Labour Exchange (Council of Europe 2004-2006, 60; ECRI 2003, 21) and therefore cannot get health insurance and receive medical treatment (Poviliūnas 2011, 28; Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 38).

The most common diseases among Roma communities are digestive, contagious and respiratory diseases, for example, tuberculosis and scabies (ECRI 2003, 22; Poviliūnas 2011, 10). Moreover, the Roma have on average a shorter life expectancy (ECRI 2003, 22; Poviliūnas 2011, 10-11). Even though the Roma people have a right to receive emergency services free of charge, they are not always able to receive those in time (ECRI 2011, 35). The ambulance is regularly reported to be one or two hours delayed (ECRI 2011, 35).

Even though some national programmes, such as “those addressing AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, drug dependency, and national tuberculosis” (ECRI 2003, 22), have been implemented, more could be done. The settlement of ‘Kirtimai’ is affected by drugs (Poviliūnas 2011, 10).

The ECRI (2003, 22) encourages the Lithuanian government to take care of health problems and take action in order to improve the health situation for the Roma in

Lithuania. Consequently, the Lithuanian government recruited special medical staff, who visited the settlement (ECRI 2006, 26; Poviliūnas 2011, 10). Moreover, the Lithuanian government launched awareness campaigns aimed at HIV prevention and treatment (ECRI 2006, 26) and sanitation and hygiene (European Commission 2010, 11). Drug dependency is another problem (ECRI 2011, 34; Poviliūnas 2011, 10) that needs to be solved.

### **2.3. Unemployment**

Another serious challenge faced by the Roma community is unemployment. According to sociological research, as many as 56.7% of Roma adults do not have a job (Gelūnas 2012). Many Roma are forced to be self-employed or to take irregular jobs. Many are unemployed, mainly due to discrimination towards them (Andriukaitis 2008, 3; ECRI 2003, 21). Many employers have a negative attitude towards the Roma and tend to resent employing them (Andriukaitis 2007, 12), because prejudices about Roma being unwilling to work are widespread. However, research (Coalition of the Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights, Center for Equality Advancement and Roma community Center 2011) has shown that 73% of Roma are actively looking for a job and eager to work. Those Roma who have a job “are usually low-skilled workers” (Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 83) and mainly find employment in cleaning, housekeeping, dishwashing, building or the collection of scrap metal (Halász 2007, 12; Poviliūnas 2011, 9-10).

Many Roma do not have a regular occupation at all and have difficulties to find a job (Andriukaitis 2007, 12). Skilled Roma encounter a strong competition on the labour market (Štuopytė 2008, 142). Therefore, many Roma are forced to live and support themselves by means of social benefits and parental support (Poviliūnas 2011, 10). According to Štuopytė (2008, 142), unemployment also encourages some Roma to become involved in drug dealing and theft in order to get money and survive.

The ECRI (2003, 14) mentions that the Roma are one of the most vulnerable groups with respect to labour market, and this is a serious challenge in Lithuania. This is also caused by a lack of education and of relevant qualifications of the Roma people (Andriukaitis 2007, 12; ECRI 2003, 21; Gelūnas 2012; Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania 2012), mainly due to computer illiteracy and limited Lithuanian language skills (Andriukaitis 2008, 3). Therefore, more attention should be given to the teaching of Lithuanian language for the Roma (Andriukaitis 2008, 3). According to the

Council of Europe (2004-2006, 60), “only 70 of the 1 400 adults in the Romani community were in employment at the time of the census”. As a consequence, a high level of poverty is encountered in the Roma community.

The ECRI (2006, 16, 2011, 33) encourages the Lithuanian government to do more to improve the employment situation of the Roma and other minorities, and to promote equal opportunities for all ethnic minorities. Therefore, the Lithuanian government provided opportunities for public employment for the Roma of ‘Kirtimai’ (ECRI 2006, 25). In 2008, Lithuania “set up a job centre targeted at Roma” in order to provide help for unemployed Roma (ECRI 2011, 33; European Commission 2010, 11). The Lithuanian government organised ‘Labour Market Days’, where Roma had the possibility to search for a job, attend vocational training and Lithuanian language training courses (ECRI 2011, 33). However, many Roma have difficulties to attend such courses, as they are not registered in the Labour Exchange, which is only available for people who have previous work experience (ECRI 2011, 34). Therefore, the ECRI (2011, 34) advised to alleviate the demand of previous work experience for the Roma and to give them the possibility to register in the Labour Exchange and to attend vocational courses.

## **2.4. Education**

Education is a key to employment and to better living conditions. Especially uneducated people experience many difficulties in finding a job. According to Vidrinskaitė (2004, 111) and Štuopytė (2008, 140), the most pressing challenge is a poor level of education among Roma.

Not all Roma children regularly attend schools, for a variety of reasons (ECRI 2006, 24; Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 82; OECD 2002, 182-183; Vidrinskaitė 2004, 111). First of all, they have a hard time to adapt to school life. Some do not feel comfortable at school due to the financial problems they face at home (Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 82). They often decide to quit school, as they have to help their parents at home (Andriukaitis 2007, 15, 2008, 14; Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 82; OECD 2002, 182-183). Moreover, the parents often lack motivation and education, and thus they are not able to help their children with their homework (ECRI 2011, 31; OECD 2002, 182-183). Igarytė (2004, 60) also mentions lack of clothes and shoes, and a long way to school as reasons of non-attendance. Additional reasons include a tradition to create a family at an early age, and a belief that education is unnecessary and not

beneficial (Andriukaitis 2007, 15, 2008, 14; ECRI 2011, 31; Igarytė 2004, 60; Leončikas 2006, 92; OECD 2002, 182-183; Vidrinskaitė 2004, 111). A generally poor level of education leads to illiteracy and limited knowledge of the Lithuanian language (Coalition of the Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights, Center for Equality Advancement and Roma community Center 2011).

Roma children who attend school experience learning difficulties such as:

- Linguistic barriers: They may come to school with a poor knowledge of Lithuanian and thus experience a hard time to catch up and master the language (Baršauskienė and Leliugienė 2003, 5; CES 2008, 59; ECRI 2003, 20; Poviliūnas 2011, 26). They often attend bilingual or trilingual schools and this may also influence their performance at school, especially if their language is not the one used in class (CES 2008, 59; EUMC 2006, 54; Leončikas 2006, 106). Roma children normally attend school in other languages than their native language. Besides, there is a lack of teaching materials in Romani and a lack of qualified teachers who can teach in the Romani language (see § 3.3.) (Halász 2007, 16; Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 91; Leončikas 2006, 106; OECD 2002, 182-183). According to research of CES (2008, 39), most Roma children received schooling in Lithuanian (44.6%) and Russian (35.5%).
- Social integration: Many Roma children communicate mostly with other Roma children in Romani and they often experience an intolerant and ignoring behaviour from non-Roma children (CES 2008, 59; OECD 2002, 182-183) and even from teachers (Pilipavičienė 2009, 15; Baršauskienė and Leliugienė 2003, 10). Štuopytė (2008, 144) mentions research that shows that teachers may treat Roma on an equal foot with the other children, but even then non-Roma children can be intolerant towards the Roma in their class. Research also shows that Roma children generally do not feel discriminated against by their teachers (Štuopytė 2008, 144).
- Age difference and adaptation problems: Some Roma children start to attend school later than other children (Andriukaitis 2007, 15, 2008, 14; Council of Europe 2004-2006, 71; ECRI 2003, 20-21; Leončikas 2006, 119; OECD 2002, 182-183; Štuopytė 2008, 143) and thus they may feel uncomfortable among their peers.

- Poor school attendance: School dropout rates are high among Roma children as they lack motivation to attend classes, they may feel uncomfortable and thus refrain from attending school (Andriukaitis 2007, 15; ECRI 2006, 24, 2011, 31; Kallonen 2004, 3; OECD 2002, 180; Poviliūnas 2011, 8; Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 45). However, the situation is changing: the numbers of pupils attending schools increase and the number of dropouts is decreasing (Andriukaitis 2007, 15, 2008, 14; CES 2008, 9; Gelūnas 2012). For example, 125 out of 276 Roma children quit attending school in 1996/1997, 76 out of 571 Roma children stopped attending school in 2000/2001 and only 11 out of 597 Roma children quit school in 2004/2005 (Leončikas 2006, 116). The Ministry of Culture (Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania 2012) provided information that indicates that the number of Roma children at school has more than doubled between 1996/1997 and 2011/2012 (from 276 to 572 respectively).

The situation of limited school attendance may be changed if Roma children are encouraged to accomplish secondary or even university education and become teachers themselves, and thus provide an example for Roma children, who may see that education leads to social inclusion, which in turn generates better living conditions (OECD 2002, 182-183). Likewise, involving Roma parents in school affairs can give Roma children better opportunities for learning and seeking higher education (Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 91). Rus (2006, 6) mentions the existence of a Roma mediator/assistant in Lithuania, who is responsible for communication between Roma families and teachers. This programme was initiated in Lithuania in 2002 in the framework of a Socrates – Comenius project (Rus 2006, 7). Moreover, more attention should be paid to training of teachers, so that they become more aware of the reality of Roma children and gain knowledge about their history and culture (ECRI 2003, 21, 2011, 32; Leončikas 2006, 119; Poviliūnas 2011, 27; Štuopytė 2008, 140). Knowledge about human rights should be promoted in order to improve the chances of inclusion for Roma children (ECRI 2006, 14).

A special class for Roma children (9-16 year old) was created in a Vilnius secondary school NR 58, where 60 Roma children were attending classes in the academic year of 1999/2000 (Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 82). The lessons were held in Lithuanian and Russian (Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 82). The children had a possibility to learn basic reading, writing and mathematics skills (Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 82). However, the ECRI (2011, 31) expressed concern about separate

Roma classes, as Roma children should be integrated into non-Roma classes and not segregated in special classes (see also Bakker 2006 and Halwachs et al. 2013).

According to the 2001 census, 43.1% of Roma children completed primary education, 28.2% completed secondary education and 5.9% completed tertiary education (Open Society Institute 2006, 31). These numbers are significantly lower than for non-Roma. Poviliūnas (2011, 8) and Gelūnas (2012) mention that Roma children on average have six to seven years of schooling. Only few Roma acquire a high school diploma (Andriukaitis 2007, 15).

The ECRI (2003, 21, 2006, 24) encourages the Lithuanian government to focus more on the integration of Roma children in pre-school education and to communicate closely with Roma families. Moreover, the Lithuanian government should provide better transportation to schools for Roma children. Locating bus stops closer to Roma homes could provide Roma children an increased mobility (ECRI 2011, 32).

The Lithuanian government adopted a new Law on Education, where more focus was held on the teaching of people from national minorities (ECRI 2006, 15). They began to provide minority language teaching in Sunday schools. These initiatives received a positive reaction from the representatives of national minorities (ECRI 2006, 15-16). The Lithuanian government also started to organise preparatory courses for Roma children in the Roma Community Centre of 'Kirtimai' in order to prepare them for the integration in the school system (see § 3.3.) (Andriukaitis 2007, 15, 2008, 14; ECRI, 2006, 24, 2011, 30; Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 18-19). The ECRI (2011, 30) also mentions that three schools in Vilnius hired social workers who provide psychological, linguistic and pedagogical help for Roma children.

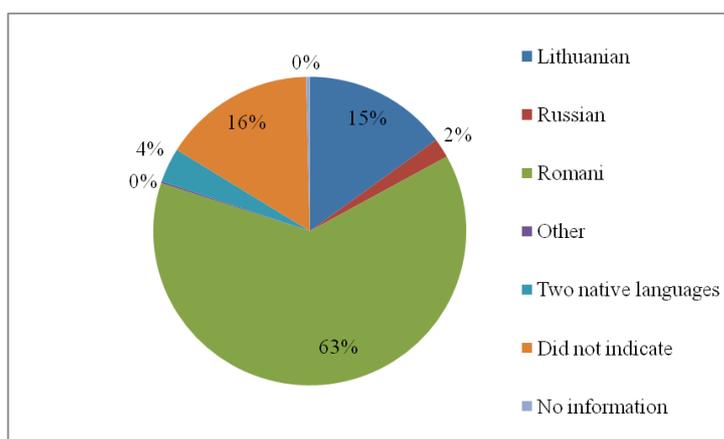
### **3. The Romani language**

Romani is a language with roots in India, a descendant of a form of Sanskrit and most closely related with languages like Hindi and Punjabi (Matras 2002). It is no longer spoken in India, but there are upwards of five million speakers in Europe, the Americas, Australia and South Africa. It has been present in Europe since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and in the Baltic region since around 1500 (Tcherenkov and Laederich 2004).

According to Matras (2002), Tenser (2005), Czerenkow (2009) and other sources, the dialects of Romani spoken in Lithuania belong to the Northeastern subgroup. Northeastern dialects of the Romani language are spoken in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, and the Baltic countries. Bakker and Kyuchukov (2003, 10) mention 'Baltic Romani'

and ‘Russian Romani/Xaladytko’ spoken in the Baltic States. However, not all Roma can speak Baltic Romani in these countries (Bakker and Kyuchukov 2003, 33). Tcherenkov and Laederich (2004) give some information about the different dialect groups of the Baltic States.

Even though the Roma people use a variety of other languages in Lithuania, such as Lithuanian, Russian and Polish, they mainly use the Romani language at home and often indicate that it is their native language and their home language (Baršauskienė and Leliugienė 2003, 1-2; Toleikis, n.d.). Roma value their language highly, which results in a high degree of cross-generational transmission (Baršauskienė and Leliugienė 2003, 2). As mentioned in the preceding chapter, many Roma do not have a good proficiency in Lithuanian, undoubtedly because Romani is their main means of communication, and Russian sometimes as their second language.



**Figure 4.** *The percentage of Roma people, according to their native language in 2011*  
(Statistics Lithuania 2013, 12)

According to Statistics Lithuania (2013, 12), Romani was indicated as a native language by 1 334 (63%) Roma among 2 115 Roma people in 2011. Lithuanian as a native language was indicated by 316 (15%) and Russian by 43 (2%) (see Figure 4). 76 (4%) Roma indicated that they have two native languages, while 334 (16%) Roma did not provide information about their native language. There was no information about 8 Roma. Most Roma living in the Vilnius area speak Russian as their second language, while Roma in other areas have Lithuanian as their second language (Council of Europe 2004-2006, 60).

In 2011, the first book focusing on the Romani language was published in Lithuanian (Beinortienė 2011). The book “Romų kalba” [“The Romani language”] (Beinortienė 2011) was reviewed by Kozhanov (2011). He mentions that “the book

consists of a grammatical description, a corpus of texts translated from Lithuanian to Romani by native speakers and transcribed by the author, and Romani–Lithuanian [4 400 words] and Lithuanian–Romani [4 200 words] vocabularies” (Kozhanov 2011, 214). The vocabularies provided in the book are edited by native Romani speaker Rada Bogdanovič (Kozhanov 2011, 216). Kozhanov (2011, 217) also mentions that the Romani language as depicted in the book displays more influence from Lithuanian than previous data had showed, e.g., a lot of borrowings in Romani, because Lithuanian is a state language. This may reflect the author’s methods of collecting data, where Lithuanian was used as an intermediate language, and Lithuanian was used as a contrast to Romani. For instance, not all prevalent structural aspects of Lithuanian Romani are discussed in the book, e.g., Romani articles are lacking; this may be due to the absence of definite or indefinite articles in Lithuanian.

### **3.1. Legislation of the Romani language in Lithuania**

According to Corsi et al. (2010, 126), “legislation is mainly related to the protection of the languages, traditions and cultural identity of formally recognised ethnic minority groups and to the right of these ethnic minorities to use their language in public administration (under certain conditions) and participate in political life”. There are three important documents for ethnic minorities ratified by the Lithuanian government:

- The Law on Ethnic minorities (1989). This law gives a right to minorities to speak their languages freely in communication, in addition to the Lithuanian language, in offices and organisations of the country, if the numbers of national minority speakers are sufficiently numerous in that area. Street signs may also be posted in their languages if many people having the same nationality are living there. People belonging to national minorities have the right to use their native language in private and public spheres. The Law also states that the languages of national minorities have to be respected and minorities should be able to receive information in their mother tongue, for instance in mass media. In relation to citizenship, every person has a free right to have a nationality and a passport, depending on the nationality of their parents (Survey of national activities and documents 2001, 525; U.S. English Foundation, n.d.).
- The Lithuanian Constitution (1992): The Constitution states that all inhabitants of Lithuania are equal before the law regardless of their nationality, language or religion, and they have a right to preserve their culture, traditions and language

(Corsi et al. 2010, 126; Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 83; Survey of national activities and documents 2001, 523-524).

- The Law on the State Language (1995): This law states that Lithuanian is the official language of the Republic of Lithuania and is to be used in public institutions, such as courts, educational institutions, cultural organisations, official events, etc. Different signs in minority languages can be indicated along with the state language, but these cannot be bigger than the ones in the state language (Survey of national activities and documents 2001, 525; U.S. English Foundation, n.d.).

Further information on Lithuanian language legislation, including other laws, can be found (in French) in Leclerc (n.d.).

In addition, the Law on Fundamentals of Protection of the Rights of the Child (1996) states that minority children “shall have the right to develop their own language, culture, customs and traditions” (Survey of national activities and documents 2001, 527) and that all ethnic minorities shall be able to create ethnic communities and organisations (Corsi et al. 2010, 71; Survey of national activities and documents 2001, 525). They shall be able to administer their affairs independently and receive financial support from the government (Corsi et al. 2010, 71; Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 83; Survey of national activities and documents 2001, 524).

Lithuanian legislation states that people belonging to national minorities have the right to receive assistance, free of charge, of a translator or an interpreter into a language they understand if they are not able to understand the state language (ECRI 2006, 12-13; Kallonen 2004, 5; Survey of national activities and documents 2001, 524, 528; Van der Stoel 2001, 358, 360). However, not all official translators or interpreters are competent in Romani; therefore, Roma cannot always use public translation services, and they have to find a translator or interpreter in their community (Council of Europe 2004-2006, 60; Kallonen 2004, 5). The Roma experience major disadvantages when they are not able to understand or receive translation in their own language, especially at courts.

Van der Stoel (2001, 378) mentions that an important tool for minority communication is the mass media, such as newspapers, TV and radio or the Internet. The ECRI (2003, 16) encouraged the Lithuanian government to allow a space for national minorities on TV, radio and other media as it is important to be informed about different issues related to national minorities in their own languages.

Some concern was also expressed regarding print media, e.g., newspapers, as not many printed materials are available in minority languages (ECRI 2003, 16). Kallonen (2004, 6) indicates that there are some newspapers and publications which have been published in minority languages though only in the major ones. However, he could not find any local printed media in the Romani language (Kallonen 2004, 6).

Romaninet (n.d.) mentions only printed material about the Romani culture and language, for example, the newspaper “Atsakingasis” [“Responsible”], and the book “Lithuanian Romani” by Anton Tenser (2005), the latter published in English. However, there are no “Romani owned or Romani language newspapers, television, or radio programs in Lithuania” (U.S. English Foundation, n.d.). The Lithuanian government is trying to make more efforts in order to provide more programmes based on the information about ethnic and linguistic minorities on TV and radio (U.S. English Foundation, n.d.). As television is the most popular mass media among Roma, Romani could help increase the awareness of the language as part of the Lithuanian linguistic landscape (Baršauskienė and Leliugienė 2003, 4).

### **3.2. The Romani language in Lithuanian society**

The language barrier is an obstacle for Roma minority as their knowledge of the only state language, Lithuanian, is generally poor. This limits their possibilities with regard to education and makes it more difficult to achieve better qualifications or get training in order to improve their social inclusion and living standards (Leončikas 2006, 89; Malinauskaitė 2007, 18).

The inclusion of Roma in Lithuanian society is an important task for the Lithuanian government. However, the authorities mainly focus on the inclusion through acquisition of the Lithuanian language and they often forget how important and valuable the Romani language is for the Roma (Malinauskaitė 2007, 38). The ability of non-Roma to speak the Romani language gives a sign of trust for the Roma people (Malinauskaitė 2007, 72), who largely respect the non-Roman who speak Romani (Malinauskaitė 2007, 38).

Malinauskaitė (2007, 38) indicates an interesting fact, noticed from a conversation with a representative of the Vilnius city municipality administration, that many families composed of Roma and Lithuanians adopt Romani traditions, e.g., Lithuanian women who married Roma men often take over the dress codes of the Roma.

The CES (2008, 73) conducted research concerning the values that Roma children attach to their traditions, culture and language. Most indicated that such continuation is very important for them (CES 2008, 73). According to the CES (2008), the main factors contributing to this are:

1. The most important factor is the ability to speak the Romani language (90.6%).
2. The second factor is the ability to communicate with other Roma (79.5%).
3. The ability of Roma children to absorb Roma traditions, culture and customs (76.6%).
4. Many Roma want their children to have their religion (69.4%).

### **3.3. The Romani language in education**

The Romani language is an important heritage preserved by the Roma. The best way to keep a language alive is to transmit it orally in the family. In addition, it is important to use people's mother tongues in the school system. Therefore, many minority groups want their children to be educated in their own language so that they can preserve their language, in this case Romani. According to the CES (2008, 58), many Roma parents do not want to bring their children to kindergarten as many Roma women do not work and cannot take care of their children. Moreover, parents argue that Roma children will have a better opportunity to learn Romani language and culture at home (CES 2008, 58).

The Law on Fundamentals of Protection of the Rights of the Child (1996) states that children belonging to minorities "shall have the right to develop their own language, culture, customs and traditions" (Survey of national activities and documents 2001, 527). The Law on National Minorities (1991) states that "minorities have a right to receive education in their own language at every level in Lithuania" (Mercator 2012). Therefore, minorities have a right to have their own schools with their own language as a language of instruction (Mercator 2012). However, in practice there are only schools in the minority languages Russian and Polish, but there are no schools where Romani is the language of instruction (U.S. English Foundation, n.d.). This may be partly due to the fairly small number of Roma in the country. The Law on Education (1991) states that separate/optional classes or Sunday schools may be established for small ethnic minorities, when they are interested to improve written skills in their own language (Survey of national activities and documents 2001, 526; Van der Stoel 2001, 369-370). The children of national minorities are provided with free textbooks in their native

language, as the State supports education in minority languages (Survey of national activities and documents 2001, 529).

Malinauskaitė (2007, 59) concluded, on the basis of an interview with a social worker of the Vilnius city municipality, that it is a necessity to have Romani specialists who can teach Roma children with love and motivation in their own language, as Roma people become more open towards new developments and express respect to those who can speak the Romani language. In this way, the Lithuanian government may motivate Roma children to attend schools (Malinauskaitė 2007, 59).

Roma children mainly attend special schools and follow special programmes (Leončikas 2006, 93) in order to facilitate integration into the regular school system. The Lithuanian government made an effort to organise preschool activities, including teaching of Lithuanian for Roma children in the Roma Community Centre (hence RCC) (ECRI 2003, 31; European Commission 2010, 9; Poviliūnas 2011, 21). The focus was on Roma living in the settlement 'Kirtimai'. Most Roma living there can only speak Romani and Russian, and thus have more difficulties with regard to the integration into mainstream schools, where Lithuanian is the language of instruction (ECRI 2003, 31). Here, 24 Roma children attended preschool activities in 2002/2003 in RCC (EUMC 2004, 19) and 25 Roma children (4-7 year old) attended these school activities in 2007 (Andriukaitis 2007, 15). Roma children are provided with food, books and access to free Internet in the RCC (ECRI 2011, 30). They can also attend courses in subjects such as arts, sports, games or computer classes (ECRI 2011, 30).

Two grammars of Lithuanian Romani have been published. Tenser (2005) is a concise grammar, written in English, based on fieldwork in the Panevėžys, Šiauliai and Anykščiai districts (p. 2). Beinortienė (2011), in Lithuanian, was discussed above.

As Romani is spoken in many different countries with different traditions of indicating speech sounds with different letters, there is no unified way of writing Romani. The different choices and motivations are discussed by a.o. Matras (1999a, 2005a, b) and, for educational materials, Bakker and Daval-Markussen (submitted).

In order to preserve the Romani language and its features, a first primer of Romani "Romane Bukvi" (Bagdonavičienė and Prosnjakova 2003) was developed and published with the support of the Lithuanian government and their representatives in 2003 (Igarytė 2004, 60; ECRI 2003, 31, 2006, 16; EUMC 2004, 6; Leončikas 2006, 103; Malinauskaitė 2007, 62; Poviliūnas 2011, 21). One of the authors of the book was a Romani woman, who actively contributed to education activities (Leončikas 2006,

103). This textbook laid the foundations for the written Romani language in Lithuania (Igarytė 2004, 60). It was presented to teachers working with Roma children and distributed to primary schools in 2004 (Leončikas 2006, 103). Romani language courses were organised for teachers three years in a row (Leončikas 2006, 103). However, some teachers expressed concern as this textbook is not necessarily appropriate for all children, as classes are composed of Romani speakers and children who do not speak Romani (Leončikas 2006, 103). Moreover, teachers were not sure when they had to use the textbook since the children cannot yet read at school start; therefore the consideration was to use it in special activities, which children could attend after the regular school curriculum (Leončikas 2006, 104). Leončikas (2006, 104) mentions that only some schools integrated this textbook in their activities, because the teachers did not see a need for using it.

In order to avoid the stereotypes created about Roma and to improve closer communication between Roma and the society, a Romani woman in the Center for Stateless Cultures of Vilnius University, started to teach Romani. Likewise, anthropologists collected material about the life stories of Roma and a movie about the Roma was created (Igarytė 2004, 60).

The Lithuanian government is also trying to invest in the training of teachers about differences in culture and also to try and improve the teaching of Romani (European Commission 2010, 10). Various training courses, financed by the Vilnius Social Support Centre, are organised for teachers working in RCC, for example Romani language courses, the educational programme ‘Rafaelis’, the project ‘Gerumo mokyklėlė’ [‘School of kindness’] (EUMC 2004, 19; Leončikas 2006, 102). Malinauskaitė (2007, 66) emphasises the importance of acquiring knowledge about Roma culture, language, traditions, their needs and challenges when working with Roma children.

#### **4. Organisations, projects and programmes**

Even though the rights of Roma are protected by different Lithuanian laws and by many different non-governmental and governmental organisations, international organisations notice that conditions for the Lithuanian Roma community did not improve significantly in recent years (Beresnevičiūtė 2010, 86). In order to solve the problems faced by the Roma and to increase Roma participation in Lithuanian society, many different projects and programmes were implemented. Research was carried out on the Lithuanian Roma

community in order to gain insights in their needs and to improve their possibilities for social integration and integration on the labour market (2007).

## **4.1. Organisations**

Several governmental and non-governmental organisations that are working on different minority issues exist in Lithuania.

Two hundred non-governmental organisations (hence NGOs) of different national minorities were established in Lithuania by 1999 (Department of National Minorities and Lithuanians Living Abroad under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, n.d.). In 2004 no fewer than 285 NGOs existed in Lithuania, among which 15 were Roma NGOs (Igarytė 2004, 76). Vidrinskaitė (2004, 111) gives a number of 14 Roma NGOs and mentions that sometimes it is not easy to find common decisions as the Roma community has no central leadership and the authority of one leader is not always recognised by others. Moreover, according to Poviliūnas (2011, 26), not many organisations remained a high level of activities.

### **4.1.1. Governmental organisations**

The Department of Regional Problems and National Minorities was established in 1989 and was responsible for the issues related to minorities, i.e. Lithuania's national minority policy (ECRI 2003, 12, 2011, 38; Kazlauskienė 2005). It was renamed the Department of National Minorities and Lithuanians Living Abroad (hence DNMLLA) as of 1999 (ECRI 2003, 12). The main tasks of the Department included (ECRI 2003, 12; Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 84-85; Kazlauskienė 2005):

- Close cooperation with public authorities and provision of information about ethnic minorities;
- Research on the present situation of the national minorities, their needs and public opinion about them in the country;
- Preparation and implementation of different minorities' integration programmes;
- Protection of minority rights, their interests and heritage.

Three public institutions were established and coordinated by the DNMLLA: the House of National Communities in 1991 (Vilnius), the Roma Community Centre in 2001 (Vilnius) and the Kaunas Cultural Centre of Different Nations in 2004 (Kaunas) (Kazlauskienė 2005). The DNMLLA worked closely with different governmental

organisations, for example, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education and Science, etc. (Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 85).

A Council of National Communities with representatives from 20 national communities was established in 1995 and worked as an advisory body to the DNMLLA (ECRI 2003, 12; Kazlauskienė 2005). The Council was responsible for coordination, maintenance and implementation of activities of different minority communities, including a state minority policy (ECRI 2003, 12). The representatives had the opportunity to meet with the authorities and to raise a range of issues relating to their communities (ECRI 2003, 12).

The DNMLLA was dismantled in 2009, and the Ministry of Culture took over their responsibilities (ECRI 2011, 38). The National Minorities Affairs Division in the Ministry of Culture pays a lot of attention to Roma issues and is responsible for the Roma integration programmes (ECRI 2011, 29). It also deals with the Roma issues in the social realm (ECRI 2011, 29).

#### **4.1.2. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)**

Hernesniemi and Hannikainen (2000, 85) listed the names of ten Roma organisations which were established in different cities of Lithuania, e.g., the Lithuanian Roma Associations 'Roma Fire' (or 'The Gypsy Fire' in Poviliūnas 2011), the Roma Association of Vilnius, the Roma Association 'Romai', 'Romani Divis', the Union of Roma Communities 'Roma Mission', the Roma Information Centre, and more. Many Lithuanian Roma NGOs were involved in different national integration programmes, for example, the national integration programme 2008-2010 (see § 4.2.4.) (European Commission 2010, 12).

The Lithuanian Gypsy Community was established in 1992 and was renamed the Vilnius Gypsy Community in 1996 (Baršauskienė and Leliugienė 2003, 2).

The Lithuanian Roma Association 'The Gypsy Fire' was established on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June in 1997 (Poviliūnas 2011). It is one of the most active national minorities' NGOs and the main Roma NGO. It deals with different issues relating to the Roma and their interests (Poviliūnas 2011; Tereškinas 2001-2002). 'The Gypsy Fire' actively communicates with the Vilnius city municipality and the Lithuanian Children's Fund (Roma.lt, n.d.). 'The Gypsy Fire' organised many different activities and projects related to Roma integration into Lithuanian society (Roma.lt, n.d.).

Tereškinas (2001-2002) also mentions another important Roma organisation, the Roma Bureau, which opened in 1998 and worked on “social, cultural and educational issues of Roma people”.

The Union of Roma Communities ‘Roma Mission’ was established in 1999, and it has a representative in the Council of National Communities (Baršauskienė and Leliugienė 2003, 2-3). The main tasks of this Union include (Baršauskienė and Leliugienė 2003, 3):

- To support and unite Roma communities and organisations in solving problems related to Roma;
- To protect Roma communities, their interests, culture and traditions;
- To cooperate with the Lithuanian government and to maintain collaboration with international organisations;
- To promote business development and creation of new jobs.

The Centre for Studies and Cultural Communities was established in 1999 in the Faculty of History of Vilnius University in order to teach the history and culture of such ethnic minorities as Roma, Karaims, Tartars, the Old Believers and Jews (EUMC 2004, 16). The goal of this Centre is also to change the existing stereotypes and to improve tolerance with regard to these minorities (EUMC 2004, 16). The students are able to take courses or to attend open lectures based on the culture of the above-mentioned minorities in Vilnius University (EUMC 2004, 16).

The Institute for Ethnic studies was established in 2002, though it started to operate under current name in July of 2010. One of the goals of the Institute is to collect and analyse data about the problems faced by ethnic minorities and migrant people. The Institute is responsible for the publication of the scientific journal *Etniškumo studijos* [“Ethnicity Studies”], which contains a lot of important information and material on the Roma issues (Poviliūnas 2011, 5). The researchers and activists of the Institute also participate in activities connected to the rights of ethnic minorities (Poviliūnas 2011, 5).

The Human Rights Monitoring Institute (hence HRMI) was established in 2003 “with the mission to promote an open democratic society through the consolidation of human rights and freedoms” (Human Rights Monitoring Institute, n.d.). The HRMI gives a high priority to Roma issues and is actively protecting their rights; therefore, it began the Roma Rights programme, where the focus is on general Roma issues (Poviliūnas 2011, 25).

According to Leončikas (2006, 97-98), NGOs represent the best contribution when it comes to Roma education. The Foundation for Educational Change, the Open Society Fund Lithuania, the Center for Innovative Education, the Lithuanian Children's Fund, the Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR), the Lithuanian youth organisation 'Transylvania' are important vectors for Roma education. Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė (2011-2012, 35) mention other important NGOs, such as the Roma Community Centre (hence RCC) and the National Institute for Social Integration.

One of the most active NGOs is the Foundation for Educational Change, which organised a project related to Roma education 'Support to Roma Pupils in Lithuania' (EUMC 2004, 14). This NGO provided help in the preparation of a Romani textbook, and organised seminars on teaching methodology for teachers and summer camps for Roma children (EUMC 2004, 6).

The Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR) also organised several educational seminars and activities, for example, presentation of Roma traditions, customs, songs and dances in schools, seminars for teachers, children and for the general public (EUMC 2004, 14).

The Open Society Fund Lithuania (hence OSFL) launched several programmes relating to education (OECD 2002, 182). The main focus was the improvement of communication with Roma families and the integration of their children in schools (OECD 2002, 182). The OSFL organised summer camps and seminars for children and teachers, presented Roma history for children, provided "more opportunities for cultural self-expression and social integration", and thus contributed to a better and more tolerant environment for the Roma people (OECD 2002, 182).

## **4.2. Projects and programmes**

Beresnevičiūtė and Frėjūtė-Rakauskienė (2006, 33) mention that the Vilnius city municipality implemented various programmes, for example, a public works programme 2004, which provided jobs for 50 people for a minimum wage. Poviliūnas (2011, 22) also mentions the programme of surveillance and security of the Vilnius Roma community and territories near the encampment and the reduction of Roma segregation for 2005-2010, which focused on the improvement of Roma housing, for instance by providing social housing or temporary accommodation for Roma. These programmes contributed to a better integration of Roma into Lithuanian society, but there is no information about the results (Beresnevičiūtė and Frėjūtė-Rakauskienė 2006,

33; Poviliūnas 2011, 23). Moreover, many programmes, e.g. Roma integration programmes (see § 4.2.3.), may also be more beneficial if Roma actively participate in such programmes.

Poviliūnas (2011, 18) mentions a few documents which are related to Roma problems such as poverty or social exclusion, for example, ‘Lithuanian Joint Inclusion Memorandum’ (hence JIM Lithuania), ‘NAP inclusion/2004-2006’ (NAP ‘National Action Plan’), ‘National Report of Lithuania on Social Protection and Social Inclusion Strategies 2008-2010’ (hence NR SPSIS), etc.

According to JIM Lithuania (Poviliūnas 2011, 18), the purpose was to prepare Lithuania for social inclusion. The organisation expressed their concern about the problem of Roma minority integration and their high poverty level (Poviliūnas 2011, 18). Moreover, JIM Lithuania emphasised their criticism of the use of the word ‘Gypsies’ rather than Roma (Poviliūnas 2011, 18). The Roma issue was more comprehensively treated in the ‘NAP/inclusion 2004-2006’ (Poviliūnas 2011, 19), in which it was argued that the Roma are one of the most vulnerable groups. Therefore the report expressed a wish to change this situation, especially with regard to poverty, education problems and unemployment (Poviliūnas 2011, 19).

‘National Report on Strategies of Lithuania for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008’ does not include discussion of the Roma community, but the next report NR SPSIS brought the Roma community and its issues back to the policy process (Poviliūnas 2011, 19-20). Most attention was given to the social exclusion of Roma, e.g. through the high level of unemployment among them (Poviliūnas 2011, 20). According to Poviliūnas (2011, 20), “the analysis of different documents reveals the inconsistency of Roma’s social policy”.

A national anti-discrimination programme, which also involved several Roma, was launched in 2009 and had the goal to improve integration of minorities and to fight against discrimination (Poviliūnas 2011, 20).

#### **4.2.1. The projects and programmes relating to education**

The project “Social dialogue”, made by two organisations, namely the Roma Community Centre and the Lithuanian Youth Falcon Union, aimed to reduce drop-out rates among Roma children from school and to increase their motivation for going to school, through the assistance of volunteers (Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 21).

The programme ‘Support for Roma students’ (1997) focused on the integration of Roma children into schools and to provide the necessary support for their teachers (Poviliūnas 2011, 26).

The ‘National Educational Strategy for 2003-2012’ was accepted in 2003 and was based on the educational needs of minorities and improvement of learning conditions for minority children with a special focus on the small minorities (EUMC 2006, 80; Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 19).

#### **4.2.2. Projects and programmes related to employment**

The project ‘Development of support mechanism of Roma integration into labour market’ aimed to implement Roma integration into the labour market and to reduce segregation by improving social communication (Poviliūnas 2011, 24). The project included the training of social workers and Roma assistants, who would later on become mediators and assist in communication with the Roma people (Poviliūnas 2011, 24). The budget of the project was more than half a million euros (Poviliūnas 2011, 24).

The project ‘Atsigrėžk į Romus’ [‘Face Roma’] (or ‘Turn to the Roma people’ in Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011) ran from 2009 until 2012 and focused on the inclusion of Roma in social life and the labour market, their motivation to keep a job, the promotion of tolerance towards Roma, and training (Poviliūnas 2011, 24-25; Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 12; Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 63). This project was supported by the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) Lithuania in cooperation with RCC, NGO ‘SOPA’ (“A non-profit organisation working on the integration of socially excluded groups into the labour market,” Sabatauskaitė & Urbonaitė, 2011-2012: 63) and the Social Assistance Centre of Vilnius municipality (Poviliūnas 2011, 24; Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 12; Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 63). The budget of the project was around two million euros (Poviliūnas 2011, 24).

#### **4.2.3. The programme for the integration of Roma into Lithuanian society for 2000-2004**

In order to solve the problems of Roma exclusion and to improve their situation, the Lithuanian government launched the programme for the integration of Roma into Lithuanian society for 2000-2004 on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 2000 (Council of Europe 2005, 37; ECRI 2001, 69, 2003, 19, 2006, 22; EUMC 2006, 80; Hernesniemi and Hannikainen

2000, 86; Kallonen 2004, 3; Kučinskaitė 2002; Pilipavičienė 2009, 9; Poviliūnas 2011, 21; Štuopytė 2008, 140; U.S. English Foundation, n.d.). The most important goal of the programme was the education of Roma children and adults (Vidrinskaitė 2004, 111). The programme also paid attention to poor Roma housing conditions, training of Roma in the Lithuanian language, the problem of unemployment, and low school attendance of Roma children (ECRI 2003, 20; EUMC 2006, 80; Poviliūnas 2011, 21-22).

During this programme, the Roma Community Centre (RCC) was established and the first primer in Romani was published (see § 3.3.) (ECRI 2003, 20; EUMC 2006, 80; Pilipavičienė 2009, 9; Poviliūnas 2011, 21; Vidrinskaitė 2004, 111). Sanitation and a hygiene centre was built nearby RCC in 2003, where the Roma had the possibility to use four shower cabins and three washing machines for a low fee (Pilipavičienė 2009, 9). Two workplaces were created there for the Roma as well (Pilipavičienė 2009, 9).

However, the programme did not include the representatives of the Roma communities in solving important questions concerning the Roma; therefore it could be beneficial to involve them in the preparation and development phases of the programme (ECRI 2003, 20, 2006, 22; Hernesniemi and Hannikainen 2000, 86; Kallonen 2004, 3; U.S. English Foundation, n.d.). The focus of this programme was mainly on the Roma community living in the settlement 'Kirtimai'; therefore, the ECRI (2003, 20, 2006, 23) recommends to pay more attention to Roma living in other areas as well. The ECRI (2003, 20) also mentions that more attention should be given to the situation of Roma in the fields of employment, health and housing, as this programme was mainly focusing on education and Lithuanian language training for Roma.

The second report on Lithuania by the ECRI (2006, 6) emphasises that not much has been done in regard to discrimination, because many Roma still feel discriminated and excluded from society. Moreover, political will was passive and funding for the implementation of the programme was quite limited (ECRI 2006, 23). Therefore, both the political will and possibilities for funding should be clear and adequate (ECRI 2006, 23).

In order to involve and introduce Roma representatives to the new integration programme for 2008-2010 (see § 4.2.4.), two meetings were organised with them by the DNMLLA (ECRI 2011, 62).

#### **4.2.4. The programme for the integration of Roma into Lithuanian society for 2008-2010**

The Lithuanian government adopted the programme for the integration of Roma into Lithuanian society for 2008-2010 in March, 2008 (Andriukaitis 2008, 32-33; European Commission 2010, 9; Poviliūnas 2011, 20). The programme was focused on different problems faced by Roma, such as education, unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, however, more focus on health, housing or social support crucially lacks (Andriukaitis 2008, 33; ECRI 2011, 28; Poviliūnas 2011, 20).

The main tasks of the programme were to train teachers who are working with Roma, to prepare relevant teaching materials, to train Roma in the state language, to organise summer activities, to build a sports hall nearby 'Kirtimai', and to protect the Romani culture, customs and language (Andriukaitis 2008, 33; Poviliūnas 2011, 21-23). With regard to health, the programme included only the provision of information related to medical insurance and some "lectures for Roma women about hygiene and medical issues" (Poviliūnas 2011, 22).

However, the programme did not receive adequate funding and was not implemented; therefore, this led to the cancellation of the programme at the beginning of 2010 (Andriukaitis and Kliukas 2009-2010, 4; Coalition of the Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights, Center for Equality Advancement and Roma community Center 2011; ECRI 2011, 8; Poviliūnas 2011, 20; Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 44). Moreover, Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis (2010-2011, 44) mention that "Lithuania does not have a policy on integration of Roma people".

According to the ECRI (2011, 9), Roma pedagogues should be present in all schools attended by Roma, the Roma housing problem should be taken into serious consideration, the employment issue should be considered and registration in employment agencies should be promoted. Moreover, proper funding should be allocated to integration programmes, and all the Roma communities in Lithuania should be addressed (ECRI 2011, 29). The ECRI (2011, 36) also recommends maintaining better contacts between the Roma community and the police.

#### **4.2.5. The programme for the integration of Roma into Lithuanian society for 2010-2012**

Since many Roma issues remained unsolved, the idea to adopt a new programme appeared (Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 44). The creation of a programme for the integration of Roma into Lithuanian society for 2010-2012 began in July of 2010, but since then the strategy of the programme only remained as a draft version (ECRI 2011, 28; Poviliūnas 2011, 20; Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 44).

The Ministry of Culture was responsible for the programme because of dismantlement of DNMLLA on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January of 2010, though the recommendations for the programme were also received from different NGOs (Poviliūnas 2011, 20; Sabatauskaitė and Andriukaitis 2010-2011, 44). Moreover, “in 2011 the Ministry of Culture has allocated 11.5 thousand of LTL for three Roma NGO projects” (Poviliūnas 2011, 20). This is 3330 Euros. The focus of the programme was again on education and assistance to Roma families (ECRI 2011, 28).

#### **4.2.6. The action plan for the integration of Roma into Lithuanian society for 2012-2014**

The action plan for the integration of Roma into Lithuanian society for 2012-2014 was approved on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 2012 by the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania (Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 38).

The main task of the action plan was the education of Roma adults and children (Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 31). The action plan aimed at improving Roma participation in society, reducing social exclusion and increasing tolerance of Lithuanian society towards Roma (Gelūnas 2012). The means used for achieving the aims of the action plan were to involve teaching of Romani in education, to collect traditional Roma folklore songs and to produce a compact disc, to involve teaching about Roma history and ethno-culture in education, to organise pre-school education and social skill development activities in RCC, to train Roma representatives in Lithuanian, to provide IT courses, to publish information about Roma rights, culture, history and customs (Gelūnas 2012; Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 31-32). The area of discrimination and the problem of health care was also actively discussed, even though there was not much political will in solving these issues, and funding was

limited (Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 63-69). However, the issue of housing was not addressed in the action plan (Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 9).

Seven NGOs, including the Lithuanian Roma Association 'The Gypsy Fire', the Lithuanian Children's Fund and RCC had a possibility to provide their recommendations for the action plan (Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 64). Nevertheless, these recommendations were not taken into consideration. The action plan was signed by the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania (Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 15). Therefore, these seven NGOs released a resolution, questioning the adequacy of the action plan, and sent it to the European Commission (Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 15, 39). The resolution addressed issues necessary for Roma integration, namely the education of Roma adults and children, the poor Roma housing conditions, health care problems, discrimination, illiteracy and drug use (Sabatauskaitė and Urbonaitė 2011-2012, 32-39, 63).

The European Commission (2013) reviewed the strategy of 2012 and expressed a positive reaction to the promotion of Romani culture, history and folklore, day centres for children, different activities for Roma children, education of Roma adults, training of teachers and Roma mediators, training of Roma in language and IT, providing information about hygiene for Roma women and girls, etc. However, they also found disadvantages, for example, the plan is not scheduled to extend beyond 2014. Besides, less attention was given to health care problems (European Commission 2013).

#### **4.2.7. The strategy on the development of the national minority policy until 2015**

According to Poviliūnas (2011, 22), the strategy is related to education, employment and discrimination of ethnic minorities. The idea of this strategy is to train teachers in working with children from national minorities and to prepare a plan that they can use in order to teach children about the Romani language and culture.

However, the information regarding Roma children is not found. Moreover, the budget prepared for this project is quite low. The strategy also settles the goals to increase the number of working Roma and to decrease discrimination towards them by creating a positive opinion with respect to Roma (Poviliūnas 2011, 22-23).

## **5. Conclusions**

We have seen that the situation of the Romani minority in Lithuania has changed quite dramatically in the past decades. In recent years, several programmes directed at the situation of Roma have been initiated, often at the instigation or after inspiration from the European level, to improve the situation of Lithuanian Roma. These programmes created a dialogue between the Roma community and the society, where civilians have been introduced to the Roma history and culture. The Roma have also profited from the improved possibilities to establish different Roma organisations and NGOs, which are working on Roma rights and better integration in the society. This indicates that the Lithuanian Roma have become more involved and active in the solution of the problems they face and their solutions.

However, the Roma of Lithuania are in many cases unable to participate fully in Lithuanian society, because of a limited knowledge of the Lithuanian language and a legal position that is weak because they may not be able to acquire Lithuanian citizenship. Moreover, the attitude of Lithuanian people towards Roma is a challenge as discrimination may also be an obstacle for full Roma integration in Lithuanian society. Most attention so far was given to the Roma living in and around the settlement 'Kirtimai'. The other Roma communities in different Lithuanian regions must also be involved. Special attention should be given to their living conditions as this is closely connected with their quality of life.

Most Lithuanian Roma speak Romani and Russian as a second language, and quite a few but by no means all, also Lithuanian. Several programmes have been set up to try and integrate the Romani language in schools, but with limited success. Similar observations can be made for the programmes relating to health, employment and housing. Clearly, improvement is visible, thanks to the efforts of Romani organisations, Lithuanian non-governmental organisations and the Lithuanian authorities, but more needs to be done if the Lithuanian Roma are to be treated as equal citizens on a par with Lithuanians.

#### Acknowledgements.

The authors like to thank Ana Paulla Braga Mattos and Aymeric Daval-Markussen for their assistance in the preparation of this article, and the colleagues of the Romident project in Manchester and Graz for their input and stimulation.

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