



Growing through Sharing Together: Needs and Aspirations of Romani Early Childhood Professionals

A Study commissioned by the
International Step by Step Association (ISSA) and the
Roma 'Kopaçi' initiatives, Early Childhood Programme
at the Open Society Foundations (OSF/ECP)



INTERNATIONAL
STEP by STEP
ASSOCIATION

This mapping study was prepared by **Laura SURDU**.

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Table of Contents

Foreword.....	4
Executive Summary.....	6
Introduction	8
Methodology	10
Characteristics of the Sample.....	12
The Profile of ECD Professionals and Paraprofessionals	14
Professions/Occupations in the Field of ECD.....	14
Types of Organizations.....	15
Education, Training and Qualifications of ECD Workforce.....	18
Opportunities for Professional Development	20
Work Aspirations, Professional Development and Networking Needs	23
Networking Needs and Opportunities	26

Foreword

A child's first 1000 days have a critical influence on their life chances, and Early Years provision needs to be of the highest quality to combat the social exclusion and historic disadvantage experienced by Romani¹ communities. ISSA and OSF/ECP recognise that the provision of high quality services for Roma children and their families is critical to improving children's lives and increasing their opportunities for future success. Access without quality is of little merit. The results of this study confirmed that there is a need to strengthen the visibility and reputation of Roma and other practitioners working with Romani families and communities. There is also a need to provide on-going quality professional development opportunities in the early childhood development (ECD) field and to strengthen the cooperation between different ECD professionals and paraprofessionals working with Roma children and their families. There is a need for a strong professional community to promote the quality of services for young Roma children and their families and to support successful partnerships having direct impact on Roma children's lives. The professional development of all staff working in projects that include Roma, particularly those who are community members, is a key component to extend best practice and, to this end, the network aims to offer opportunities for training and partnerships, resources and guidance.

During 2012, OSF, ISSA, and ISSA members and partners in the following 10 countries conducted this mapping research to determine the professional interests and needs of Romani ECD professionals and paraprofessionals: Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine. Professionals in the study included *teachers, educators, psychologists/school counsellors, psycho-pedagogues, speech therapists and pedagogues*. Paraprofessionals included *school mediators, nursery nurses, community mediators, health mediators, teaching assistants, Roma community workers and Roma community nursery nurses*. To implement the study, coordinators from ISSA's member NGOs used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to reach participants. The coordinators were able to gather 382 questionnaires and to interview 97 participants through peer group discussions and individual in-depth interviews.

The questionnaires and interviews asked a series of questions to determine the professional needs of participants, as they perceive them. Participants overwhelmingly saw a need for further in-service training which would result in either certifications or diplomas. They stipulated that this in-service training should not take the place of formal training, which was viewed as essential. Participants showed significant interest in study-visits as a form of in-service training, and saw value in participating in a European ECD network. However, interestingly, participants did not place a high value for online networking or mentoring. The implementers of the study think this is likely due to a large portion of the participants' lack of previous engagement in effective, well-planned online networking interactions.

1. In using the term 'Romani', the authors acknowledge the diversity of the differing Roma, Gypsy, Traveller, Gitano, Beyash, Ashkali, Egyptian, Sinti, Manouche and other associated communities, without intending any disregard for the diversity of Romani communities, nor their right to be identified as such.

Given the results of the study, ISSA and OSF/ECP moved forward with launching a new partnership initiative in the second half of 2012. The Romani Early Years Network (REYN) is a network hosted and managed by ISSA, launched as a partnership with Open Society Foundations' Roma 'Kopaçi' initiatives of the Early Childhood Programme. The Network focuses on emerging and established Romani early childhood development professionals, as well as other professionals working in the field of ECD with Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, Sinti, Gitano and other communities. REYN's main purpose is to support the development of skills and good practice, extend the knowledge drawn from experiences of working effectively with Romani families and children in ECD, establish effective partnerships between Roma and other ECD professionals and paraprofessionals and support professional development for those working with these marginalized and excluded groups.

Within the broad framework of ISSA's and the OSF/ECP's shared objectives, ensuring access and equity of care for every young child and of increasing high quality services and provision, through promoting professionalism in early childhood education and care, the overarching goal of this joint initiative is to create opportunities for Romani and other ECD practitioners to develop their confidence and competences for improving the quality and promoting equity of early childhood services that target Roma children and their families.

REYN will address findings that demonstrate a paucity of resources and knowledge for early childhood development ECD professionals, pedagogues and paraprofessionals and few mechanisms to support those working in ECD settings with Romani families and their children, with professional development opportunities and courses. ISSA and OSF aim to address this gap, by launching a network that will promote note-worthy practice amongst those ECD practitioners that are engaged with Romani families, organize training and professional development courses (through an online learning community), offer the chance to share experiences of successful (and not-so-successful) initiatives with other practitioners through interactive 'blogging', promote the exchange of knowledge and understanding of Romani communities and cultures with visits and exchanges. The network will particularly focus on supporting a greater number of Romani ECD professionals and paraprofessionals in the field and as practitioners, managers, policy-makers and decision-makers, in line with the principle of KHANCHI P'AMENDE BI AMENGO, "nothing about us without us", in Romani.

The Network has started from knowledge and experience sharing and will grow to more knowledge creation through the following different channels of communication:

- The **ISSA Online Community** for announcements/news and for sharing resources: www.issa.nl/oc.
- **Facebook** for informal sharing: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/romani.early.years.network/>.
- **REYN Blog**, for reflection and shared learning: <http://reyn.blog.issa.nl/>.

Whilst all international networks are faced with language barriers, ISSA and OSF are using their experience of bringing together a multi-lingual network, through building on vibrant national networks and the strengths of individuals to create a powerful community of professionals to help improve the lives of Roma children across the region and deeply at the national level.

Practitioners who are interested in joining the REYN network are encouraged to write to membership@issa.nl. ISSA and OSF look forward to working together with interested organizations in order to create high quality, equitable early childhood provisions for Roma children.

Executive Summary

The main objective of the research was that of mapping the interests and needs of Roma ECD professionals and paraprofessionals.

The research project was implemented by OSF, ISSA and ISSA member organizations or other partners in ten countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine.

The target group of the research was Roma and non-Roma ECD professionals and paraprofessionals.

The methodology of the research was based on qualitative and quantitative methods. The sample used was based on the available population of ECD professionals and paraprofessionals who could be reasonably reached by ISSA local coordinators. Thus, study implementers gathered 382 *questionnaires* and conducted *peer group discussions* and *individual in-depth interviews* with 97 persons.

For analysis purposes we clustered the professions/occupations from the sample into two main categories. In the category of *professionals* we included the professions of teacher, educator, psychologist/school counsellor, psycho-pedagogue, speech therapist and pedagogue, given the fact that these positions require higher qualifications and a higher degree of specialization. In the category of *paraprofessionals* we included the following occupations: school mediator, nursery nurse, community mediator, health mediator, teaching assistant, Roma community worker and Roma community nursery nurse. 62% of the subjects in our sample are ECD professionals, while 38% are ECD paraprofessionals. 89% of the subjects have previous work experience in the field of ECD, and 93.2% of the subjects have previous experience of working in Romani communities.

Qualitative research shows that most of the subjects consider both formal education and in-service training essential for a professional working in the ECD field. Ideally, in-service training would complement formal education and not be a substitute for it.

From a list of professional development opportunities, the highest interest of the respondents was for knowledge foreign exchange projects, study visits to other early childhood programmes and facilities and in membership of a network of ECD experts. By comparison, the professional interest was lower for participating in seminars, conferences and short-term trainings.

During the last year, 71.6% of the subjects attended a form of ECD training. For 68.3% of the subjects, their most recent professional education (training, courses) in the ECD field was certified by a diploma. 74.4% professionals received a diploma for completing their most recent ECD training as compared with 56.6% paraprofessionals in a similar situation. Most of the subjects (79.5%) consider that their latest obtained diploma is *useful* or *very useful* for their professional development. 94.2% of the subjects aim to pursue more professional education in ECD field. 19.8% of the subjects declared

themselves proficient in English language. Most of the subjects (83.4%) appreciate that they had so far *good* and *very good opportunities* for becoming professionals in the ECD field. 41.2% of the professionals declared that so far, they had very good professional developments opportunities, compared with 24.2% paraprofessionals who offered a similar evaluation.

In the section of the study which identified participants' professional needs, access to literature and technical resources (82%), trainings (84.4%) and study visits (80.5%) were all perceived as very valuable by the subjects, being considered *important* and *very important* for professional development. Online exchanges of knowledge, experiences and resources represented a less attractive development opportunity with only 38.6% considering it as *very important*. However, when participants were interviewed individually and in peer groups, many participants verbally shared the advantages of online exchanges, such as rapidity of access to information and diversity of sources.

The most widely used tools participants use to maintain connections with other ECD experts are the working meeting, e-mail and telephone. Participants rarely used professional visits either within their home country or internationally. 86.8% of Roma ECD professionals and paraprofessionals have connections with other Roma and non-Roma ECD experts, while 78.5% of non-Roma have connections with other experts from their field. Most of the subjects (88%) intend to continue working in the ECD field during the period of the next 3 to 5 years.

Almost half of the respondents (48.5%) are not members of a professional network. However, 10.1% of the subjects are participating in two or more professional networks. Roma professionals and paraprofessionals working in the ECD field are slightly better connected in professional networks (50.3%) compared to their non-Roma peers (33.5%) working in the ECD field.

82.8% of the subjects are interested in taking part in further consultations and in becoming part of a professional ECD network of experts. 89% of paraprofessionals expressed a high interest in the ECD network while 74.5% of the professionals showed a similar interest for this opportunity.

The main reasons given for the high interest in becoming members of an ECD network working in and with Roma communities are the following:

- ✓ Exchange of information and experiences
- ✓ Sharing and developing new ideas, concepts and approaches related with ECD
- ✓ Receiving and providing technical support
- ✓ Opportunities for partnerships among the stakeholders
- ✓ Learning and promoting ECD concepts and methods
- ✓ Reputation and a sense of belonging to a professional community

Introduction

For Roma children and other excluded groups, early intervention and provision of universal care and education services assume critical significance, given the strong, positive associations between investments in early childhood, poverty reduction and inclusion. However, access to quality services remains limited in a number of EU member states and most transition countries, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas.

Research also shows that the competences of the workforce are salient predictors of early childhood education and care quality, and they can encourage children's learning and development to their full potential. At the same time, more and more stakeholders recognize that ensuring the workforce in the early years services is representative of the diversity present in the society is a high priority. Educators who come from Roma communities or from other excluded groups will serve as powerful role models and contribute to bringing greater social justice into the education and upbringing of children who come from diverse family backgrounds.

In pursuit of their common mission of ensuring access, equity and quality in early years services, OSF's Early Childhood Program and ISSA plan to embark on a joint initiative to ensure diversity among the early years workforce, and to empower **ECD professionals coming from Romani communities or from other excluded groups**. In order to better understand the needs and aspirations of the target audience, OSF and ISSA conducted a mapping exercise focusing upon participants engaged in partnership projects supported or implemented by OSI, ISSA, ISSA member organizations or other partners.

Participants of this mapping exercise are ECD professionals who are coming from and/or working with Romani communities and with other excluded groups, who are working in the health, education, and social protection sectors. Data was gathered by ISSA member organizations in each country and by the author of the reports.

The mapping report gathers information from those who would be potential participants in this **joint initiative from OSF's Early Childhood Programme and ISSA**. The main topics and research questions addressed by the report are the following:

- **CAPACITY:** What kind of experience do they have in terms of working with young children and with professionals working in early childhood provision and services? What are their educational qualifications and training experiences? What are they confident about in their work? What are their professional aspirations? In what languages are they proficient?
- **NETWORKING NEEDS:** Would these professionals and paraprofessionals like to establish professional connections with other Roma ECD experts and with non-Roma ECD experts? What would their expectations from such a network be?

- **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** which of the following opportunities would be of greatest interest?
 - ✓ Literature and technical resources
 - ✓ Study visits (regional and international)
 - ✓ Online exchanges of knowledge, experiences and resources
 - ✓ Training and mentoring opportunities
 - ✓ Certification and qualification

- **PARTICIPATION AND REPUTATION:** At what levels do Romani ECD professionals and paraprofessionals currently have a 'voice' and visibility? What would empower them to have more opportunities for participation, more autonomy and a stronger reputation?

Methodology

The main objective of the research is that of mapping the **interests and needs of Roma ECD professionals and paraprofessionals**, with the aim to later develop and offer them opportunities for professional development and networking. The mapping process seeks to find information from those who would be potential participants of a Roma ECD Professional Network.

The research project is implemented by OSI, ISSA and ISSA member organizations or other partners in ten countries: **Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine**.

The target group of the research was Roma and non-Roma ECD professionals and paraprofessionals (whether currently working in ECD services or not). The persons from the target group were selected from the following types of organizations:

- Roma NGOs/associations currently working in Romani communities in ECD projects and in other fields of intervention as well
- Non-Roma NGOs/associations currently working in Romani communities in ECD projects and in other fields of intervention as well
- NGOs specialized in ECD currently working in projects for Romani communities
- NGOs specialized in ECD interested in working with Romani communities
- Governmental institutions (i. e. state-funded kindergarten)

The methodology of the research was based on qualitative and quantitative methods. Three main research methods were used:

1. A survey based on a questionnaire delivered electronically via e-mail,
2. Peer group discussions,² and
3. Individual semi-structured interviews.

The sample took into consideration the need to select the respondents for the survey and group/individual discussions according with the existing resources and time limitations. In this regard, the survey used a **sample of availability**, based on the population of ECD professionals and paraprofessionals who could be reasonably reached by ISSA local coordinators.

2. We use the term of 'peer group discussions' instead of 'focus group discussions', because in some cases the participants know themselves among each other as they are working in the same field and had opportunities to meet before the group discussions.

As working definition for the current report, **ECD professionals** are considered to be teachers, educators, psychologists/school counsellors, pedagogues, psycho-pedagogues, and speech therapists. **ECD paraprofessionals** are those who are trained to assist professionals, but are not themselves licensed at a professional level. Therefore, the diversity of this category is very high. For the current report, ECD paraprofessionals are: school mediators working in ECD (preschool, kindergarten, nursery, etc.), nursery nurses, community mediators working with parents to support their skills, health mediators, teaching assistants, Roma community workers, and Roma community nursery nurses. The research was exploratory, in the sense that the main characteristics of the population of professionals and paraprofessionals were described in the present research report via qualitative and quantitative methods. In many countries, community/health mediators are still not recognized as a profession, therefore they can be considered paraprofessionals.

The **data gathering** was done by ISSA local coordinators and partner organizations during the period of April-June 2012. A total of **382** valid **questionnaires** were returned. Eleven peer group discussions were held with a total of 89 subjects and nine individual interviews were completed. The group and individual interviews were led by ISSA representatives and local partners using the same interview guide.

Given the fact that the sample used in the survey is one based upon availability, the conclusions of this research report and the data findings applies only to the subjects of the sample and may, or may not be representative of the entire population of ECD experts working in the surveyed countries.

Ninety-seven ECD professionals and paraprofessionals were interviewed through qualitative methods by individual and group interviews. Participants in peer group discussions had the following distribution across countries:

- Albania (Tirana) 10 persons
- Bulgaria (Sofia) 9 persons
- Czech Republic 18 persons (9 in Brno, 5 in Prague and 4 in Ostrava)
- Hungary (Budapest) 6 persons
- Kosovo (Pristina) 7 persons
- Macedonia (Skopje) 7 persons
- Serbia (Belgrade) 8 persons
- Slovakia (Bratislava) 10 persons
- Ukraine (Kyiv) 13 persons

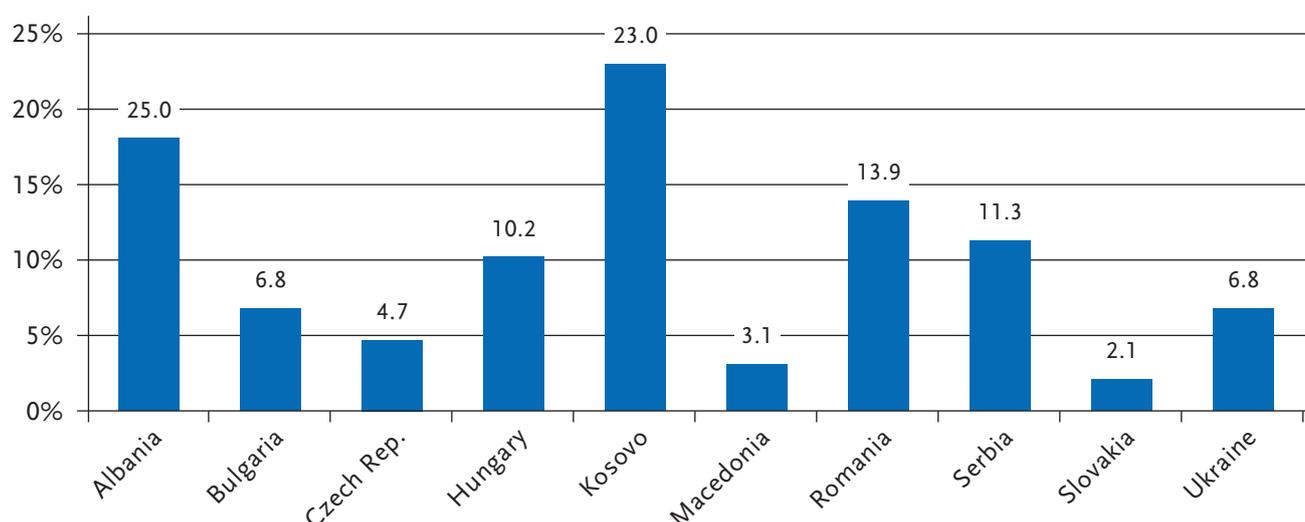
Individual interviews with ECD professionals and paraprofessionals were completed in Macedonia (1), Romania (4), and Slovakia (4).

Characteristics of the Sample

The sample is one of availability based on subjects who were accessible to be contacted through ISSA representatives from the 10 countries included in the survey. The availability of the subjects from the sample is based also on a professional history of partnership in ISSA and OSF projects. The subjects answering the questionnaire are likely to be interested in forming a professional network with the aim of working and exchanging information about ECD projects and practices with a focus on Roma. The sample is not representative either for the population of ECD professionals and paraprofessionals from the countries concerned, or for those working in ECD projects focusing on Romani children.

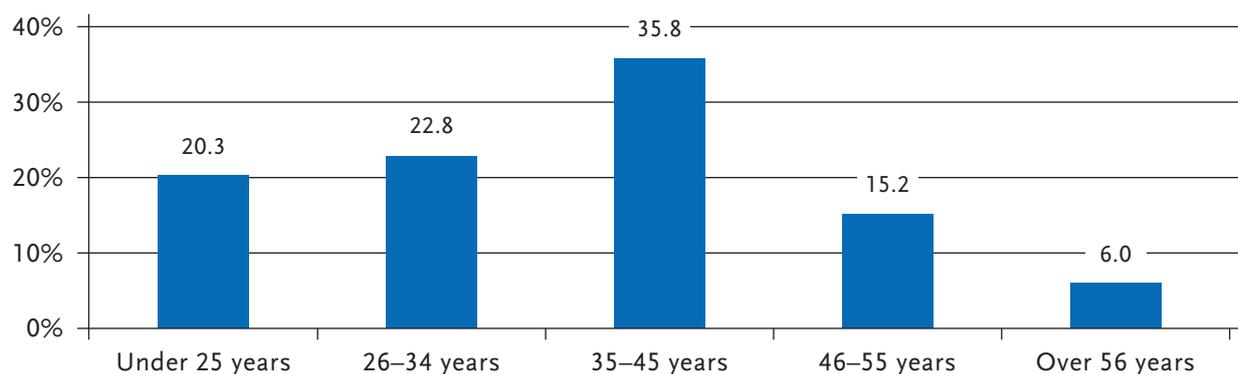
The achieved sample totals 382 cases. The **distribution of cases** (in percentages) **per country** is shown in Graph 1 below. The highest number of returned questionnaires was achieved in Kosovo (88 cases) and Albania (69 cases). The following countries also had a relatively high return in number of completed questionnaires: Romania (53), Serbia (43), and Hungary (39 cases). From Bulgaria, 26, from Ukraine, 26, from the Czech Republic, 18, from Macedonia, 12, and from Slovakia, 8 questionnaires were received.

Graph 1: Questionnaires by countries (%)



The **age structure** presented in Graph 2 below shows that the largest age category is that of the subjects aged between 36 to 45 years. Subjects up to 34 years represent 43.1% from the total of the sample.

Graph 2: Age structure of the sample (%)



42.4% (N=370) of the subjects declare that they are of **Roma ethnicity** while 54.6% are non-Roma. 3% of the subjects did not answer the question.

Women are predominate in the sample (78.3% (N=374), while **men** make up 21.7% of the subjects. This gender imbalance confirms the feminisation of the workforce in education and more specifically in the field of ECD.

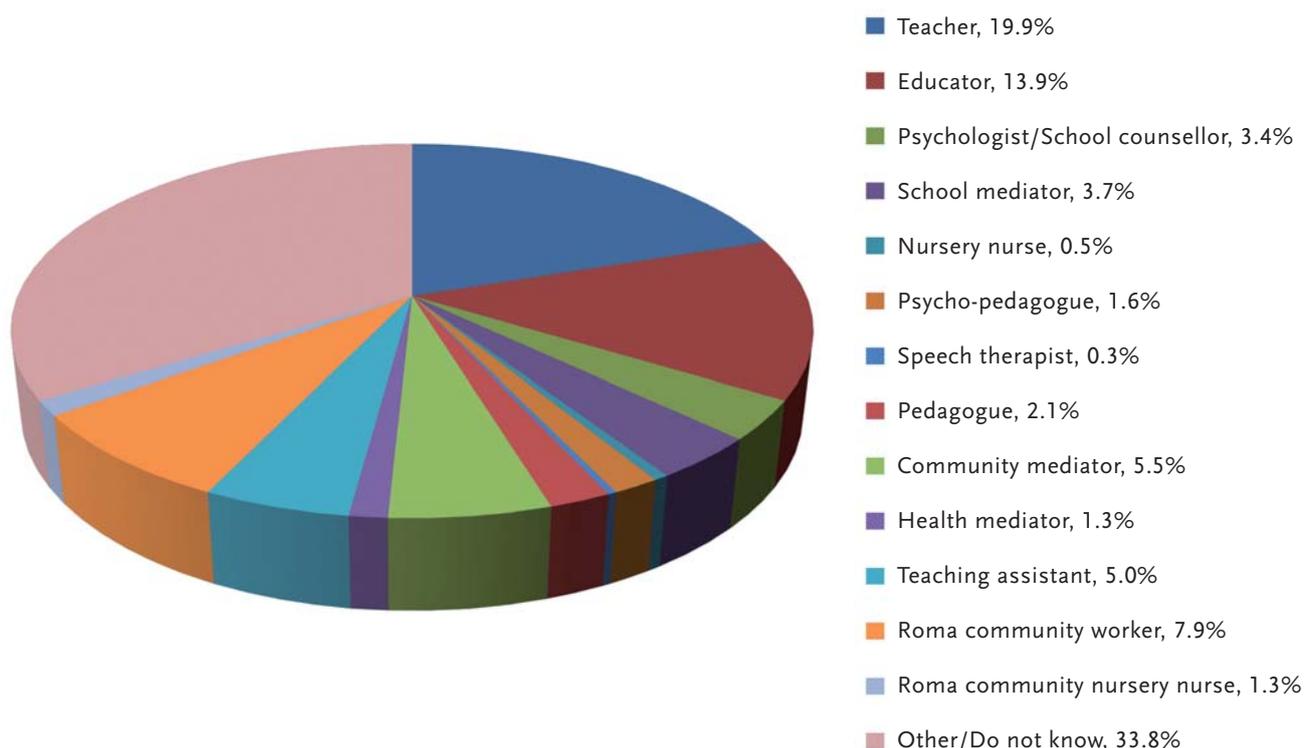
The Profile of ECD Professionals and Paraprofessionals

PROFESSIONS/OCCUPATIONS IN THE FIELD OF ECD

Teachers made up the largest category of ECD professionals and paraprofessionals in our sample with 19.9% or 76 cases. Teachers represent 30% of the sample if we exclude from the analysis the cases who answered with “other/don’t know”). The second largest group of subjects categorized themselves as **educator** with 13.9% or 53 cases in the sample (20.9% if excluding “other/don’t know” cases). Both the positions of *teacher* and *educator* are rather generic denominations under the category of ECD professionals, with the differentiation between the two occupations consisting in the fact that the teacher is working at the school level and educator at the preschool level. Excluding those cases that don’t associate themselves with a certain occupation in the proposed taxonomy, about half of the cases in the sample (50.9%) are professionals (teachers and educators).

The third largest occupation group is that of **Roma community worker** with 7.9% of the sample or 30 cases (11.9% if excluding “other/don’t know” cases). **Community mediator** comes next with 5.5% (21 subjects) identifying themselves with this occupation (8.3% if excluding “other/don’t know” cases). 5% of the subjects (19 persons) of the sample self-identified as **teaching assistants** (7.5% if excluding “other/don’t know” cases).

Graph 3: Professions / occupations in the field of ECD



3.7% or 14 subjects (5.5% if excluding “other/don’t know” cases) identify themselves with the occupation of **school mediator** and 3.4% or 13 cases (5.1% if excluding “other/don’t know” cases) are **psychologists/school counsellors**.

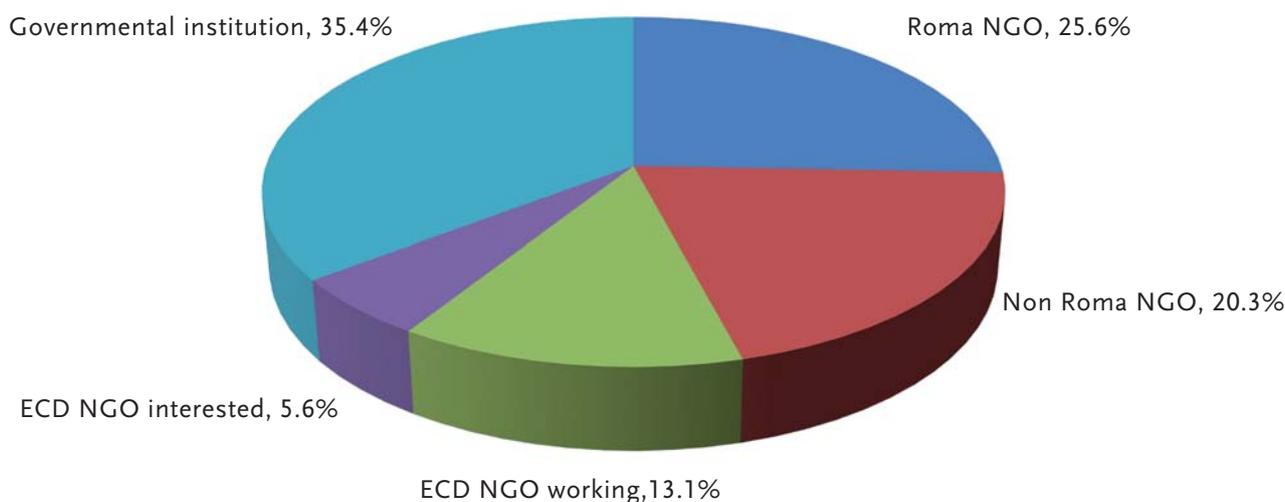
Other professionals and paraprofessionals that are less represented in our sample are the following: *pedagogue* (8 cases), *psycho-pedagogue* (6 cases), *health mediator* (5 cases), *Roma community nursery nurse* (5 cases), *nursery nurse* (2 cases) and *speech therapist* (1 case).

For analysis purposes we can cluster the professions/occupations from the sample into two main categories. The first category, **professionals**, can unite the professions of teacher, educator, psychologist/school counsellor, psycho-pedagogue, speech therapist and pedagogue, given the fact that these positions require higher qualifications and a higher degree of specialization. The second category, **paraprofessionals**, can include the school mediator, nursery nurse, community mediator, health mediator, teaching assistant, Roma community worker and Roma community nursery nurse. Performing analyses with these two categories, we can observe that after excluding the cases pertaining to the category of “other/don’t know,” **62%** of the subjects in our sample are **ECD professionals** while **38%** are **ECD paraprofessionals**. Although our sample is one of availability, we consider that the ratio between professionals and paraprofessionals in our sample is a reasonable reflection of the ECD workforce working in or with Roma communities.

TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS

In regard to the type of organization in which the subjects are currently working, the distribution is presented in Graph 4 below.

Graph 4: Organization type (%)



The largest category of subjects is those which are affiliated with a governmental institution active in the ECD field, for example a state funded kindergarten or crèche. 35.4% of the subjects (N=359) fall into this category (127 cases).

The second largest group of survey participants work for Roma NGOs/associations currently working in Romani communities in ECD projects and in other fields of intervention. 25.6% of the subjects (92 cases) are in this category.

20.3% of the subjects (73 cases) work for non-Roma NGOs/associations currently working in Romani communities in ECD projects and in other fields of intervention. 13.1% (47 cases) work for NGOs specialized in ECD currently working in projects for Romani communities. Finally, 5.6% (20 cases) work for NGOs specialized in ECD which are interested in working with Romani communities.

Most of the subjects (89% or 339 cases) **have previous work experience in the field of ECD** (either community based, school or preschool programs, etc.) within the organization in which they are currently employed. 93.2% of the subjects (355 cases) **have previous experience of working in Romani communities**.

From the professionals and paraprofessionals answering to the questionnaire **88.7% have been working with young Romani children aged birth to eight years**.

The qualitative research reveals that in the subjects' view, the main issues related with working in the field of Early Childhood Development (ECD) with young Roma children (aged birth to eight years) could be grouped around two main categories:

1. The lack of material resources required for a full participation in ECD services. This lack of material resources is affecting both Roma families and ECD institutions/services.
2. The insufficient preparedness of Roma parents and of ECD professionals and paraprofessionals for sustaining the process of ECD.

“School attendance, financial problems of the families, lack of preschool education, speech barrier, and lack of teachers prepared for multicultural education.” (Slovakia)

“[...] the lack of support from parents, the majority does not present understanding and interest in Roma children.” (Slovakia)

“The language barrier: the teaching language is Macedonian and these parents and children usually don't speak any other language than Roma language.” (Macedonia)

“No house visits to identify problems and disorders for early intervention.” (Romania)

“Lack of services and of staff, lack of initial and continuous education.” (Romania)

“Lack of financial and material resources that would allow enrolment of the children in an early education system. Lack of human resources specialized in the field of early education.” (Romania)

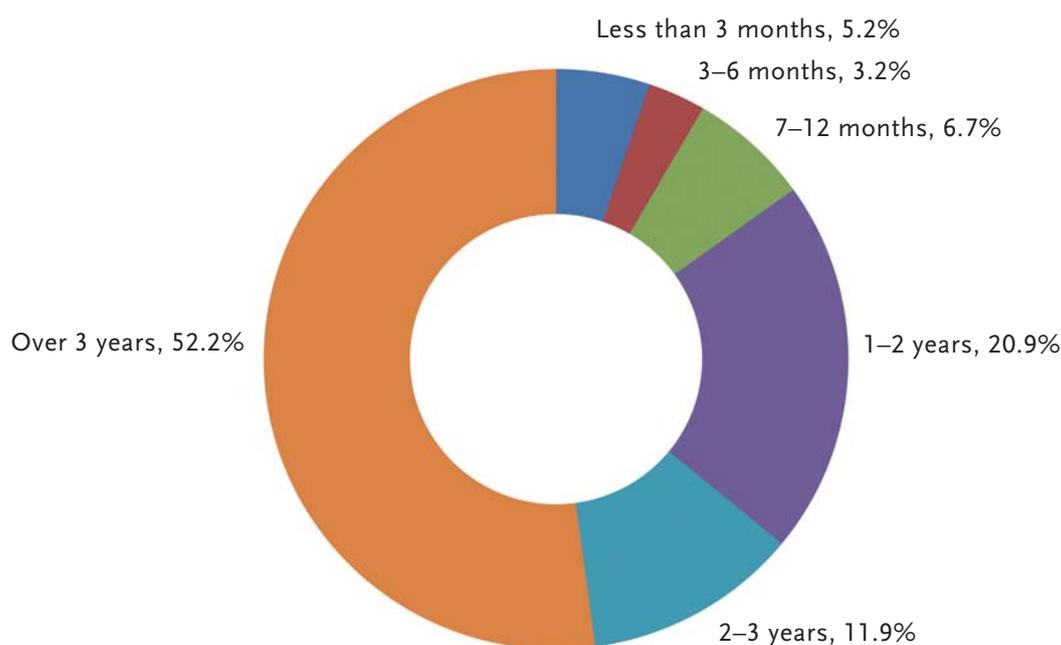
“Problems are associated with parents who do not support their children to go to kindergartens. Another problem is related to irregular attendance of kindergarten. The third problem is related to the acquisition of the official Bulgarian language.” (Bulgaria)

In few countries, ECD itself appears to be a concept that is problematic and may have different meanings for the various categories of stakeholders, including governmental officials and representatives of education and health systems. In this regard, some of the subjects think that not all people working in the ECD field are really fully informed and up to date with the theoretical background related to their work. Moreover, it would be important to focus on explaining the ECD concept and acquiring a consensus over the definition and especially best practices among the people who are currently working in this field.

“First of all we have to have a common definition of Early Childhood Development, because it does not exist in Hungary.” (Hungary) “We do not have yet a consensus of what is ECD, nor academic, nor politic, nor from the experts.” (Serbia)

As can be seen in Graph 5 below, about half of the sample of professionals and paraprofessionals (52.2% or 180 cases, N=345) have a working experience of **over three years long** in the ECD field. The other half of the sample is rather **inexperienced** in working in ECD field with periods of work experience ranging from less than 3 months to up to 2–3 years of professional experience.

Graph 5: The length of working experience in ECD field



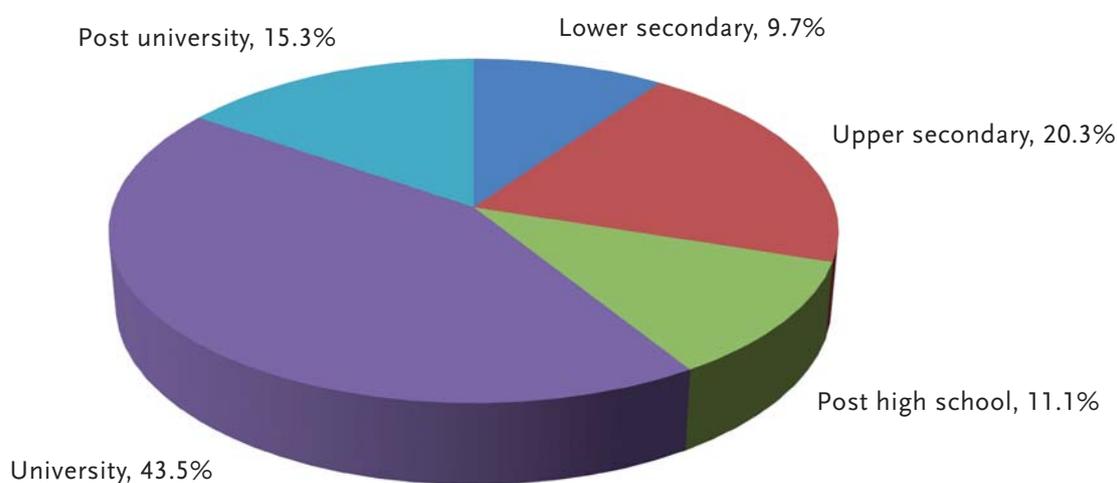
15.1% (or 52 cases) are new entrants in the field, and they are at the beginning of their ECD professional career, having work experience of less than one year.

About three quarters of the subjects are working in **urban areas** (76.4%) while the rest (23.4%) are working in **rural areas**. This distribution of the ECD workforce in our sample may constitute an indication of the coverage of ECD programs available to Romani communities, with more chances of accessing an ECD program or institution in the cities and less in the rural environment.

Education, Training and Qualifications of ECD Workforce

In regards to the education level acquired by the respondents, the largest category is that of the subjects with higher education (university), with 43.5% or 156 cases (N=359).

Graph 6: Level of education (%)



The second largest category in the sample is that of the professionals and paraprofessionals who have upper secondary education. 20.3% of the respondents reported this level of education (73 cases). 15.3% or 55 cases have acquired post university education. 11.1% (40 cases) of the respondents completed post high school education (or vocational education) and 9.7% of the respondents (35 cases) have graduated lower secondary education.

Half of the teachers from the sample (N=76) have completed university education (50% or 38 cases). 22.4% of the teachers (17 cases) have continued their education at the post-university level. 15.8% (15 cases) of the teachers have graduated from post high school or vocational education. The remaining 9.2% (7 cases) of the teachers have upper secondary education or less.

Among those with the profession of educator, 67.9% (36 cases) have completed a university education, while 15.1% (8 cases) graduated from post high school or vocational education.

Performing analyses on occupations clustered in the categories of professionals and paraprofessionals (as defined above) we draw the **educational profile** which describes each of the two categories. In the case of professionals working in ECD (N=153), the educational profile is the following:

- 58.2% (89 cases) have a university education
- 18.3% (28 cases) have post-university education
- 13.1% (20 cases) have post-high school or vocational education
- 10.5% (16 cases) have upper secondary education or less

For the paraprofessionals working in ECD (N=90), the educational profile is the following:

- 35.6% (32 cases) graduated university
- 12.2% (11 cases) have post-university education
- 8.9% (8 cases) have post-high school or vocational education
- 43.4% (39 cases) have upper secondary education or less

The percentage of professionals that graduated university or post-university is higher than the percentage of those having a similar level of education in the group of paraprofessionals.

Qualitative research shows that most of the subjects consider it essential for a professional working in the ECD field to have both **formal education** and **in-service trainings**. However, there is visible a tendency to appreciate that in-service education is a must for a professional. The respondents emphasize the relative importance of in-service training and courses over formal education. Ideally, the **in-service training would complement the formal education and not substitute for it.**

“The most important is formal education; it is not possible to work without it. I think taking part in continual education is also necessary, because it is the way of acquiring new knowledge and skills, the possibility to improve personal skills.” (Slovakia)

“Formal education and continuous in-service trainings [are preferred] because they are complementary. Maybe [the need is] in the area of legislation, human relations, problem solving.” (Slovakia)

“It is more important to have a series of qualifications and experience of working with children than a formal education. Training, seminar, online discussions, all these make a person complete. The knowledge has no end, so the education must go on continually. The faculty is not enough.” (Kosovo)

“Training [is preferred] because it provides possibilities for development and after [I received training] I can teach others. We all have to learn. The practical knowledge is better memorized and provides better results. Courses [are preferred in order] to hear specific things – the new approaches/tendencies in education.”(Ukraine)

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The subjects in our sample were asked to score different opportunities for their professional development according to their perceived importance and usefulness. Respondents were asked to rank (on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is the lowest and 5 the highest mark) among the following opportunities for professional development:

- Short-term training
- Seminars and conferences
- Knowledge exchange visits
- Being member of a professional network of ECD experts
- Long-term training
- Summer school/camp
- Study visits

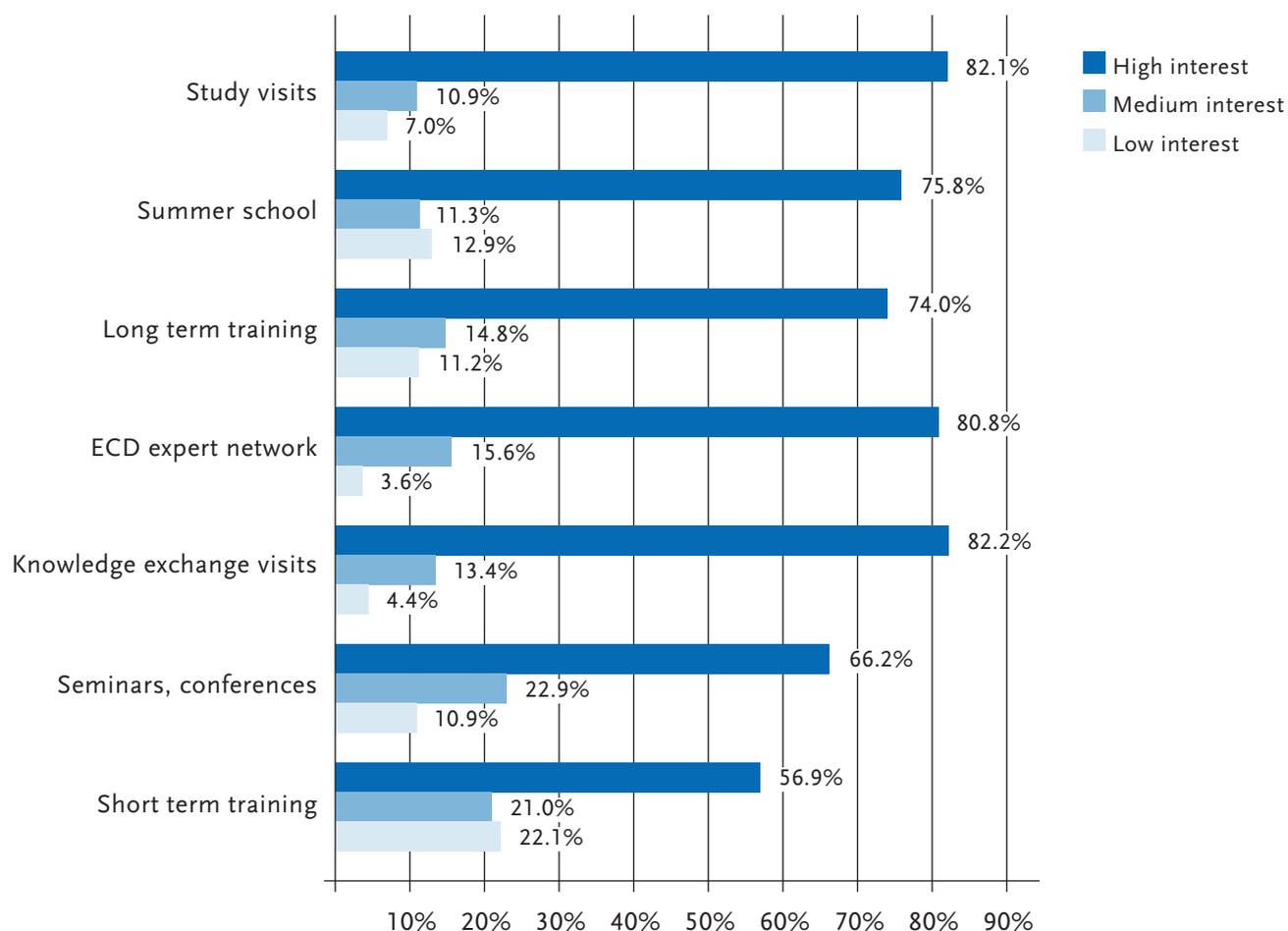
The table below presents the mean and standard deviation for each of the seven types of professional development opportunities listed in the questionnaire.

	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Short-term training	3.57	1.21
2. Seminars, conferences	3.88	1.07
3. Knowledge exchange visits	4.31	0.94
4. Being in a professional network of ECD experts	4.29	0.91
5. Long-term training	4.08	1.12
6. Summer school/camp	4.03	1.17
7. Study visits	4.28	1.03

As can be observed from the table, the highest mean scores were obtained by the *knowledge exchange visits*, the *opportunity of being a member of a professional network of ECD experts* and the *study visits*. We can, therefore, conclude that these three opportunities of development represent to the highest degree the preferences and interests of the respondents related with their professional career.

In order to ascertain better how the subjects evaluate the development opportunities listed in the questionnaire, we have merged answers to reduce the number of values from 5 to 3: low professional interest, medium interest and high interest. Graph 7 shows how the respondents score the interest and the utility of the opportunities for their professional development.

Graph 7: Professional interest for development opportunities (%)



Graph 7 shows that **the highest interest** of the respondents is in **knowledge exchange visits**, **study visits** and being a **member of an ECD network** of experts. By comparison, the professional interest is lower for participating in seminars and conferences and in short-term trainings.

Analysing more in depth the professional interest for becoming part of an ECD network of experts, data shows that there are slightly more paraprofessionals highly interested by the network, compared to professionals. Thus, **89% of the paraprofessionals express a high interest for the ECD network** while **74.5% of the professionals** show a similar interest for this opportunity.

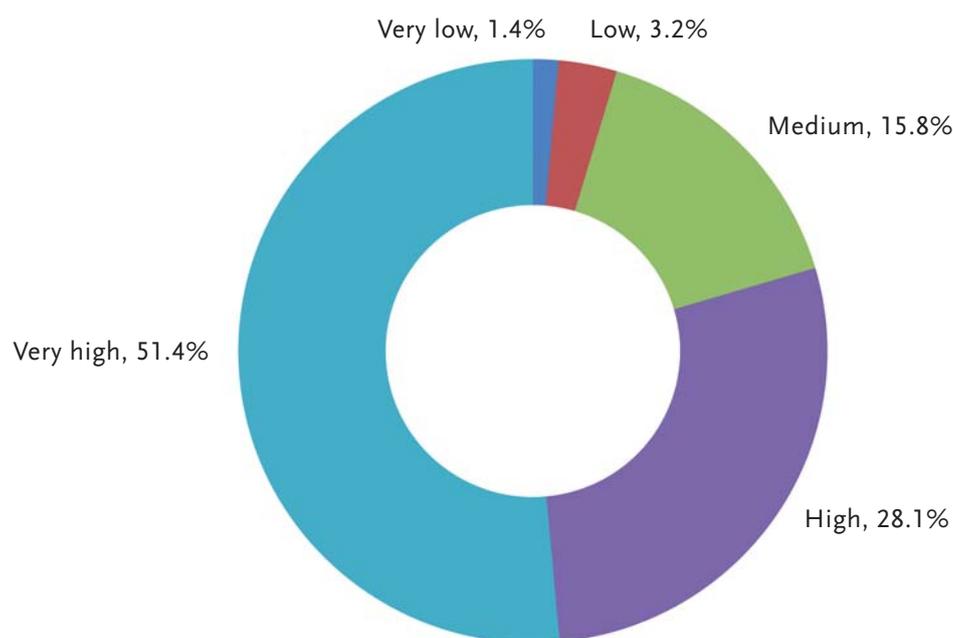
71.6% of the subjects (or 255 cases) **were attending a form of ECD training** for the period of the **last year** while 28.4% respondents have not benefitted from this opportunity. There are not significant differences between professionals and paraprofessionals in this regard.

For **68.3 % of the subjects** (205 cases) **the latest professional education** (training, courses) **in ECD** have been **certified by a diploma**, while the remaining 31.7% (95 cases) have not received any certification for their participation in ECD training. The differences between professionals and paraprofessionals are significant with **74.4% professionals receiving a diploma from their last ECD training**, compared with **56.6% paraprofessionals** being in a similar situation.

Most of the subjects consider that their latest certificate or diploma obtained was useful for their professional career. In this regard, on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is the lowest and 5 the highest mark, the average of diploma usefulness is 4.28 (N=278, std. deviation=0.93).

Graph 8 describes the perceived usefulness of the last diploma obtained for the professional career of the respondents.

Graph 8: Perceived usefulness of the latest obtained certificate/diploma (%)



Most of the subjects (79.5%) consider that their **latest obtained diploma** is *useful* or *very useful* for their professional development. There is a relevant difference among the age groups, with a higher percentage (98.3%) of the youngest group of under 25 years considering that the last certificate/diploma is useful or very useful for them. The fact that the youngest group more highly values the last obtained diploma is also reflected by the difference between the value of the mean for the entire sample which is 4.24 (std. dev.=0.93) and the value of the mean for the age group of under 25 years which is 4.67 (std. dev.=0.5).

94.2% of the subjects (N=342) aim to pursue more professional education in ECD field, while of the remaining 5.8% (21 cases) do not have plans for completing more professional education in the field of ECD.

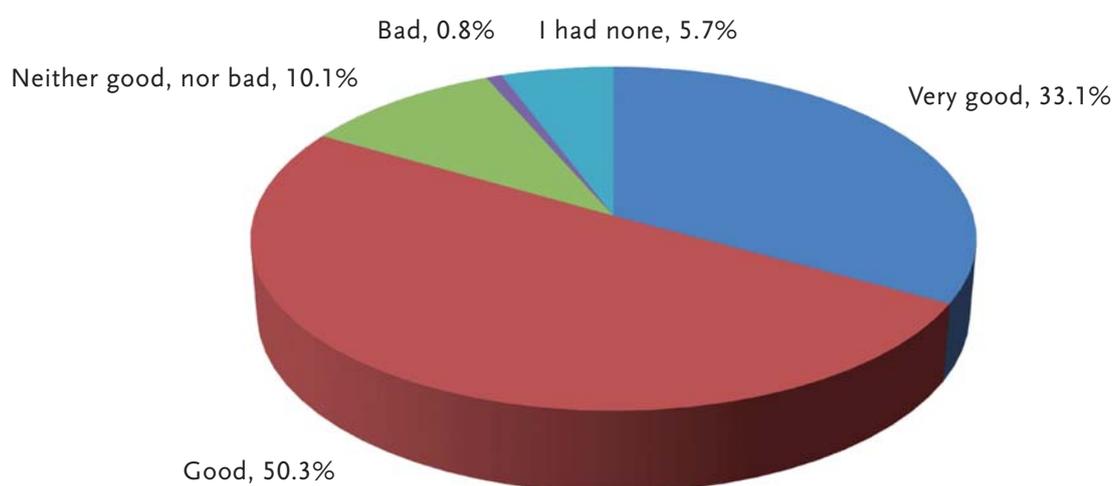
Among the respondents, 6.3% (24 cases) declare **Romani language** (*Romanës* or *Rromani-chib*) as their mother tongue. However, the percentage of speakers of Romani language among the subjects of our sample is higher, reaching 19.3% (73 cases) who can have conversations in Romani language. Probably the difference between those who are speaking Romani language and those for whom Romani language is the mother tongue comes from people who learned Romani language due to their personal or professional contacts with Roma.

12.6% of the respondents (48 cases) do not speak any other language except their mother tongue. **19.8% (75 cases) of the subjects declared themselves proficient in English language.**

Work Aspirations, Professional Development and Networking Needs

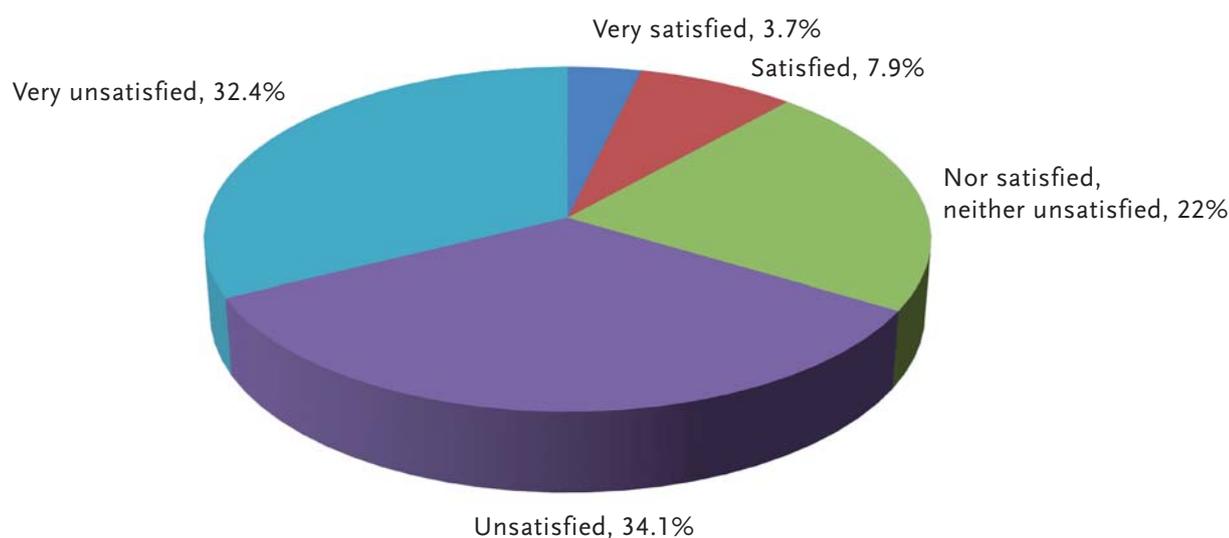
Most of the subjects (83.4%) appreciate that up to this point, they have had *good* and *very good opportunities* for becoming professionals in the ECD field. Graph 9 below reflects the subjects' evaluation of their opportunities for development in the ECD field.

Graph 9: Opportunities for professional development in ECD specialization (%)



In our sample, **41.2%** of the **professionals** declare that **so far, they have had very good professional development opportunities**, compared with **24.2%** **paraprofessionals** who offered a similar evaluation. Most of the subjects (66.5%) are satisfied with their current jobs from the perspective of the opportunities for professional development offered by their employment (graph 10, N=355).

Graph 10: Satisfaction with professional development opportunities in current job (%)



Thus, 34.1% of the subjects (121 cases) are very satisfied with their professional development path and 32.4% (115 cases) are satisfied with their career in ECD so far.

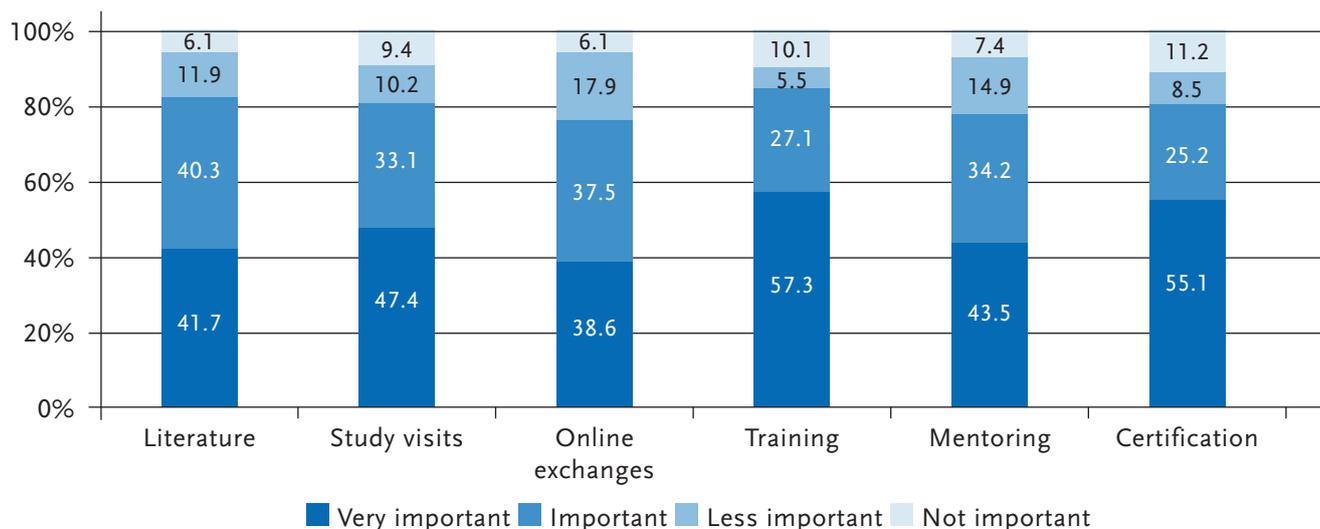
Respondents were asked to score their **professional interest** in regard to a set of professional development opportunities. In general, subjects show a high degree of interest for their professional development. Participating in trainings, obtaining certifications and enhancing their professional qualifications are considered to be the most valuable professional development opportunities. Thus, 57.3% (N=365) of the respondents consider as very important the opportunity of being **trained in the ECD field** and 55.1% (N=365) of the subjects consider **certification and qualification** to be very important for their professional career.

The qualitative research shows that training courses are very useful, especially for professionals working in kindergartens, because the training courses complement their basic education, which sometimes is outdated in regard with modern pedagogic requests.

“For teachers from kindergartens, their basic education is not enough. They need courses and seminars to learn how to respond to modern requests.” (Serbia)

“Certification and qualifications are useful for my professional development. If I did not have appropriate qualifications I could not apply for my job.” (Slovakia)

Graph 11: Professional interest in development opportunities (%)



By comparison with training and certification, the **online exchanges of knowledge, experiences and resources** represent a **less attractive development opportunity** with only 38.6% (N=363) considering it as very important. However, in interviews and peer group discussions, respondents presented a series of advantages of online exchanges, such as: rapidity of access to information, diversity of sources and the easiness of establishing professional contacts.

“Online exchanges are operational, it’s easy to do, it is fast. You can ask questions and receive suggestions about how to solve your problems. There is even the possibility of online trainings, blogs, discussions, contacts with people from all around the world. You can meet many people with the same interests in the same place.” (Serbia)

“By internet resources you can educate yourself much cheaper and with much comfort. Change information. Be open. The online exchange of experiences and resources is nearby, is quickly to find something of interest, easier to use it, and a source of other peoples’ experiences. (Prague, Czech Republic)

“[I prefer] online exchange of experience and resources, because it is a quick way of getting and sharing information between experts and people working in similar field.” (Slovakia)

“I think literature, internet and other technical resources are very useful sources of new information, research in the area of multicultural education, social justice, etc.” (Slovakia)

If we group the answers “very important” and “important” as designating a high interest of the respondents, then it appears that **having access to literature and technical resources** (82%) and benefitting from **trainings** (84.4%) have a relatively similar high position in the perception of the subjects.

Another valued opportunity for most of the subjects (80.5%) is **study visits**, which is considered to be a good possibility of exchanging experiences in a different and inspirational environment.

“Study visits are a good possibility to observe good practice, meet interesting and skilful people.” (Slovakia)

“Study visits [bring] relaxation, everybody needs from time to time to change places, to be fresh, to have new energy to work with children back at home. I want to know what the NGO is doing, what are the ways somebody else does things... to gain new experience... [to]... travel, see new practice. You obtain inspira-

tion from somewhere else, you are going to schools, classes, you get information, you might change places.” (Ostrava, Czech Republic)

“I also stress the importance of study visits; through them we can easily acquire knowledge, have interactive discussions and study visits are useful for developing personal contacts.” (Slovakia)

77.7% of the subjects valued **mentoring** as a development opportunity for their professional career. The interviews show that mentoring is seen as a very important tool in ECD. Mentoring is appreciated because it has an interactive approach, a guidance system that allows exchange of experiences for various professionals working in the field of ECD.

“You could receive mentoring from other related professions, disciplines (children rights, intercultural, multicultural, drama, and anthropology). Expand your experience like an interactive approach.”(Serbia)

“Mentoring is a kind of external help for unusual problems that could appear. Mentoring means to have a supervisor at what you are working for.” (Brno, Czech Republic)

“Inspiration for your work. The mentors are not teachers, but experts, and they can give fresh ideas, they can see the educational principles from another point of view.” (Prague, Czech Republic)

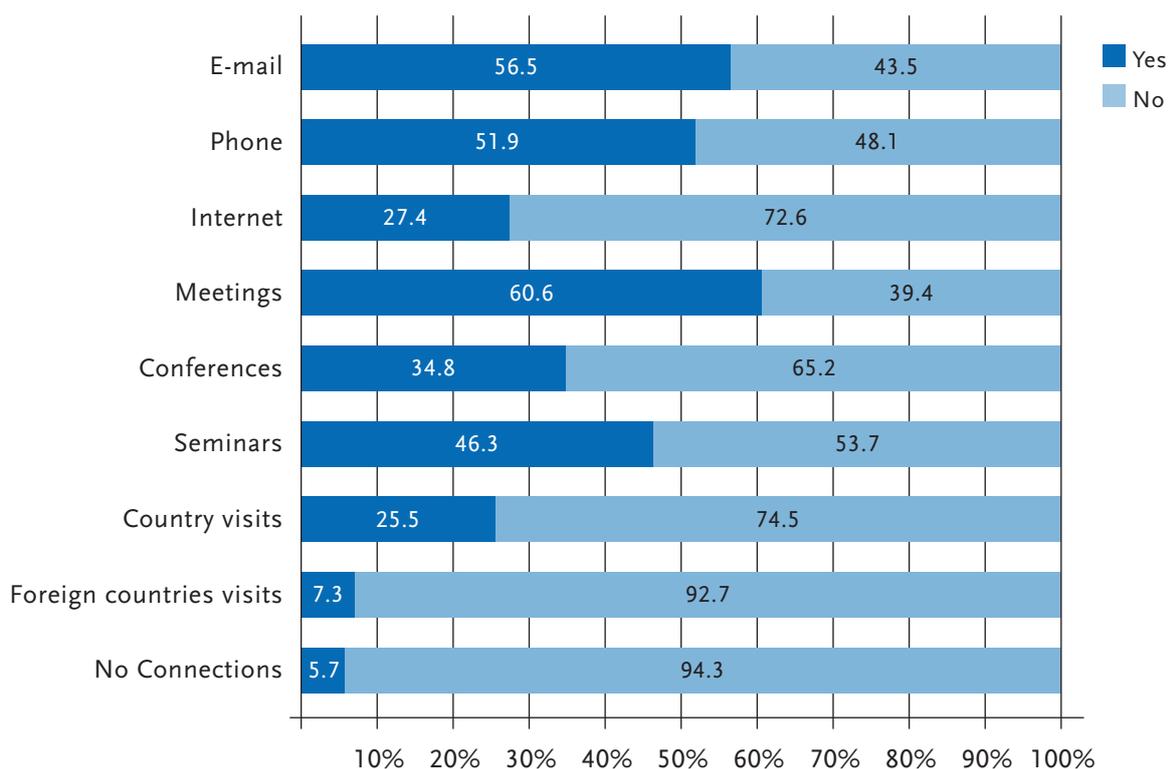
“Mentoring – I want someone who can supervise me and tell me where what I am doing is good or bad. I’d like to benefit from somebody else’s experience. The mentor gives me advice, keeps an eye on me without judging me.” (Ostrava, Czech Republic)

“Mentoring is a great possibility to be guided by the expert. It helps to exchange opinions, to acquire skills much faster.” (Slovakia)

NETWORKING NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

82.1% (N=358) of the subjects are currently connected with their peers, Roma and non-Roma professionals and paraprofessionals working in ECD. Graph 12 below presents the main tools for maintaining professional connections in the case of subjects in our sample.

Graph 12: Currently used networking tools (%)

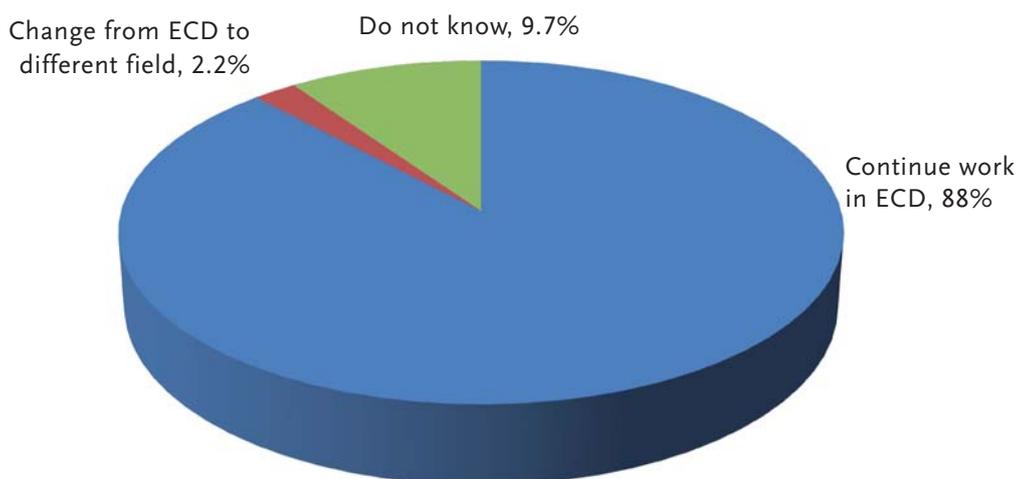


The group of subjects who identify themselves as belonging to Roma ethnicity has slightly more professional connections when comparing with the non-Roma group. In this regard, 86.8% Roma have connections with other Roma and non-Roma ECD experts while 78.5% non-Roma have connections with other experts from their field.

The most widely used tool for our subjects to maintain a connection with other Roma and non-Roma ECD experts is **working meetings**, a way to connect with other professionals used by 60.6% (N=368) of respondents. **E-mail** and the **telephone** are also used to a large extent (56.5% and 51.9% respectively) by the subjects in their professional communication with peers working in the same field. Professional visits in country are relatively rarely used, about one quarter (25.5%) of the respondents using this way to connect themselves with other experts. Professional visits in foreign countries are a tool of connection with other Roma and non-Roma ECD experts for very few cases (7.3%).

As shown in Graph 13 below, most of the subjects (88%, N=359) intend to continue working in the ECD field during the period of the next 3 to 5 years.

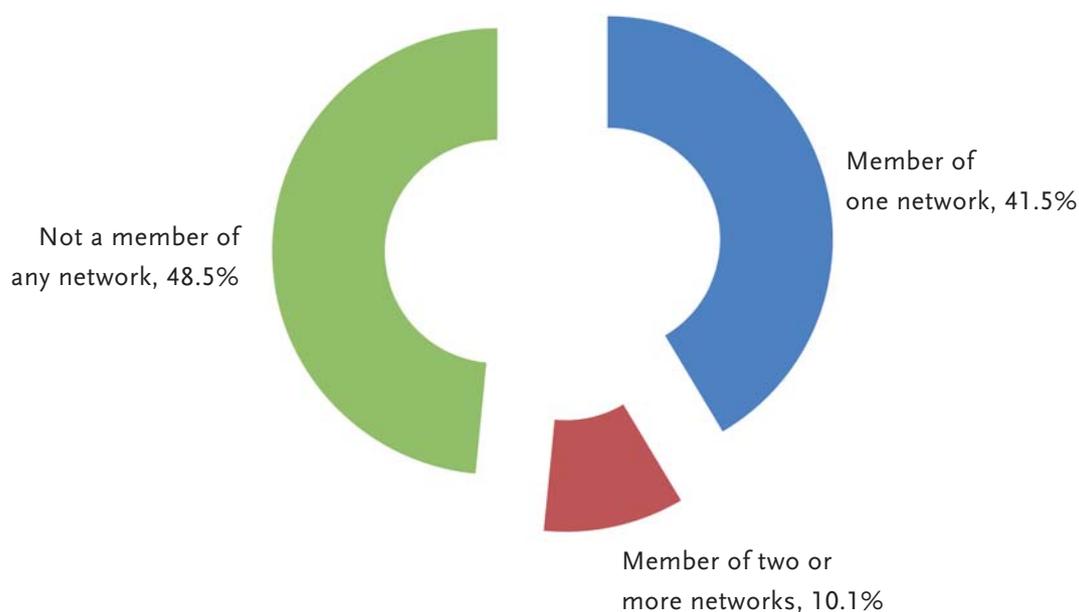
Graph 13: Intention to continue working in ECD field in the next 3 to 5 years



Just a very few subjects (2.2%) intend to change their current field of employment, while 9.7% of the respondents are not sure about their professional continuation in the field of ECD.

As can be observed in Graph 14 below, **almost half of the respondents (48.5%, N=357) are not members of a professional network**. 41.5% participate in one professional network, and 10.1% of the subjects currently participate in two or more professional networks.

Graph 14: Membership in professional networks (%)



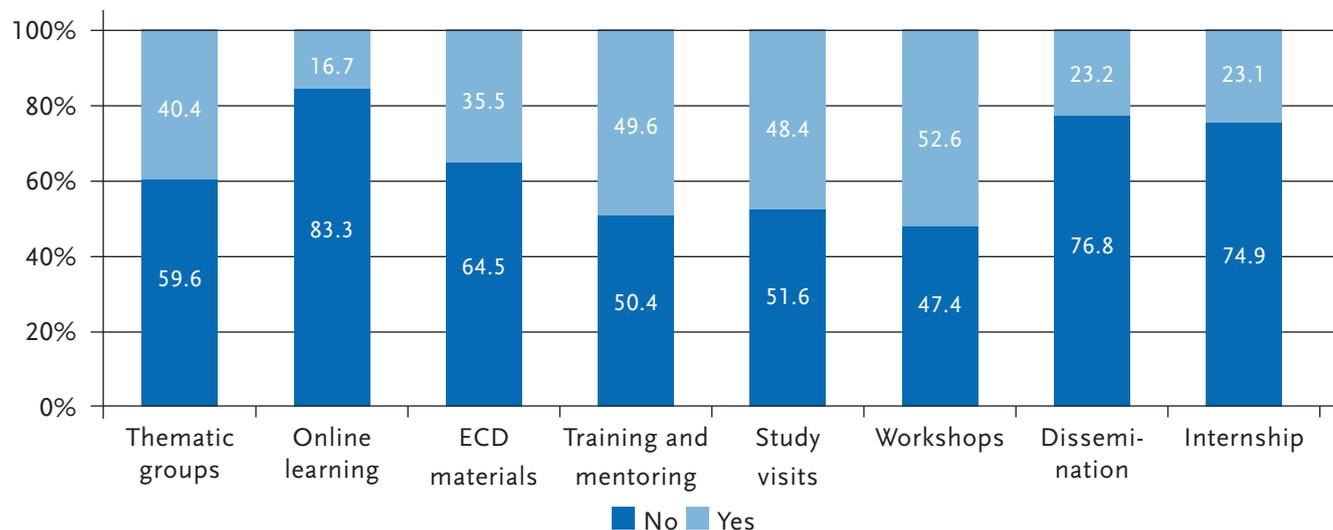
There is a difference between Roma and non-Roma respondents in regard to their membership to the professional networks. While 50.3% Roma are members of a professional network, only 33.5% non-Roma are in a similar situation. At the same time, while 39.7% of Roma respondents are not part of a professional network, the non-Roma in a similar situation are 55.7%. We can conclude, therefore, that **Roma professionals and paraprofessionals are slightly better connected in professional networks, compared to their non-Roma peers working in ECD field.**

Analysing the membership to professional networks by age group, we see that the less connected age groups (N=171, persons who are not currently part of a professional network) are the group of 26–34 years and the group of 35–45 years. In the group of 26–34 years, 60.8% subjects are not connected to any professional network and in the group of 35–45 years the percentage of not connected people is 54.9.

Subjects were asked to indicate from the following list those activities which are the most appropriate within the framework of a professional ECD network:

- Thematic meetings and thematic groups within a national and regional network
- An online interactive learning community
- Access to quality ECD materials, standards and training resources
- Training and mentoring courses
- Study visits to see ECD best practices in projects across the region
- Workshops and professional development courses
- Development and dissemination of new resources specifically developed for inter-cultural ECD provision and services
- Opportunities for internships

Graph 15: Activities for a professional ECD network (%)



Graph 15 above describes the subjects' preferences in regard to activities considered appropriate for a professional ECD network. According to the results of the questionnaire, the three activities considered by about half of the respondents as being most appropriate for a professional ECD network are the following:

1. Workshops and professional development courses (52.6%, N=371)
2. Training and mentoring courses (49.6%, N=371)
3. Study visits to see ECD best practices in projects across the region (48.4%, N=368)

In interviews and peer group meetings, participants in the sample expressed the feeling that workshops and internships are beneficial because of their practical, applied characteristics.

“Workshops are thematically, specialised meetings; I can have as many as possible; I am interested in other NGOs and their experience and I want to compare the experiences. Very practical to gain experience.”
(Ostrava, Czech Republic)

“An internship gives the opportunity to see other people at work, to work together with them and to receive feedback. It is an opportunity to see the processes in depth and, further, to try to apply the same techniques in your own work. Work for a while in another NGO and see how other people are concretely working.”
(Brno, Czech Republic)

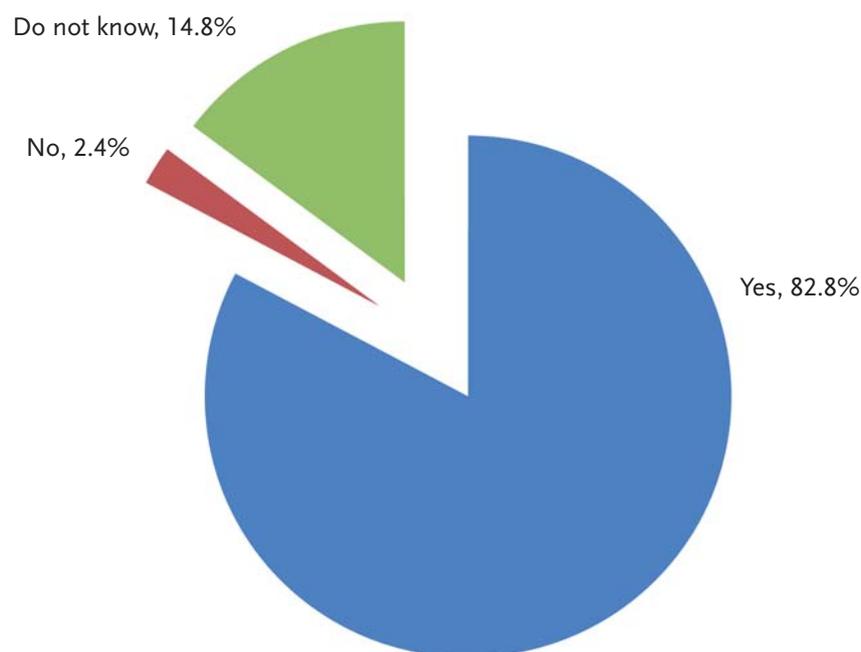
“I like workshops, because they are attended by professionals/experts and during a short time I can acquire new knowledge and practice key skills. Workshops are good places for our personal and professional presentation.” (Slovakia)

“Workshops are most important to me because they are practical. Most things we have learned from workshops.” (Kosovo)

On the other side of the spectrum of preferences is the **online interactive learning community**, an activity which reached only 16.7% (N=372) of choices and the opportunities of internship offered by an ECD network of experts, an activity which gathered 23.1% (N=370) from preferences. The relatively low interest in an online interactive learning community may be due to lack of experience with the benefits of such a community.

As presented in Graph 16 below, there is a **high interest among the subjects in forming a professional ECD network of experts**. The majority of the subjects (82.8%, N=372) are interested in taking part in further consultations and in becoming part of a professional ECD network in the future.

Graph 16: Interest for becoming part of a professional ECD network



Just a very few (2.4 %) of the respondents are not interested in being part in such a professional network and 14.8% are not yet decided.

Among those interested in taking part in further consultations and in becoming part of a professional ECD network in the future (N=301), 87.3% belong to Roma ethnicity and 80.9% are non-Roma. In the age group of under 25 years, the percentage of subjects willing to become part of a professional network is slightly higher, at 90.7%. Similarly, there is a slight difference between men and women with 92.5% men and 81.2% women willing to become part of a professional network. However, the gender differences should be treated cautiously given the fact that the number of men (N=80) from our sample is considerably smaller than the number of women (N=287).

As shown by the qualitative research, most of the respondents believe that establishing a network of ECD experts working with Romani communities is a good initiative. The participants interviewed expressed their willingness to become members of such a network. In their view, establishing a network of ECD experts working with Romani communities has the following **benefits**:

1. Exchange of information and updating professional knowledge

“Faster exchange of information.” (Ostrava, Czech Republic)

“You receive more information than you give. In an ECD network it is necessary to give and to share.”(Serbia) “Sharing information.” (Brno, Czech Republic)

“[The main benefit of the network is] the fact that we always have updated information at the national, European and global levels.” (Romania)

“Information from many fields.” (Ostrava, Czech Republic)

“A professional network of ECD experts offers opportunities to exchange information and experiences with other colleagues abroad and home.” (Slovakia)

“The possibility of gaining access to resources, information and experience.” (Bulgaria)

“The benefits of belonging of such network are being present in the field, getting information about conferences and other possibilities.” (Hungary)

2. Communication and exchange of experiences among ECD experts. The network is seen as a space necessary for putting ECD experts in contact and maintaining that contact.

“[The network will cover] the lack of communication among different groups of people who are working in ECD and who have the same interest.” (Serbia)

“Exchange of experience, exchange programs, making programs, different materials, including parents’ interest groups, constant social dialogue, different professions discuss the same topic (as doctors, teachers), forums.”(Serbia)

“The network would be a space where different positions could be brought together. Methods should be made known. Space where different professions share their opinions or practical methods and approaches to their work.” (Serbia)

“It is a very good idea according to which we could learn from each other in a new way. I would be able to measure my level of expertise compared to my peers.” (Kosovo)

“Mutual support, exchange of experience, dissemination of resources and of innovative methods and activities.” (Romania)

“The biggest advantage is the ability to exchange experiences, knowledge and programs.” (Bulgaria)

“The main advantage of an ECD network would be to enhance communication between ECD professionals from various fields and regions.” (Hungary)

3. Space for developing new ideas, concepts and approaches related to ECD

“[...] a network will be great for having access to new people and new things. Usually, the same people exchange information, specialized articles, etc., with other people, always the same. Diversification of opinions of actual networks where the same people are coming up with the same ideas. We need new ways of work, new didactic methods (the world is changing rapidly and you have to adapt to its changes).” (Prague, Czech Republic)

“Would take new ideas and implement them where I work.”(Kosovo)

“Knowing what is new.” (Brno, Czech Republic)

“This way, there are exchanges of ideas and analysis of changes. Professional networks are very useful in personal development and may produce useful materials for professionals. [...] I want to stay connected to everything that is done and to novelties and to share what I know.” (Romania)

“They can expand their professional contacts, meet new people, be informed about the latest new, research, projects they can participate in.” (Slovakia)

4. Receiving and providing technical support. A network of ECD experts working with Roma communities fulfils the role of providing technical advice for professionals seeking practical solutions to their work problems.

“Better orientation to an issue. Find direct help. Easily find help and information. Find solutions for your current case. You could solve it because someone else already solved it.; Find advice for families in need.” (Ostrava, Czech Republic)

“Advantage of getting quick feedback and getting advice in case of solving problems.” (Slovakia)

5. New opportunities for partnerships among the stakeholders

“NGOs are working together, but just a few of them are involved in the same projects. It would be useful to enlarge this network, this collaboration, and to include more NGOs. It could lead to something bigger, cooperation with ministries also, at least at the methodological level.” (Ostrava, Czech Republic)

“We would regularly meet and collaborate; that kind of formalization of the collaboration and exchange is very important.” (Macedonia)

“It should be a network of people with different professional profiles – practitioners, educators, mediators, project managers, state institutions’ representatives, experts.” (Macedonia)

“To expand their professional contacts.” (Slovakia) “In the NGO sector, to join a network allows for collaboration on projects looking for partners to share best practices.” (Bulgaria)

“There is a special request for international cooperation in social-political intervention in ECD.” (Hungary)

6. Specialisation: the network is a way of learning and promoting the ECD concept and methods

“Another need from a network of experts is to fulfil the need of specialization.” (Brno, Czech Republic)

“The main role of the network: promotion the concept and the practice of ECD, creating a space of discussions, defining positions, opinions about ECD topics.” (Serbia)

“Such a network would help me to stay informed of the topic of early education – current challenges, new methods, initiatives for working with Roma children, etc.” (Romania)

“It would be a great opportunity to improve professional skills.” (Slovakia)

7. Reputation and a sense of belonging to a professional community. A network of ECD experts working in and with Roma communities offers to potential members the sense of belonging to a professional community which shares common values and mission.

“[Being part of a professional network,] you get the feeling that you are not alone. Even at this table, we come with different experiences and from different backgrounds, but we feel that we all have something to share. This way we can see other people’s perspectives, and grow ourselves.” (Albania)

“I think that’s a good idea and would love to be part of it. For me it would be a great honour. I will be happy to hear that it is a fact and I’m sure there will be great benefits for children.” (Bulgaria)

A small number of subjects participating in interviews and group discussions consider that the network will be beneficial for the **parental participation** and **volunteering**.

“Practitioners, parents, not only professionals [will be involve in the network]. [It is necessary] to be an inclusive, participatory network. We have the ECD topic in professional circles, but we have to ask children, parents.” (Serbia)

“Parents of [Roma] children should be part of such a network, as their involvement and commitment are very important.” (Bulgaria)

“The network offers the possibility to involve volunteers to be the members of the network.” (Ukraine)

In a few cases there are opinions that the network will have the role of improving awareness of existing projects and programs which address similar topics and target groups, so that duplication of initiatives could be avoided.

“The continuous contact can prevent organizations from initiating the same project at the same time with the same target, which is happening very often. The donors usually finance projects related to some mainstream trends and, for example, five projects related to preventing domestic violence are implemented by different organizations at the same time. The network can advocate for a systematic approach in project planning, which can lead to achievement of long-term goals.” (Macedonia)

“Often, there are huge overlaps between projects without one project knowing about the other. An ECD network could help to solve this problem.” (Hungary)

While the idea of a network of ECD experts is generally seen in a positive light, some of the subjects thought as well on the **practicalities of implementing such a network**. On the one hand, there are some positive characteristics of the network such as rapidity of professional communication, easy and free of charge access. On the other hand, there were some sceptical opinions related to the fact that many

subjects do not speak English, and considered different languages would be a barrier to the practical functioning of an international network.

“Rapidity, receiving feedback more quickly in regard with a certain issue. Solving problems is much faster.” (Brno, Czech Republic)

“Faster exchange of information” (Ostrava, Czech Republic)

“[...] the advantage of being available free of charge and at any time.” (Slovakia)

“It is difficult to communicate in a big network of professional and paraprofessionals. Not because of the different specializations, but because that different cities/schools have different problems. A bigger network, an international one for example, is seen as more problematic because of the different languages. English is not yet a common language, especially for older generations of professionals and paraprofessionals.” (Brno, Czech Republic)

“[The network] has the disadvantage of requiring access to a computer and to the internet.” (Romania)

Isolated, the idea of a network of ECD experts is seen ineffective by a few subjects who claim the lack of free time to enrol themselves and to be active in such a network.

Some of the subjects are not convinced that a network of ECD experts who are working in Roma communities is a useful initiative and they do not express the need to become members of such a network. These professionals have the feeling that they already are members of an informal network, because they are already working in this field and collaborate successfully – they know each other, work together and have common professional interests.



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