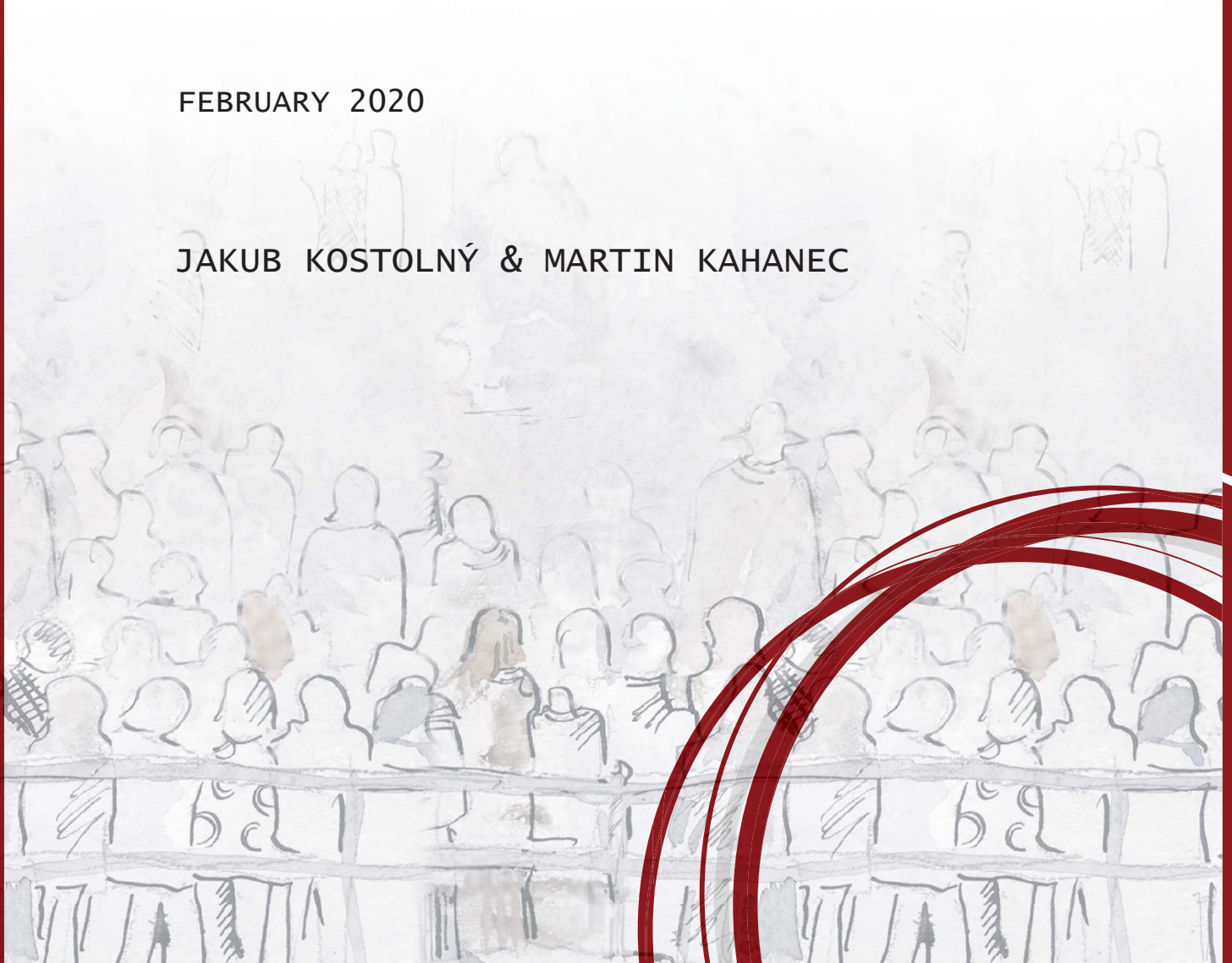


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STRATEGIC REVIEW OF THE SLOVAK NATIONAL RI ROADMAP

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The aim of this report is to review the Slovak national research infrastructure roadmap in the context of the focus of the InGRID project on vulnerable groups and their working conditions. We review the literature dealing with data and research infrastructures in Slovakia and present the results of an expert survey and expert interviews.

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1. Introduction

Quality data is required both for research and for evidence-informed policymaking. It helps us to deepen and broaden our knowledge and to make better informed decisions. When studying vulnerable, hard-to-reach groups in society, the reliability of data becomes even more crucial, as the achieved samples tend to be smaller and non-representative and the studied questions are more sensitive.

The aim of this report is to review the Slovak national research infrastructure roadmap in the context of the focus of the InGRID-2 project on vulnerable groups and their working conditions. In the report we present the literature dealing with data on vulnerable groups in Slovakia. Based on an expert questionnaire and expert interviews we discuss the gaps that researchers and policymakers face when studying such populations.

2. Methodology

To inform the analytical approach of this report, pilot interviews and a roundtable debate¹ with experts on Central and Eastern European research gaps were conducted to provide an initial mapping of the situation. The report draws on and complements a similar report on gaps in the CEE region.²

The review of the Slovak National Research Infrastructure roadmap uses the following sources of data: (1) the existing literature on data regarding vulnerable groups in Slovakia, (2) the InGRID-2 CEE expert questionnaire on data gaps and the InGRID-2 user survey and (3) three expert interviews.

The InGRID-2 CEE expert questionnaire was designed to gauge data about gaps in the Slovak research infrastructure in respect of (1) international and national data, (2) InGRID-2 project data sets, (3) administrative data and (4) data on vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups. The methodology and sampling are explained in detail in the report on gaps in Central and Eastern Europe.

In order to validate the findings from the expert questionnaire, three expert semi-structured interviews were conducted in the period of September – November 2019, with a representative of Comenius University (Interview 1), a representative of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (Interview 2), and a representative of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (Interview 3). These interviews followed the same structure as the questionnaire, offering more space to interviewees and possibility of follow-up questions.

2.1 Sample

There were eight female respondents and seven male respondents in both the InGRID-2 CEE expert questionnaire and the InGRID-2 user survey from Slovakia. Seven experts were aged between 18-34, four belong to age category of 35-49 years old and four experts were over 50 years old.

The majority of the respondents (5) represented governmental or public organisations, while two were from research institutions, two from non-governmental or civil society organisations and the rest was from other types of institutions.

There were four junior researchers, seven senior researchers and one professor among the experts. Six experts had as their main field of expertise ‘the labour market, vulnerability and precariousness’, three experts work in ‘poverty and living conditions’, and two who work in ‘industrial relations and collective bargaining’. The remaining experts chose ‘other’ or skipped the respective questions.

¹ The roundtable took place on 7-8 March 2019 in Bratislava.

² For more information, see report on CEE Research Infrastructure gaps. (Kostolny, Kahanec & Szudi, 2019)

3. Analysis

3.1 Literature review

The 2019 revision of spending on groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion by the Slovak Ministry of Finance estimates that in 2017 16.3% of population in Slovakia was in risk of poverty or social exclusion. Even though this is below the EU average (22.5%), according to the Ministry some vulnerable groups are more endangered even when compared to similar vulnerable groups in the other EU countries. Public spending on these groups was estimated at 0.51% GDP, which is in the bottom third of countries in the EU (Hellebrandt et al, 2019: 6-9). The revision also investigated data collection set-up and outlined some of the best practice examples based on existing data sources, including administrative data.³ This is an example of an initiative applying an innovative data approach on the study of vulnerable groups. More of these initiatives are emerging in Slovakia, exposing but also overcoming various gaps in the data infrastructure.

The Eurostat data sets on macroeconomic and social statistics are well standardised and available for scientific purposes to researchers in Slovakia, both in the aggregate form and as anonymised microdata.⁴ The main limitation with respect to vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups is that these groups, including individuals living in institutions or individuals living in segregated communities, are underrepresented or not represented at all. Among these data sets are, for instance, the EU-wide Study of Income and Living Conditions (SILC), Labour Force Survey (LFS) or Structure of Earnings Survey (SES). These data sets are referred to as ‘go-to’ standard data sets in EU, widely used in research and policymaking.

The government publishes a list of available aggregated data, including those of the Statistical Office, online at: <https://data.gov.sk/>. The city of Bratislava has launched its open data webportal in 2019 covering topics ranging from budget, environment to social sphere and can be found at: <https://opendata.bratislava.sk/>. Various data on poverty, social benefits and services or activation work from various governmental portals are made available through this site. The progress in open and linked government data⁵ has also been recognised by the European Data Portal in 2018.⁶

3.1.1 Hard-to-reach groups

A particular challenge for the data infrastructure is the lack of data about the Roma community. Roma account for about 9% of the population in the Slovak Republic. They mostly live in concentrated settlements, separated neighbourhoods or ghettos, excluded from the general population. Most of them live in poverty and face social exclusion in multiple aspects of everyday life (Bednarik et al., 2019).⁷ While in the 2011 census 105,000 persons identified themselves as Roma, the estimates in the Atlas of Roma Communities suggest there are more than 440,000 Roma living in Slovakia. This signifies a challenge with respect to the identification of the Roma in census and other survey data.

3 <https://www.mfsr.sk/en/finance/value-money/spending-reviews/groups-risk-poverty-social-exclusion-2018/>

4 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/help/first-visit/database>

5 <https://celsi.sk/en/publications/detail/247/policy-brief-using-administrative-data-to-improve-policy-making-in-the-cee/>

6 <https://www.europeandataportal.eu/cs/news/slovakia-progresses-linked-data>

7 Bednarik, M., Hidas, S. & Machlica, G. (2019). Enhancing the social integration of Roma in Slovak Republic (OECD Economics Department Working Papers, No. 1551). Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/197eb309-en>.

The Atlas of Roma Communities was implemented in 2004, 2013, and 2019⁸ in cooperation with the UNDP,⁹ the Office of Roma Plenipotentiary, and other partners such as the Institute of Research of Labour and Family and Associations of Towns and Communities in Slovakia. The data was intended to inform evidence-based policymaking, primarily in the area of social inclusion. The Atlas covers communities also in settlements, which are scarcely covered in EU-wide data sets: (1) segregated settlements, (2) settlements/neighbourhoods on the edge of towns/villages, (3) settlements/neighbourhoods inside the towns/villages or (4) towns/villages where Roma are living dispersed among majority populations. One of the advantages of the Atlas of Roma Communities is that it enables pooling with administrative data and the identification of Roma population in places with at least one concentrated settlement. This improves the evaluation of impact of integration policies on Roma minority (Hellebrandt et al., 2019). The salience of the issue is underlined by the fact that the Office of Roma Plenipotentiary with the Statistical Office organised a dedicated EU-SILC module on income and living conditions of Roma communities in 2018.¹⁰

Homeless people represent a group which is both vulnerable and hard to reach. According to a Commission Regulation (EC) No 1201/2009 of 30 November 2009, ‘homeless (persons who are not usual residents in any living quarter category) can be persons living in the streets without a shelter that would fall within the scope of living quarters (primary homelessness) or persons moving frequently between temporary accommodation (secondary homelessness).’¹¹ Following this regulation, the 2011 Slovak Census covered ‘secondary homeless’, while ‘primary homeless’ without any residency or shelter were still missing in the data. Despite this, the 2011 census data represents the first mention of official data regarding homeless in Slovakia. Before 2011 the statistics were gathered solely by non-governmental organisations such as Vagus.¹² There were 1,834 persons in Bratislava who could be included in the ‘secondary homeless’ category. In 2016, following this mapping, a study specifically on homeless has been conducted in Bratislava. It included both types of homeless people and was organised by the Institute for Research of Labour and Family, City Council and Ministry of Education.¹³

Besides the Roma and homeless people, several other hard-to-reach or vulnerable groups are not properly covered due to gaps in data infrastructure. Slovakia has the sixth lowest proportion of foreigners, with EU citizens accounting for more than half of all foreigners in Slovakia. This data is available for instance from the International Organisation for Migration in Slovakia.¹⁴ However, the small numbers of foreigners limit their coverage in nation-wide data sets. On the other hand, the Slovak Statistical Office now gathers data on the social situation of persons with disabilities.

3.2 Expert Questionnaires

Nine of the fifteen experts that responded to the expert questionnaire stated that they are generally able to access the data sets required for their research work, while two stated that the available data, indicators and tools were insufficient for their work, with one stating that ‘effective criteria for representativeness were missing’.

From the available international and European data sets, three experts use EU LFS, one uses EU SILC and one European Working Conditions Survey. In these data sets, the timing of data release, sample attrition, adequacy for cross-region comparative analysis are ranked as very significant or significant gaps.

8 <https://www.minv.sk/?atlas-romskych-komunit-2019>

9 <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbec/docs/Report-on-the-living-conditions-of-Roma-households-in-Slovakia-2010.pdf>

10 <https://www.minv.sk/?tlacove-spravy&sprava=urad-splnomocnenca-pre-romske-komunity-v-spolupraci-so-statistickym-uradom-realizuje-prve-zo-zistovani-eu-silc-mrk-o-prijmovej-situacii-a-zivotnych-podmienkach-romskych-komunit>

11 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32009R1201>

12 <https://dennikn.sk/blog/1158187/bez-domova-a-predsa-scitani/>

13 <https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/informacie-media/aktuality/historicky-prve-scitanie-ludi-bez-domova.html>

14 <https://www.iom.sk/en/migration/migration-in-slovakia.html>

Amongst the data sets made available within InGRID-2 project research infrastructure, EURO-MOD and ICTWSS are only mentioned by two experts. However, the interviewed experts also use the WageIndicator and LIS data sets.

Only two experts in our study report the use of administrative data sets. They list the following gaps as very significant or significant: missing variables or topics, sample attrition, adequacy for cross-country comparative analysis, length of time series, lack of data set information/codebooks.

3.3 Interviews

All three interviewed experts state that the use of European data sets is without any problem. Since 2005 these data sets are gathered and available in the CEE region. Interviewee 1 states that EU standardisation helped set the standards also for Slovak authorities. The main drawback of this data (SILC, LFS) is that institutionalised groups or marginalised communities are not adequately covered in the data. The random sample is based on census data, which takes place each ten years and is therefore outdated. (Interviewee 1) This could be improved if administrative data were used. The government could also use administrative data in order to avoid dual asking of information that already is included in its registries. The census questionnaire could be therefore shortened. (Interviewee 3).

The 2018 dedicated EU-SILC module focused specifically on Roma communities, including those which are segregated. It uses a random representative sample proxied by the Atlas of Roma Communities. Interviewee 3 states that there is possibility of future cooperation with the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), which wants to share expertise and collaborate. (Interviewee 3)

The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), conducted by the Slovak Academy of Sciences and its Sociology Department, is also running an archive of social science data. The European Values Survey is run by the Academy of Sciences as well. All interviewed experts know data listed in the InGRID-2 project and have used EUROMOD, LIS. They also attended InGRID-2 events or visited InGRID-2 infrastructures via transnational access grants.

According to Interviewee 1, administrative data are of varying quality: it is hard to know what exact data there is and, typically there is no catalogue or codebook for this type of data. (Interviewee 1). The data requires a lot of data cleaning and statistical expertise to work with large samples. (Interviewee 2) To a large extent, access to administrative data is dependent on personal contacts or the power of the asking institution expressed in terms of its relevance in the policy decision-making processes. While governmental analytical institutions generally have access to many of these data sets, for individual researchers or students there is no standardised way of obtaining the data. Some sensitive information and labour market data are collected for the state by private companies, but these are not available for further use by researchers. Instead the data must be bought again. (Interviewee 1). Data protection regulation constitutes another hurdle for the access to administrative data sets. In effect, many administrative data sets remain hard to access even for governmental organisations, let alone academics and researchers. Finally, administrative data often do not identify vulnerable groups, precluding any study of such groups even if the data as such is readily accessible.

The lacking statistical expertise and training might also constitute a gap in accessing research infrastructures in Slovakia. Interviewee 2 suggests that the research community on vulnerable groups is relatively small with limited number of researchers with the expertise and tools to study large data samples.

4. Discussion

In this report we reviewed some of the existing literature on the data about specific vulnerable groups in Slovakia, analysed the results of two expert questionnaires on gaps in research infrastructures, and interviewed three experts who work with social science data in Slovakia in order to review the Slovak national research infrastructure roadmap with a specific focus on vulnerable, hard-to-reach groups and their working conditions.

The purpose of this study was primarily exploratory, with no intention to make statistical inference from the data. Specifically, we aimed to map the situation of data and research infrastructures on vulnerable groups in Slovakia and present some best practices and gaps. By means of the various sources of information we triangulated some key findings about the gaps.

Our findings suggest that data is relatively accessible, and researchers and policymakers generally can access the data they need. International and European data offer standardised, easily accessible and reliable sources of information. However, the responses also suggested that more transparent procedures and government regulatory mechanisms could be engaged in order to overcome several specific obstacles with the data. When asked about the most important obstacles concerning the collection and maintenance of data sets on poverty, living conditions, working conditions and vulnerability the experts most often indicated the following: (1) lack of clear procedures (lack of transparent engagement process) to request/access the data sets, e.g. administrative/government micro-data, (2) lack of principles and regulatory mechanisms governing the establishment and use of large-scale, linked data sets, (3) lack of coordination of what is collected/available and what is missing and (4) lack of integration of the data sets – lack of multiple government agency data sets.

Some good practices trying to tackle these issues in Slovakia, which we discuss in this report, are the Atlas of Roma Communities or the survey of homeless individuals. Open data initiatives are emerging both on the level of cities and the government. Our respondents claim that administrative data is generally accessible, although several barriers to their effective use remain, including a lacking identifier of vulnerable groups, missing standardised ways of obtaining these data, and the lacking infrastructure enabling an effective access and data protection at the same time.

The main gap and challenge for the future is the lack of principles and regulatory mechanisms for obtaining and using the data, and a lack of their integration. Whereas the interviewed experts indicated fairly good access to major data sets, an integrated data service centre offering access to researchers and academics (including students and junior researchers), and to sensitive data sets, using standardised procedures and ensuring data protection, is long due.



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