

RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM: YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO
SOCIAL RIGHTS

Between Entitlement and Exclusion: Roma Youth Access to Welfare and Employment Services in North Macedonia

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Question and Methodology

Research Question

How do Roma youth experience the journey from formal entitlement to actual access to welfare benefits and active employment programmes?

Focusing on lived experiences, institutional interactions, and administrative friction rather than formal legal text alone.

Methodology

- ✓ Review of relevant policy and programme documents.
- ✓ Guaranteed Minimum Assistance (GMA) framework analysis.
- ✓ Operational Plan for active employment programmes.
- ✓ Employment Service Agency implementation data review.
- ✓ Focus group with 10 Roma young people in Shuto Orizari.
- ✓ Beneficiary journey mapping & intersectional analysis (ethnicity, gender, disability).

 **Main Finding:** Non-take-up is produced cumulatively across the beneficiary journey—not by one isolated decision.

Policy & Employment Context

TWO SYSTEMS, ONE JOURNEY: Roma youth must simultaneously interact with two separate administrative pillars.



Guaranteed Minimum Assistance

- Provides means-tested income protection for households.
- Administered through Centres for Social Work (CSW).
- Strict eligibility depends entirely on collective household circumstances.



Active Employment Measures

- Training, vocational education, and skills development.
- Internships and subsidized employment schemes.
- Self-employment grants and job-search support.
- Administered primarily through the Employment Service Agency (ESA).

↩ **Institutional Disconnect:** While national strategy presumes integrated activation, beneficiaries encounter two fragmented, siloed institutional tracks.

What the Data Show

RECORDED PARTICIPATION REMAINS UNEVEN: Administrative statistics reveal significant gaps.

Activation Service for Unemployed Roma, 2025

Total People Reached	1,710
Young People Under 29	318
Entered an Active Measure	100
Obtained Employment	80

Internship Measure, 2025

Total Participants	1,162
Women	743
GMA Beneficiaries	40
Participants Recorded as Roma	4

 These are participation figures—not take-up rates.

The Beneficiary Journey

WHERE DOES THE UPTAKE GAP EMERGE? The uptake gap can emerge at every stage of the activation sequence:



⚠ **Key Takeaway:** The uptake gap can emerge at every stage—an interruption at any point breaks the chain of access.

Finding 1: Access Has a Price

"Most often, information comes from third parties, acquaintances or the NGO sector."

"If we ask, they give us information. But they would never contact us themselves."

"Out of 15 counters, only two were working."

"It can cost 1,000 denars just to get there."

The Cumulative Burden: Limited outreach + waiting + travel + unclear feedback = disengagement

Finding 2: Unequal Journeys

THE JOURNEY IS NOT THE SAME FOR EVERYONE: Intersecting structural factors compound administrative exclusion.



Ethnicity

Reported discrimination, distrust and concern about recording ethnic affiliation.



Gender

Pregnancy, childcare and family expectations may restrict participation.



Disability

Inaccessible information and procedures create dependence on personal assistance.

“Before I had an assistant, there was inappropriate treatment towards me as a blind person.” – Focus-group participant; translated from Macedonian.

Finding 3: Risk of Employment

EMPLOYMENT CAN FEEL FINANCIALLY RISKY: Fear of losing income support disincentivizes activation.

"Not only employment—the same thing happens with internships."

Participants were uncertain about:

- ? Whether internship payments count as household income.
- ? Whether temporary work affects GMA eligibility.
- ? Whether lost support can later be restored.
- ? Whether training leads to a real job.

Voices from Participants:

"Whoever waits for the institutions will wait forever."

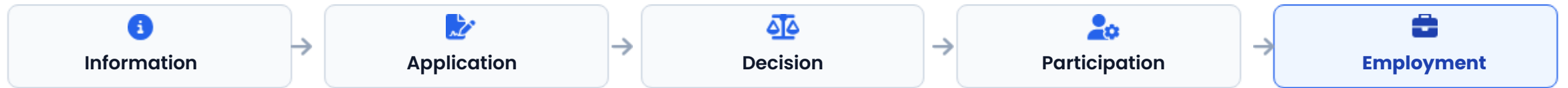
"Of course I would attend again. Knowledge is power."

Main Interpretation: Disengagement reflects weak institutional trust—not necessarily weak employment aspirations.

Formal Eligibility vs. Access

⊘ FORMAL ELIGIBILITY IS NOT EFFECTIVE ACCESS

For Roma youth, the uptake gap is produced across the entire journey:



✂ Closing this gap requires more than administrative simplification.

👥 It requires redesigning services from the perspective of the people expected to use them.