BRIDGE TO BUSINESS

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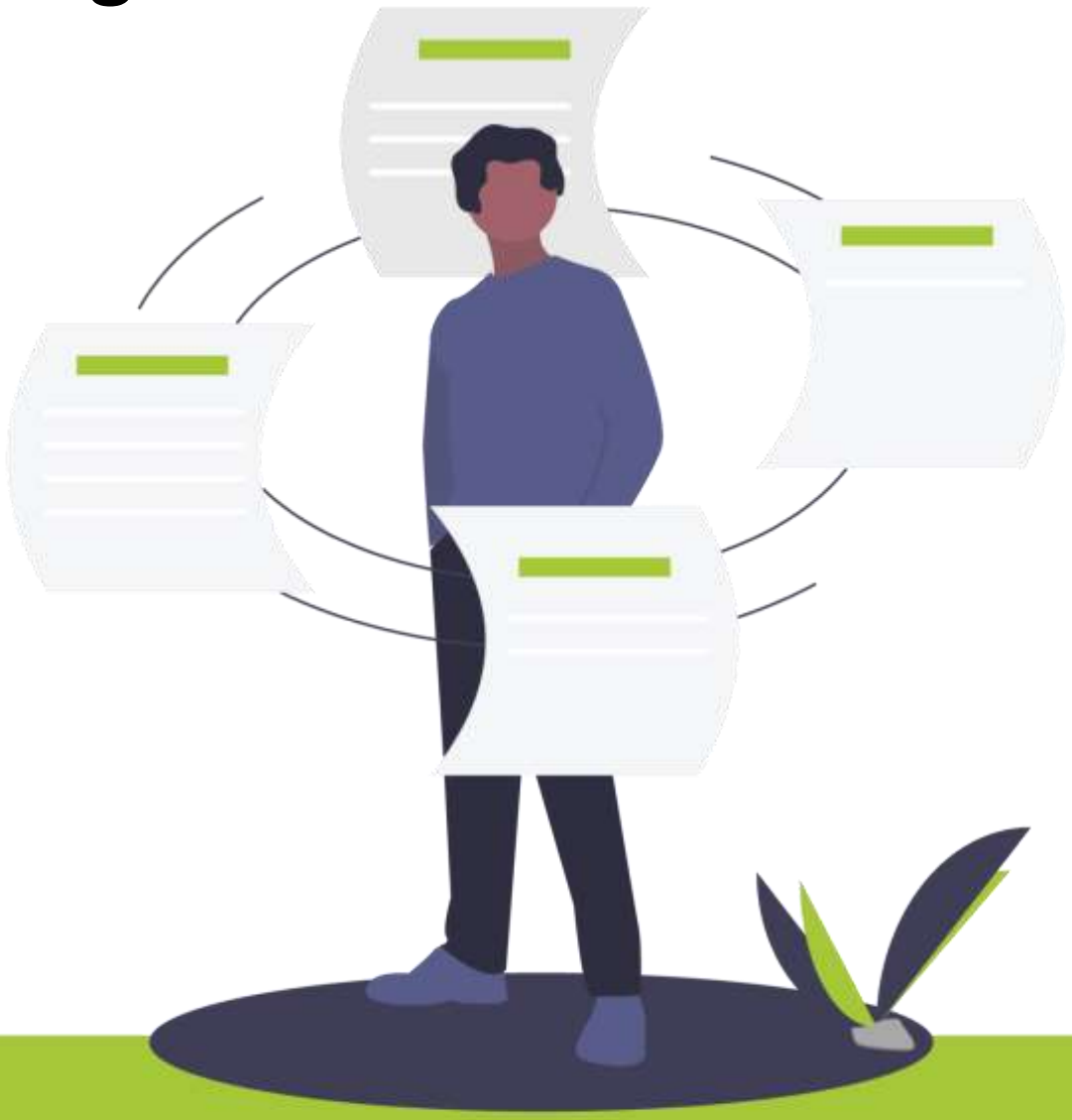
Report on the impact of Bridge to Business program on participant young Roma in Bulgaria



Bridge to Business is performed within *"Bridging Young Roma and Business - Intervention for inclusion of Roma youth through employment in the private sector in Bulgaria and Hungary"* project that has been supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation ("EaSI") 2014-2020.

Goal: The overall aim of the project is to highlight an approach that contributes to the emergence and strengthening of Roma middle-class, consisting of Roma with at least secondary education, working in mainstream environment in quality positions. The project is applying rigorous quantitative and qualitative measurements to evaluate the effect of the interventions. The final outcome of the project will be policy conclusions and recommendations for state employment services to adapt to the needs of that special target group of relatively educated Roma employees as well as providing similar policy advice to future employers on internal procedures and services needed for a similar Roma employment initiative**.**

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Report on the impact of Bridge to Business program on participant young Roma in Bulgaria

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Summary

The Bridge to Business (BtB) programme

The Bridge to Business (BtB) programme supports the access of young Roma (18 to 35 years old) with at least secondary level education to good job in their field of education in the private sector. The programme also provides mentoring for Roma in their last two years of secondary education in selected high schools to support their successful passing of matriculation exams and to create opportunity for their access to higher education to jobs corresponding to their qualifications and preferences.

The BtB programme works closely with members of the private business sector that are interested in hiring qualified young people from the ethnic minorities.

Part of the BtB programme in Bulgaria is Diversity Pays Off initiative. In the framework of this initiative Bulgarian non-governmental organizations and private business members meet to discuss diversity policies and the employment of a diverse workforce including persons belonging to vulnerable groups. The Diversity Pays Off events are implemented in collaboration with other Bulgarian NGOs working with a wide range of vulnerable groups – people with hearing and physical disabilities, women and members of the LGBTQ community.

The BtB programme is financed by the EU programme for Employment and Social Innovation („EaSI“) 2014-2020 and carried out by Open Society Foundation Institute – Sofia in a consortium with Autonomia Foundation (Hungary) and Central European University (Hungary).

Summary results of the research about the impact of BtB on programme participants

This assessment looks at the effects of the Bridge to Business (BtB) Programme on the programme participants, which we refer to also as beneficiaries. The programme is implemented simultaneously in Bulgaria and Hungary, but both the criteria for admission into the programme and the services provided by the programme differ substantially. This analysis examines only the part of BtB implemented in Bulgaria.

In Bulgaria admission to the programme takes place after filling in an electronic form on the Internet, with which the participant declares his interest in participation and completes basic data about himself that are important in the selection process. An interview with each participant precedes the final decision whether he/she meets the basic criteria including the administrative conditions for participation. As a result of the interview, the request for the participant's request to be included in the BtB is either accepted or rejected. The rejection rate of BtB was quite low. By design BtB is targeting young people of Roma origin up to 35

years of age, who have completed at least a secondary education and successfully passed the matriculation exam, without which they cannot access tertiary education. After being notified of the outcome, each successful candidate has the opportunity to sign the General Terms of Participation in Bridge to Business. From the moment of signing the approved candidate becomes official participant. This is the time from which the effect of BtB is being tracked, including drop out from the programme and beneficiary engagement levels. The Hungarian contractor of the programme has chosen a more favorable definition for official inclusion in the programme – one becomes an official participant having passed the obligatory training foreseen in the programme. This definition makes it harder to recruit formal participants - all those who did not attend the training are not considered participants but at the same time it reduces the risk of enrolling into the programme formal, inactive or uninterested participants that would most likely have a negative contribution to the programme's net effect. The evaluation of each programme is usually done according to its own criteria about whom the programme considers a beneficiary.

The main data for the evaluation comes from a repeated survey among participants in the programme, which was completed on the official entry of the programme participant, and then - approximately 6 months later. In total, the two polls contain over 500 variables, about 100 of which are repeated in both polls (a total of about 200) and are intended for pairing to test the change within the 6-month period.

In addition to the extensive paired survey, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected participants in BtB to: 1) supplement the impressions of the surveys; 2) give guidance on their analysis; 3) take a deeper insight into the mechanisms that led to a specific result for the participants or a choice they made.

For the purpose of evaluation, a comparison group was formed, with the idea of assessing the net impact of BtB on participants using a quasi-experimental approach.

What do participants say they have learned in BtB?

Approximately half of the participants in BtB mention at least one thing they learned within the programme or at least one service they received. The core of the programme is formed by the participants in the training - roughly every second enrolled in BtB. Almost all participants in the training indicate that they have learned the things that are contained in the training modules. These include CV writing, communication in the process of job search, especially during interviews, job searching strategies, and more. Part of the benefits of the training, which is mentioned by almost all participants, is the creation of social contacts, the opportunity to meet with other educated young Roma and with professionals in the business sphere. Meetings with employers as well as real job applications are mentioned by just under half of the training participants, which correspond approximately to every fifth participant in BtB. Real success in finding a job or switching to a better or better paid job is mentioned only by single programme participants, the best examples of employment being in the public, not the private sector.
For comparison, the expectations of the young persons included in the Bridge to Business were primarily to improve their skills, find a job, replace their work with a better paid one, and get acquainted with business representatives and other young Roma professionals.

A large part of these expectations were met for almost all the young persons who said they had them. **A notable exception is the expectation to find a job or move to a better-paid job**. These important transitions for the most part did not take place during the observed period of about 6 months since joining officially the BtB programme. It should be noted that the list from which candidates were able to choose their initial expectations was largely drawn up, taking into account the offer and ambitions of the programme. It is possible that within a broader list of options, the participants would have given priority to other desirable developments or outcomes, although during the discussion groups and in-depth interviews most participants found it very difficult to point other needs, the satisfaction of which would help them in finding a job and through their future careers.

Income and participation in the labour market

The evaluation of the Bridge to Business programme was carried out using three main blocks of outcomes, some of them with more than one component.

The **first set** includes only the change in the income of programme participants and the comparison group. The earnings of participants in the programme and of the members of the comparison group were calculated on the basis of the answer to the question asked in the first and second questionnaires. The question allows measuring the change in income that happened within about half a year.

In addition to this main indicator, several important transitions between labour market and education related states were used, which form **the second set of indicators** for programme evaluation. The main transitions within the 6-month study period that we examined are the following:

1) Transition from expressed desire to become employed to employment, i.e. finding a job within 6 months after expressing a strong wish to find a job;

2) Transition from unemployment with and without active job search or from household work to employment;

3) Transition from any other situation that does not involve employment to employment;

4) Transition from unemployment with or without active job search or from household work to higher education;

5) Transition from any other activity that does not involve participation in higher education, including employment, to participation in higher education.

We found out that *Bridge to Business* had no statistically significant positive effects on any of the indicators related to the participation in the labour market, be it gain or loss of income or subjective satisfaction from different aspects of the work environment. There were also no negative effects for the participants in the training. In aggregate, when change in the income of participants in *Bridge to Business* is compared to the change of income of the comparison group, taking into account everybody's starting position in

education and the labour market, their demographic characteristics and the family environment, **we found a slight negative effect from *Bridge to Business* on the income. The net negative effect is unrealized monthly income. This effect is largely due to what we consider being the major positive outcome of Bridge to Business.**

The programme had a clear positive effect in an area that does not fall within its core objectives. **Participants in *Bridge to Business* were much more likely to make a transition from unemployment (with or without active job search) or housework to participation in higher education.** In other words, the unemployed and house workers were much more likely to continue their education after joining *Bridge to Business*. If they had not taken part in the programme, they would most likely have started some work.

Within Bridge to Business the rate of transition from unemployment or work in the household to formal education is almost two and a half times bigger. Even when we take into account the fact that in *Bridge to Business*, unemployed persons were twice as frequent as in the comparison group (household workers were equally frequent) the probability of transition from unemployment to learning remains much higher for those in the *Bridge to Business* (about 30 pps higher).

Probably, in some way, the *Bridge to Business* programme has shown to some of the participants who were not prepared to join the high segments of the labour market where the programme had the ambition to position them, that it is not a bad idea to further build some of their more fundamental skills. This that can only be done by returning within the education system. In Bulgaria, the recruitment of participants eligible for *Bridge to Business* was harder than in Hungary, and this had required some compromise with the selection criteria. As a result, there was an inflow of participants in *Bridge to Business* who could not fully benefit from the services of the programme. This problem paradoxically may have led to an increased reorientation of young persons to education. This unexpected result of the programme is highly positive, although it does not correspond to the programme's original intentions and even may be considered to contradict some of them. In the short term, participation in education reduces the potential for generating income - most of unemployed participants in *Bridge to Business* who chose to enroll in tertiary education did not try to combine education with work. In the longer term, it is not unlikely that this investment will be paid off if we consider general data about the Bulgarian labour market.

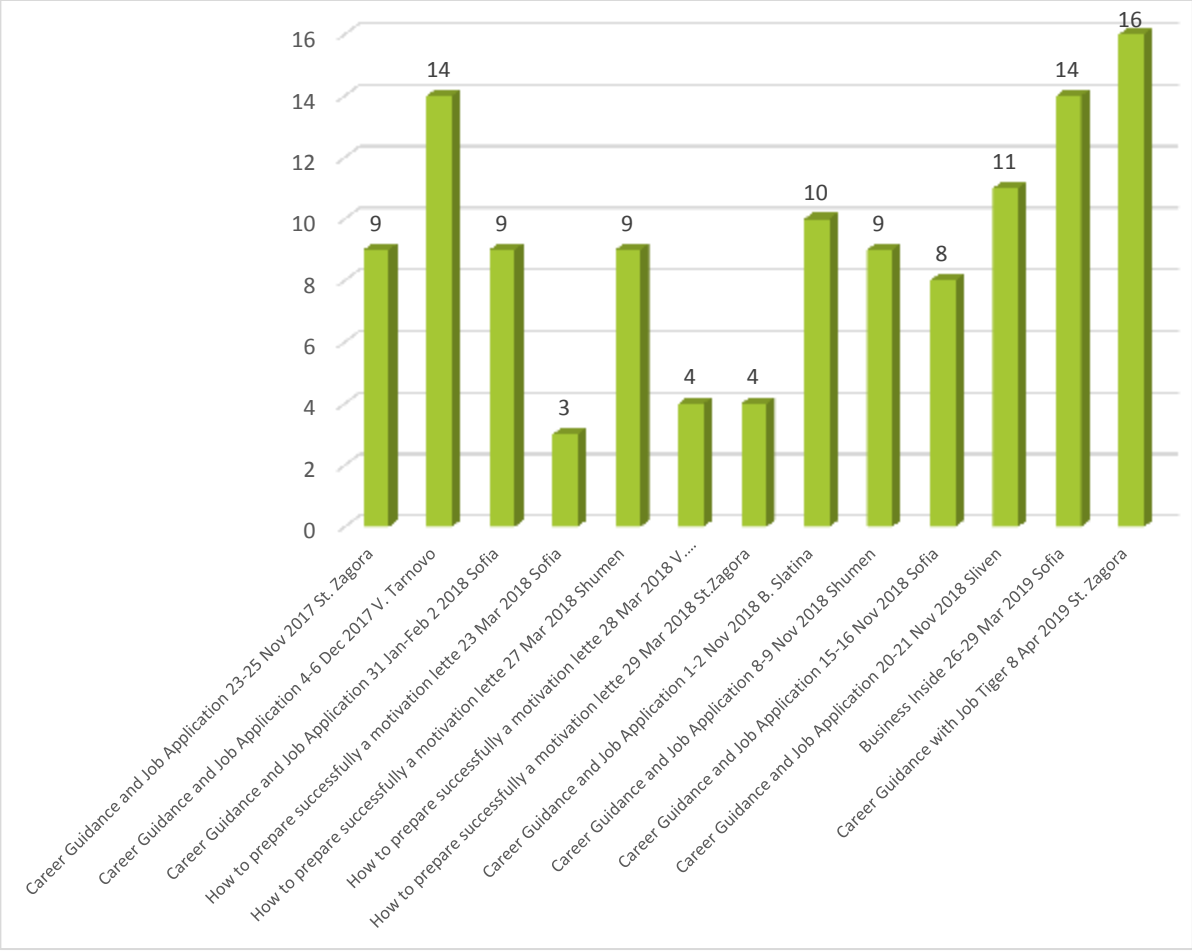
The experience from Bridge to Business could serve well a programme for promoting participation in higher education – one which Bulgaria needs both for meeting its own education targets and for making higher education more accessible to underrepresented groups. Meetings with representatives of companies that have many jobs requiring high quality education or the intensive use of high-edge knowledge and skills may obviously have an inspirational effect on learning. This can be combined with short-term trainings focusing on the acquiring of important skills. Institutions of tertiary education wishing to attract more students could organize, either alone or in partnership with appropriate business representatives, short-term trainings for upper secondary school students, young people with secondary education and a bachelor's degree. *Bridge to Business* seems to indicate that such trainings can potentially have a more stimulating effect than campaigns specifically aimed at attracting students.

It is also possible, based on the experience from *Bridge to Business*, to develop programmes designed primarily for Roma with higher education or Roma university students. The rising (albeit slowly) number of Roma students and Roma university graduates suggests that the range of potential beneficiaries of a modification of the *Bridge to Business* programme with a focus on graduates from and students in tertiary education could rely on a large enough pool of participants. According to the Roma Education Fund, only the number of students receiving scholarships from their programme from 2000 to 2018 had reached 1 602. Roma higher education graduates are considerably more, as there are persons supported by other programmes and institutions, and many Roma students who didn't apply for scholarships. Such a programme can maintain the objectives of helping Roma to find high-quality jobs and put a special emphasis on combining learning and work - career planning along with planning for the development of additional skills, including more fundamental skills. The programme may also be applicable to young people from other vulnerable groups or even universally applicable. Stimulating lifelong learning is a major deficit of the Bulgarian education system and a challenge to the economy.

Elements and intervention logic of the Bridge to Business Programme

The main type of intervention in the programme according to the initial plan was a training to be delivered to as many programme participants as possible. Two types of trainings were designed and delivered (figure 1). The first one is which takes about 2 days is called Career Guidance and Job Application Training. This can be described as an interactive training for a small group of programme participants. It includes several modules among which, guided discussions about career plans, mock job interviews with analysis and feedback from trainers and the group, preparation of a CV including quick feedback by e-mail from an expert not participating in the training who doesn't have personal impressions from the participants, job search and, for some participants, submission of actual job applications. The training is quite flexible; the modules can be rearranged or supplemented with other activities depending on the size and composition of the group and the main needs and interests of participants. The second type of training is shorter; it takes about half a day and focuses only on the preparation of motivation letters. The preparation of good motivation letters is viewed in this training as a technical skill to be developed but the process also requires reflecting on one's own motivation and reasons to want a specific job, which could be even more useful.

Figure 1. ***Trainings organized by Bridge to Business with dates and number of participants***



Apart from the trainings Bridge to Business provided participants with several other services such as personal consultations, mentoring and advice in the process of job application and especially in preparing for job interviews and some others. Participants in trainings generally benefitted from other services as well, but some of the programme participants who did not participate in any training also benefited from other services. There is no way of knowing based on the available administrative data either the volume or the exact timing of other services each person got so their effect can only be assessed in total and cannot be distinguished from the effect of trainings.

In the last period of implementation of Bridge to Business a new form of service was introduced called *microinternship*. It includes a short preparation and coaching and a one-day guided visit to selected companies, usually ones offering jobs demanding high-skills. At the time of preparing the present report this service was still very small in scope, having reached individual cases and its impact could not be captured with the main survey instruments as it was delivered after the collection of data had finished. So the evaluation of the impact of *microinternships* is not part of this report. Programme staff reported during that two off the participants in the small internships got employed at very good job positions in the IT and consulting sectors just about the time this report was being finalized.

A second line of interventions in Bridge to Business is related to the impact of the programme on companies. It has been discussed in the Bridge to Business report on companies[1].

[1] Diversity strategies of Bulgarian companies and Roma inclusion, OSI – Sofia, BtB Programme, 2019, Sofia.

Data and methods

This assessment looks at the effects of the Bridge to Business (BtB) Programme on the beneficiaries. The programme is implemented simultaneously in Bulgaria and Hungary, but both the criteria for admission into the programme and the services provided by the programme differ substantially. This analysis examines only the part of BTB implemented in Bulgaria.

In Bulgaria admission to the programme takes place after filling in an electronic form on the Internet, with which the participant declares his interest in participation and completes basic data about himself that are important in the selection process. The feed from the electronic from was used as an additional data source and important questions appearing there were not repeated or reformulated in other questionnaires. An interview with each participant precedes the final decision whether he/she meets the basic criteria including the administrative conditions for participation. As a result of the interview, the request for the participant's request to be included in the BTB is either accepted or rejected. Information from such interviews was also sometimes taken into account when making the current analysis. The research team also had access to an administrative database containing the available information about services offered to each programme participant and some data about the job implications they submitted, the job interviews they went to and some other. This information had not been collected in a systemic and standardized way so it was not used for quantitative analysis but also for cross-verification and to provide additional insights into opportunities and choices that BtB participants faced.

The rejection rate of BTB was approximately 54% – with 34% applications rejected based on administrative and 20% after the stage of initial interviews. By design BTB is targeting young people of Roma origin up to 35 years of age, who have completed at least a secondary education and successfully passed the matriculation exam. After being notified of the outcome, each successful candidate has the opportunity to sign the General Terms of Participation in Bridge to Business. From the moment of signing the approved candidate becomes official participant. This is the time from which the effect of BTB is being tracked, including drop out from the programme and beneficiary engagement levels. The Hungarian contractor of the programme has chosen a more favourable definition for official inclusion in the programme – one becomes an official participant having passed the obligatory training foreseen in the programme. This definition makes it harder to recruit formal participants - all those who did not attend the training are not considered participants but at the same time it reduces the risk of enrolling into the programme formal, inactive or uninterested participants that would most likely have a negative contribution to the programme's net effect. The evaluation of each programme is usually done according to its own criteria about whom the programme considers a beneficiary.

For the purpose of the analysis, we used the propensity score matching method[2], implemented through the Stata package[3]. Propensity scoring assigns to each analysed unit points (real numbers) from 0 to 1, which represent probabilities that a certain criterion will be fulfilled given a set of characteristics of each analysed unit. The criterion to be fulfilled is most often eligibility for a programme, or being targeted by a specific measure (treatment) or by the implementation of a particular policy. In our case the main criterion is the official participation in the BTB programme.

[2] "Khandker, Shahidur R.; Koolwal, Gayatri B.; Samad, Hussain A.. 2010. Handbook on Impact Evaluation : Quantitative Methods and Practices. World Bank. © World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2693 License: CC BY 3.0 IGO."

[3] Becker SO, Ichino A. Estimation of average treatment effects based on propensity scores. The Stata Journal 2002; 2(4):358-377

A further criterion was participation in at least one training, as trainings represent the major part of the BTB intervention. In addition, the active participants in BTB, who attended the training most often also benefited from some of the other services – help in preparing a CV, consultation for job search, rehearsal for a job interview, and more.

Table 1. ***Main services in Bridge to business and share of participants who accessed them (Np=121)***

	Number	Percent
Participants in training "Career Guidance and Job Application Training"	70	58%
Participated in training "Training "How to prepare successfully a motivation letter""	20	17%
Participated in training "Business inside Training" and a micro internship	14	12%
Participants in "Career Guidance Training"	16	13%
Did not take part in trainings	43	36%
Did not receive nor training nor any other service	33	27%

Note: Some participants took part in more than one training, the data for "Career Guidance Training" was not included in this assessment since it was not available by the time of preparation of this report

The main data for the evaluation comes from a repeated survey among participants in the programme, which was completed on the official entry of the programme participant, and then - approximately 6 months later. In total, the two polls contain over 500 variables, about 100 of which are repeated in both polls (a total of about 200) and are intended for pairing to test the change within the 6-month period. The remaining variables refer to the individual characteristics and personal traits of the respondents and to different circumstances of their past life, which in theory may have a bearing on job search and the chances for particular job placement. Among these characteristics are age, gender, level of education, information about the interviewee's household, his / her educational and family history, his / her skills and psychological characteristics, and the support networks in which he / she participates. Separately, a small set of variables refers to the attitudes, intents and plans of the respondents. Two completed survey questionnaires were collected for 92 out of 121 participants in Bridge to Business.

In addition to the extensive paired survey, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected participants in BTB to: 1) supplement the impressions of the surveys; 2) give guidance on their analysis; 3) take a deeper insight into the mechanisms that led to a specific result for the participants or a choice they made. Some of the interviews were repeated during follow-up meetings with programme participants. A total of 10 interviews were conducted. In 3 cases small discussion sessions were organized with 2 participants each to discuss not so personal issues related to common obstacles encountered by young Roma both in education and while looking for a job or working. Sometimes in such sessions, despite the apparently less confidential setting, participants were even more open to share personal experiences, driven by examples, episodes, comments or observations shared by their peers participating in the conversation.

Quasi-experimental design

For the purpose of evaluation, a comparison group was formed, with the idea of assessing the net impact of BTB on participants using a quasi-experimental approach. The comparison group was formed applying the snowball process triggered at all available starting points. We try to use in most places the term 'comparison group' instead of 'comparison group' to emphasize the fact that the approach used by the research team is not based on a truly randomized experiment. A similar use of the concept is consistently applied in manuals published by the World Bank, although in other studies the concept of a 'control group' is also extended to cover quasi-experimental contexts. So independent of the terms used what is important is to emphasize that this assessment does not use randomized control trials and therefore does not represent a true experiment but a quasi-experiment: we hope a rigorously applied one.

Participants in the comparison group also filled in a pair of questionnaires with pause of approximately 6 months between them. The questions were largely the same. The questionnaire for the comparison group is a bit shorter and excludes all the issues that would not be relevant for the comparative study of the changes as well as the issues directly related to the BTB programme which are not relevant for the comparison group. A total of 139 respondents completed both entry and follow-up questionnaires, i.e. we have almost 50 members more in the comparison group than the BTB participants included in the survey.

The comparison group was built by simulating approximately the same search process that lead to the generation of the group selected into the Bridge to Business programme. In the process of building the comparison group we didn't try to balance the sample leaving this task for the posterior application of a matching method. This bore the risk of obtaining a comparison group potentially very different from the treatment group. With a relatively small sample like ours this could lead to impossibility to perform at the end of data collection any meaningful matching. However the comparison group luckily proved similar to the treatment one beyond our best expectations, which enabled us to apply a rather detailed matching procedure based on many dimensions. What follows in this section is a brief overview of some important variables illustrating the degree of similarity between both groups, providing also in our view some useful preliminary background about the kind of persons included in Bridge to Business and the peer group. Other relevant variables will be analyzed in due course in the appropriate sections within the analytical part of the text.

The basic demographic characteristics are indicative of the similarities between the main and comparison group.[4] Differences in age are as small as to appear unsubstantial but age was nevertheless included in the matching procedure.

Table 2. ***Distribution by age***

	Dropped out before the interview	Dropped out after interview	Signed, not in the main group	Main group	Comparison group
Average age	24	25	24	25	25

[4] The tables below contain data for main and comparison group but also include data on the group of not admitted applicants, as well as on the group of participants not covered by the survey (mainly because these participants have entered the final phase of the program and have not been able to complete entering and follow-up questionnaires).

The breakdown by gender shows predominant number of women in both groups with no significant differences between groups in gender balance. Gender was also included in the matching procedure.

Table 3. ***Distribution by gander***

	Dropped out before the interview		Dropped out after interview		Signed, not in the main group		Main group		Comparison group	
Male	45	44%	27	43%	13	45%	39	42%	61	44%
Female	58	56%	36	57%	16	55%	53	58%	78	56%

About two-thirds of Roma with minimum secondary education have said that their most commonly used language is Bulgarian, followed by Romani and Turkish. The differences between the treatment and the comparison group are negligible, and in the group of those who dropped out of the programme before and after the entry interview every 5th speaks mainly a language which is neither Bulgarian nor Romani.

Table 4. ***Distribution by mother tongue***

	Dropped out before the interview		Dropped out after interview		Signed, not in the main group		Main group		Comparison group	
Bulgarian	67	65%	39	62%	17	59%	66	72%	96	69%
Roma	15	15%	13	21%	8	28%	18	20%	35	25%
Turkish	16	16%	7	11%	4	14%	7	8%	8	6%
Another	3	3%	3	5%			1	1%		
No answer	2	2%	1	2%						

In terms of residence, the main and comparison groups are completely identical – ¼ live in villages and ¾ in towns. In the group of participants in BTB who did not fill questionnaires the young Roma living in villages reaches 1/3.

The regions of residence are also quite similar – as 5 out of 6 respondents in the main and comparison groups live in the same 15 administrative districts. Respondents from the main group live in 17 districts, with only 2 of them without participants in the comparison group, and the respondents in the comparison group are from 21 districts, 6 of which have no main group representatives.

Table 5. ***Distribution by settlements***

	Dropped out before the interview		Dropped out after interview		Signed, not in the main group		Main group		Comparison group	
Town	85	83%	45	71%	19	66%	67	73%	102	73%
Village	18	17%	18	29%	10	34%	25	27%	37	27%

The entry survey in the comparison group registered a similar share of Roma with higher education - 37% with 35% in the comparison group. Approximately 10 percentage points growth of Roma with higher education was registered in both groups between the entry and follow up surveys and in the follow up survey the share of Roma with tertiary education was 46% in comparison group and 45% among participants, i.e. identical.

There is no statistically significant difference in the possession of driving licenses between the participants in the programme and the comparison group. For drop-outs and non-admissions there are slightly higher shares of young Roma without driver's licenses, which could be correlated to deficiencies on other skills as well.

Table 6. ***Distribution by possession of driving license***

	Dropped out before the interview		Dropped out after interview		Signed, not in the main group		Main group		Comparison group	
No	47	46%	38	60%	8	28%	40	43%	48	35%
Yes	55	53%	25	40%	21	72%	52	57%	88	63%
No answer	1	1%							3	2%

This brief overview shows that using the quasi-experimental comparison group was safe enough and that as it happened the application of a matching procedure had a good chance of producing well-balanced subgroups with comparable peers from within and outside the programme.

Propensity scores

In our survey we have relatively small samples in the range between 90 and 150. Therefore there is a strong limit on the number of covariates we can use for matching. In the final calculation of the propensity score we used the maximum number of plausible covariates that could be loaded without violating the balancing within homogenous blocks. On the other hand because the comparison group as indicated above showed a substantial overlap with the treatment group – a property which greatly facilitates matching and, other things equal, allows the use of more covariates.

Despite the similarity between the treatment group and the comparison group on a broad set of relevant dimensions due to the quasi-experimental nature of the study and the fact that we couldn't have much control of the recruitment either of the comparison group or the treatment group, we chose to use a matching procedure based on propensity scores. We identified a set of personal characteristics as relevant for the matching: 1) gender; 2) age; 3) education (the highest education level achieved); 4) size of the household; 5) whether the person had children; 6) the level of segregation in the primary school where the person had studied; 7) the level of segregation in the secondary school where the person had studied; 8) the income of the person in the month preceding the filling of the first questionnaire; 9) the status of the person on the labour market at the time of the first interview, which includes the following possible states to choose among – work, study, work and study, being unemployed and actively seek a job, being jobless and ready to work but not actively seeking a job, doing housework. Age was also used in the matching procedure although the age distribution of the treatment and comparison groups was almost identical with an average around 25 years – slightly above 25 for the comparison group and slightly below 25 for the comparison group.

After generating the propensity scores we used the nearest neighbour as a method for choosing peers for the estimation of the treatment effect. Treatment effects are estimated using the standard indicator called ATT (average treatment effect on the treated). This is the indicator we quote in the text. The nearest neighbour most often than not is the more conservative method in identifying any statistically significant differences as it usually selects the smallest eligible samples for each comparison. Methods based on kernel density (like difference-indifference) more easily pass statistical tests for significance as they take the whole available sample using propensity scores to compute reverse distance weights. In this analysis we haven't used either kernel densities or customized radii (neighbourhoods) to increase grouped subsamples, so the results we have can be considered quite robust.

Profiles of educated young Roma in BtB and the comparison group:

background, personality traits and skills, personal circumstances, plans and aspirations

Family background and early surrounding

All participants in the programme emphasize the importance of the family environment for motivating children for educational development and employment.

According to the survey, 5 out of 6 Roma youths were encouraged and actively supported by their family members to complete secondary education.

Table 7. ***Support from members of social networks***

	Parent or other family member	Teacher	Friend or parent of a friend	Priest or other ecclesiastic	A person from the local cultural club	Cannot remember	I have not received help from anybody
Comp.	76%	32%	14%	5%	4%	1%	2%
Treat.	95%	41%	21%	13%	5%	1%	2%
Total	84%	35%	17%	8%	4%	1%	2%

Quantitative data from the questionnaires are also supported by information coming from the personal interviews.

"The family and the first 7 years are the most important. The family is the foundation that motivates you to continue ... In my life I have had examples of my relatives whom I have admired. Although they did not have a tertiary education, they were an example of the pursuit of intellectual development ... The foundation is the family and the personal desire for development then comes by itself, but it is already embedded. After high school, no one has forced me to continue my education. I wanted to continue myself.

Considering myself as a Roma person, I would find that any desire for development or integration comes first and foremost from the family. It is a rule, that in order to build up there must be a good foundation, and as I said already [this foundation] comes from the family. The already born desire is a good start to unleash the potential."

(Essay of a Participant in the Bridge to Business Programme)

The role-model of the parent-keen-to-learning and the working parent is a strong factor in the development of children.

In their most active years, the parents of young Roma with secondary and higher education had a job and, with their daily personal example, presented to their children a role model of employed

persons. For half of Roma youngsters with a minimum of secondary education, both parents had work in their most active years, and another ¼ of them lived in a family with at least one employed of their parents.

Parental education has a strong impact on motivation for learning in secondary and higher education. Mothers of about 40% of Roma youths who completed at least a secondary school also have secondary education degrees, and another 10% of the young Roma have mothers who tried to continue in tertiary education or have completed it [5]. These are significantly higher shares than the average for the Roma. According to NSI data from the Population and Housing Census carried out in 2011, women self-identified as Roma aged 20 and over with secondary and higher education are only 7.3%[6], and 2016 EU MIDIS confirms that among the Roma women aged 16 and over this share is similar - 7%.[7]

Part of the educated young Roma when discussing their families also mention the important influence that siblings can have on each other, serving as positive examples or role models.

„When you are already educated – you can serve as an example. At least I, in my family, have two other sisters, and without urging them for anything, without talking to them about learning, they followed suit and now they wish to continue with their education."

Persons in the wider circle of social contacts beyond relatives also appear to have had an impact on Roma youngsters' development, albeit on a more limited scale. Every 6th of the young well-educated Roma recognizes that their education has received support from their friends, 8% are supported by priests.

„Apart from the family, the environment is also important. They all have friends, and it's important what kind of people they are. My friends are five only, but they are a bit different - from the point of view of thinking, of vision of life, of the future ... Since, if in your environment one thing is spoken, you are part of this thing and you simply adjust."

„There must be support from parents for young people – to be encouraged to graduate."

„The environment I live in, the parents do matter. I personally grew up in a family that holds the doctrine. But I have seen others who, when they reach a certain age – 15-16 years, their parents are looking to find them a spouse."

Education and experience of schooling

According to Population and Housing Census data from 2011, the share of Roma with completed secondary and higher education in the population aged 20 to 39 is just under 11%, with the share of Roma graduates from universities in this age group reaching only 0.5%.[8]

These data are confirmed by a study carried out by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency of 2016, according to which only 9% of Roma aged 25-44 in Bulgaria have completed secondary or

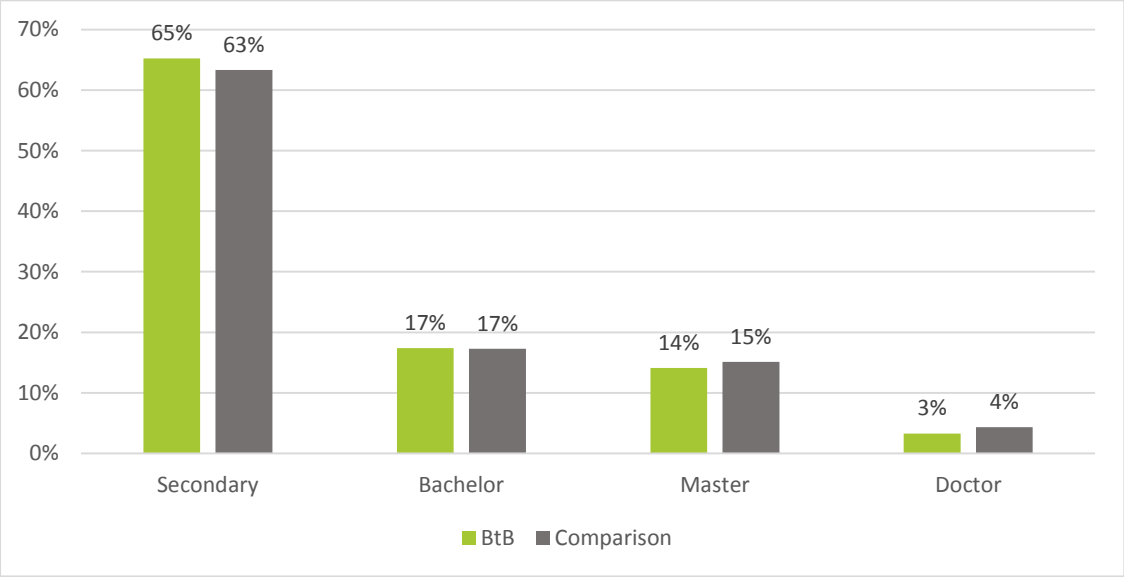
[5] Bridge to Business Programme Survey comprising almost 230 young Roma in Bulgaria (2017 - 2019).
[6] NSI, Census of Population and Housing, 2011.
[7] EUMIDIS, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, FRA, 2016, database.
[8] NSI, Census of Population and Housing, 2011.

higher education, and only 12% of Roma in Bulgaria within the same age group determines as excellent the level of written knowledge of the Bulgarian language. [9]

These figures show that the number of young Roma with a high level of education and competitive skills remains rather limited. Obtaining a diploma in itself is not a guarantee of the quality of education and even less for its compliance with business expectations and labour market requirements.

In our samples the distribution of educational achievement in the comparison group and among participants in Bridge to Business is similar, practically identical.

Figure 2. ***Distribution of the highest level of education completed in the comparison group and in BtB (in BtB two categories of secondary education were distinguished the sum of which gives the overall number)***



Those with secondary education are about 2/3 in each group. The shares of persons holding bachelor, master or doctoral degrees are also identical within statistical chance.

As noted in the Bridge to Business report on the private companies, many of them are looking for opportunities to intervene in the education system (especially in VET schools) to match the skills and qualifications to the needs of the industry:

"Typical examples are the conclusion of contracts with local vocational schools and the application of the principles of so-called" dual learning." [10]

Many Roma are educated in segregated schools, many of which have educational outcomes lower than the average for the country, and the share of students who successfully pass the two mandatory state matriculation examinations is relatively limited.

The following typical comments from the assessments given to applicants with secondary education who dropped out from the BTB programme after the stage of initial interviews are

[9] EUMIDIS, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, FRA, 2016, database.
[10] Diversity strategies of companies and Roma integration, OSI – Sofia, BtB Programme, 2019, Sofia, p. 17.

indicative for the deficit of skills which can become a severe impediment to the life chances of graduates, especially from segregated schools.

„He experiences difficulty in expressing himself, incorrectly uses expressions and words. He claims to have computer skills, but he can hardly determine them exactly, except with working in FB, Skype, and other programmes. He does not speak English."

„The candidate does not speak very well Bulgarian, he has not been able to work on a computer, too."

„Difficulties with communication and social competencies. It is difficult to determine what she likes and what does not. Extremely limited social life and experience. It would be very difficult if she had to go outside and communicate with other people. There is a need to improve her social skills."

„The applicant is almost illiterate, unable to read the application form, his wife has filled it."

„There is very little experience and a lot to learn, especially about how to present herself - she has graduated from high school for IT, but she has a basic level of knowledge of software products. She is timid."

„She is communicative, but she speaks fast and chaotic. It was difficult for her to get to the city and it took her more than an hour to find the office."

For example, according to a report of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency in Bulgaria 60% of Roma aged 6 to 15 attend schools where all or most of their classmates are Roma[11]. By itself, the small proportion of Roma who continue their education in universities is also indicative of the insufficient level of preparation in secondary education, although factors such as poverty, lack of financial support from families, and others – also affect Roma youths' odds to get to a higher level of education.

The review of educational achievements, capabilities, and motivation and interviews entail further reduction of the number of potential programme participants in programmes like BtB. The lack of sufficiently qualified applicants for white collar jobs leads to initially quite loose filtering criteria for admission to the programme. On the one hand, this approach gives chance to more young people meeting the minimum requirements of the programme to get access to the services offered. But the low threshold for admission raises the risk of disappointment of some young people who would not receive the expected support.

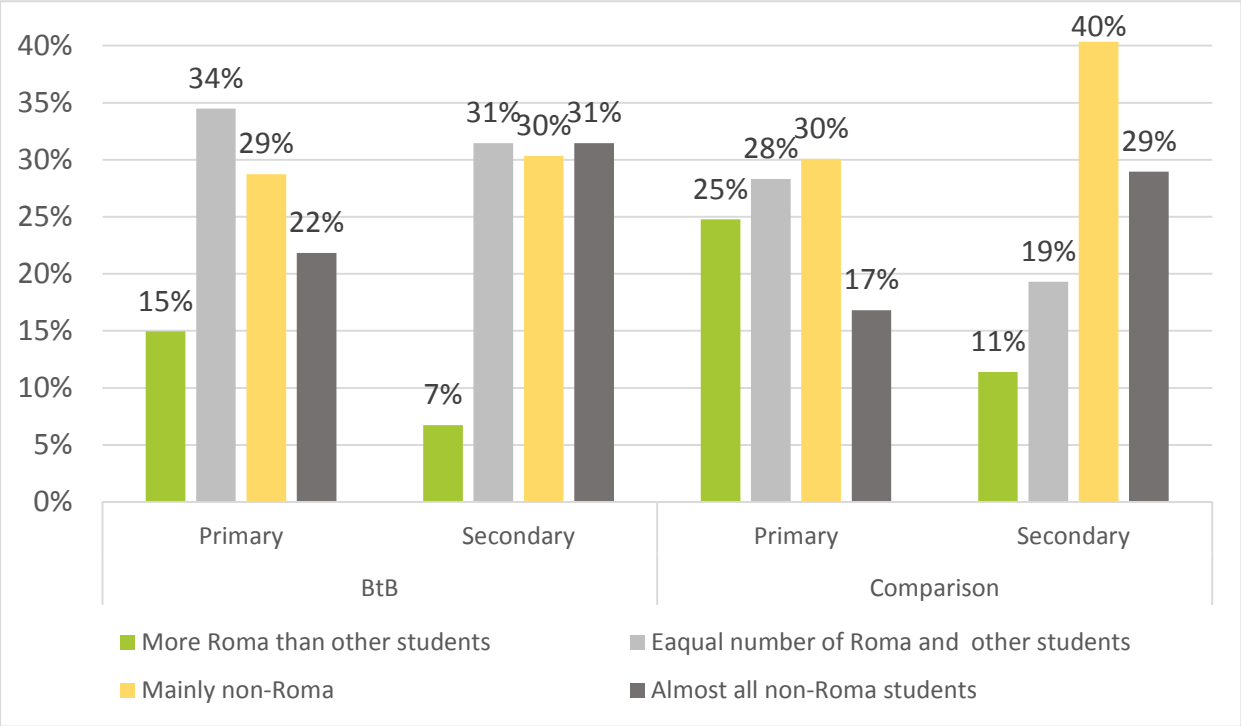
As a result only half of applicants have successfully passed the administrative check-ups and initial interviews stages of the programme and have been enrolled in it. The group of drop outs at this phase consists of only 5% of graduates from universities, 18% – university students and all others are young Roma who have discontinued their education after getting diploma from secondary schools.

[11] Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma – Selected results, FRA, 2016, p. 27.

These data show that the range of Roma young people with secondary and higher education is limited and the pool of potential participants in BtB programme is even more confined although especially after the first year when some problems with recruitment of suitable candidates became apparent, the programme adopted rather an unrestrictive approach to be able to meet its targets concerning the number of participants.

In our survey there were no significant differences in the education completed between the comparison group and participants in the programme. A significant proportion of Roma youth spent the years of their primary education in schools with a predominant number of Roma.

Figure 3. ***Levels of segregation experienced in primary and secondary school by BtB participants and the comparison group***



In the primary school BtB participants were equally exposed to a segregated environment as members of the comparison group: about half of the students in each group studied among Bulgarians with few other Roma, the other half studied in a desegregated environment in schools with almost entirely Roma population or where Roma were significantly overrepresented.

The levels of segregation experienced by members of the comparison group and BtB participants in the secondary school were slightly different. A bit less than a third (30%) in the comparison group studied in very segregated environment with at least half the students being Roma. In the main group 38% studied in a similarly segregated environment. Since school segregation can reasonably be expected to influence chances for employment it makes sense to use this variable in the matching procedure.

Some of the variables can be used directly for comparison, i.e. whether the treatment and comparison group have worked in the last 6 months – var790 (treatment) and var401 (comparison).

We constructed several variables mapping important transitions to employment from unemployment, education and housework, as well as a special variable tracking the success in finding employment for those who had declared they wished to find a job and were actively seeking for one.

An important fact, however, is that most of them were enrolled in secondary schools where the majority of students were not Roma.

„My primary education is in the Roma school in the heart of the neighbourhood. But my secondary education is in a desegregated school."

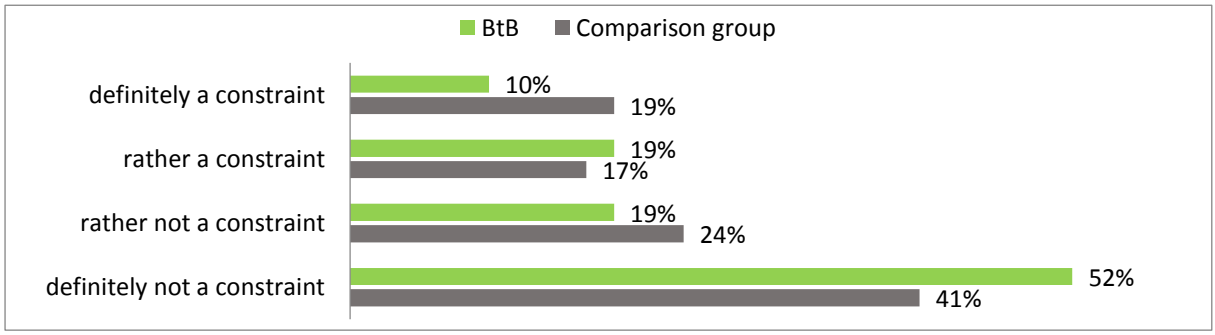
This fact is not surprising considering that most Roma usually drop out of the education system before the beginning of secondary school – the net enrolment rate for 15-18 year old Roma is only 40%, while the general enrolment rate is 83%[12].

The main shortcomings of well-educated young Roma are related to the limited opportunities in educational institutions for adequate career guidance

„Many young people have limited information on the labour market about what they can work. They do not know what they can do after they finish school."

Among the group of Roma with secondary education that ended up being selected into the BtB programme and among Roma with similar background in the comparison group tertiary education seems to be increasingly perceived as a necessity and the lack thereof as a powerful constraint.

Figure 4. ***Not holding a university diploma as a perceived constraint to realizing one's ambitions***



Not holding a university diploma is mentioned as a constraint by approximately a third of educated young Roma, i.e. by 29% of all BtB participants and 36% of the comparison group. Among persons with only secondary education 37% perceive the lack of university diploma as a constraint. University diploma can be regarded as a mark of possessing certain high level cognitive skills or as a credential in society and on the labour market as evidenced by the sheepskin effect. This looks like a very good and objective assessment of the situation on the labour market. As our survey demonstrates for Roma with higher education, unemployment is very low - of the order of 3 persons in every 100, so in practical terms it makes little difference whether we take into account the unemployed or exclude them from the income estimates. The low risk of unemployment for those with higher education is something very encouraging but

[12] Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma – Selected results, FRA, 2016, p. 25.

unfortunately, despite the rising participation of Roma in tertiary education, the number of Roma graduates is still quite low. Unemployment among Roma with secondary education is markedly higher, but they are very active - almost all who do not continue their education are actively looking for a job.

Other personal circumstances and constrains affecting opportunities and performance on the labour market

Educated young Roma participating in the survey were asked to evaluate a series of possible constraints that could hinder them in pursuing their goals and ambitions. Constraints include missing or deficient skills and other circumstances, some within, others beyond the control of participants. For all but few constraints a large majority of the respondents thought they could not have a significant negative impact. The summary table 6 therefore shows the balance of those who think this specific constraint is not a hindrance for them over those who thought it was. In the table we have omitted age, gender, education as well as personal traits and a category referring to the overall set of personal skills. All these are strikingly considered an impediment by a negligible proportion of respondents both in the comparison group and among participants in Bridge to Business. The vast majority of well-educated young Roma appear quite confident of their strength and personal qualities.

Table 8. ***Do you think any of the following factors could hinder your ambitions? – balance of responses: probability not to hinder - probability to hinder?***

Groups	My Qualifi-cation	My family back-ground	My Ethni-city	My place of resi-dence	That I am or will be a parent	Insufficient knowledge of foreign languages	Insufficient computer skills	Lack of univer-sity diploma	Lack of strong social ties	Lack of support from my family	Insufficient resources
Treatment group	84%	84%	40%	67%	69%	10%	46%	42%	23%	59%	-1%
Comparison group	77%	62%	40%	65%	57%	6%	49%	30%	14%	56%	22%

It is also noteworthy that a large proportion of well-educated young Roma do not feel that their family and community environment, residence, can be a barrier to their development. Relatively few are those who believe that ethnicity may also be a hindrance to the future they want.

While recognizing various potential impediments which are beyond one's reach, educated young Roma tend to believe that personal responsibility is more important for the success of the individual.

„We are not different because we have a different skin colour, not because of disabilities, but because we think differently. Integration and change must begin with our way of thinking." (feedback from an MBA trainee)

„In the programme, I met people I did not know before who want to develop and do so. I'm glad I met them and we already exchanged contacts."

Resources appear as an important constraint mentioned by educated young Roma. According to NSI data in 2018, poor Roma are 68.3% – a share that is over 3 times higher than the national

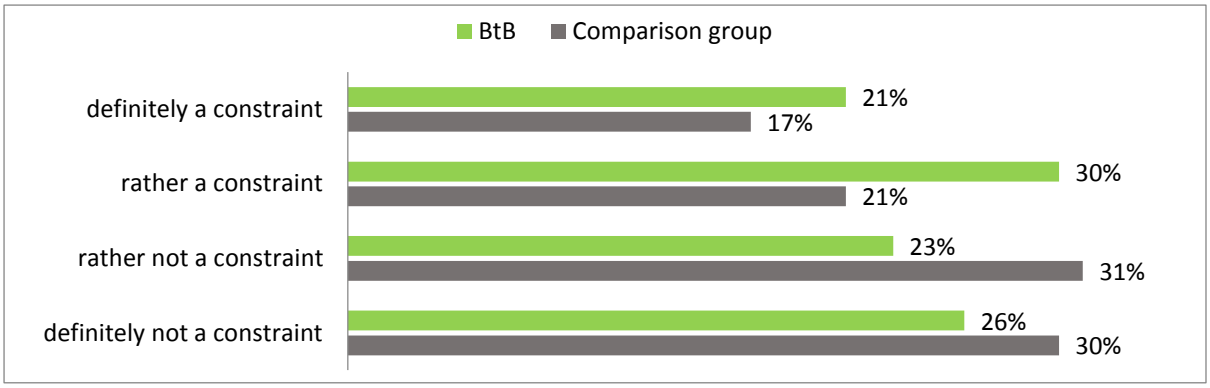
average – 22%[13] and 85% of Roma are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, while the average indicator for the Bulgarian population is 1/5[14].

In our survey limited resources are mentioned as an impediment both in the past and in the present for accessing learning and other opportunities. In many Roma families, poverty appears to be among the main barriers to higher education.

„From a financial point of view, it is important that families can afford a longer period of education for children. In our family it was a bit difficult, but we succeeded."

The lack of economic resources is one of the primary constraints to their ambitions mentioned by BtB participants.

Figure 5. ***Not having adequate means (the word used in the Bulgarian questionnaire is routinely understood simply as 'money') as a constraint***



Not having money is a constraint for half of the BtB participants, something we can expect from persons joining an employment programme. The comparison group members are slightly less cash-constrained (Figure 5).

Where the cost of education could not be provided by the family, it is often the funding of specialized Roma scholarship programmes that contribute to overcoming the financial difficulties of the Roma who have successfully completed secondary and higher education. Approximately 2/3 of the young well-educated Roma in our survey report that they have received a scholarship for their studies at a school or university, this share being higher for participants in the programme – 75% and lower for the comparison group – 58%.

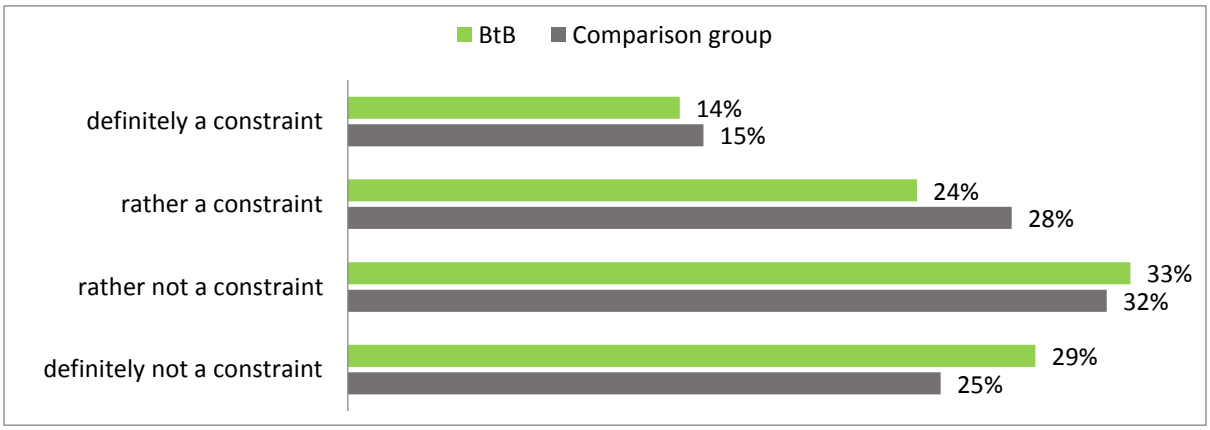
The additional forms of support these programmes provide – supplementary courses, guidelines, participation in scholarship networks – also have a positive impact on learning motivation and success.

„To motivate a person, he needs individual attention and support tailored to his needs. Especially important for motivation are guidance, support, and understanding."

Limited social networks and not knowing influential persons also appear as a constraint.

[13] Indicators of Poverty and Social Inclusion in 2018, NSI, 2019, p. 4.
[14] Indicators of Poverty and Social Inclusion in 2018, NSI, 2019, p. 10.

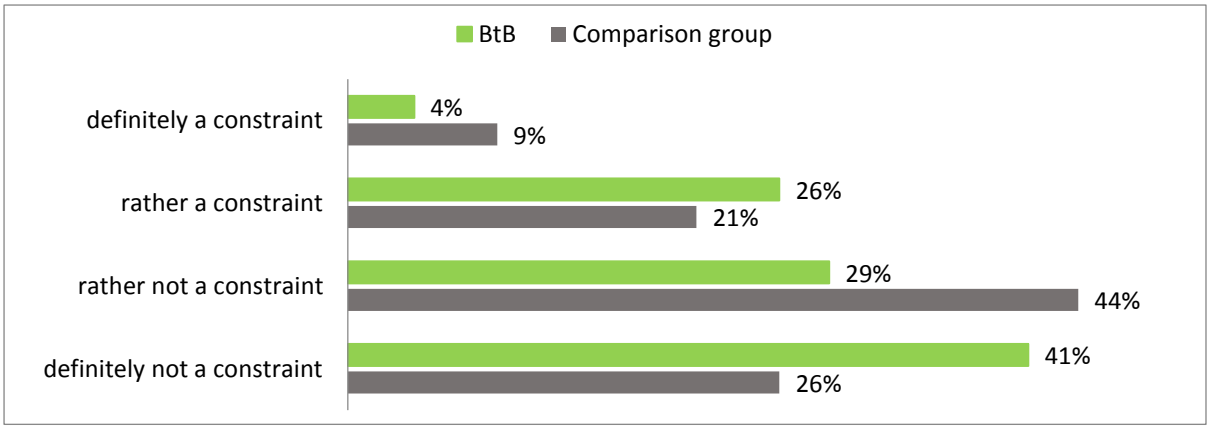
Figure 6. ***Not having social ties with influential persons as a constraint***



Among the main constraints mentioned by educated young Roma which can impede the achievement of their goals and aspirations is not having social ties with influential persons. This constraint is mentioned by about 40% of respondents in both BtB and the comparison group.

The key personal characteristic which stands out as a constraint is ethnicity.

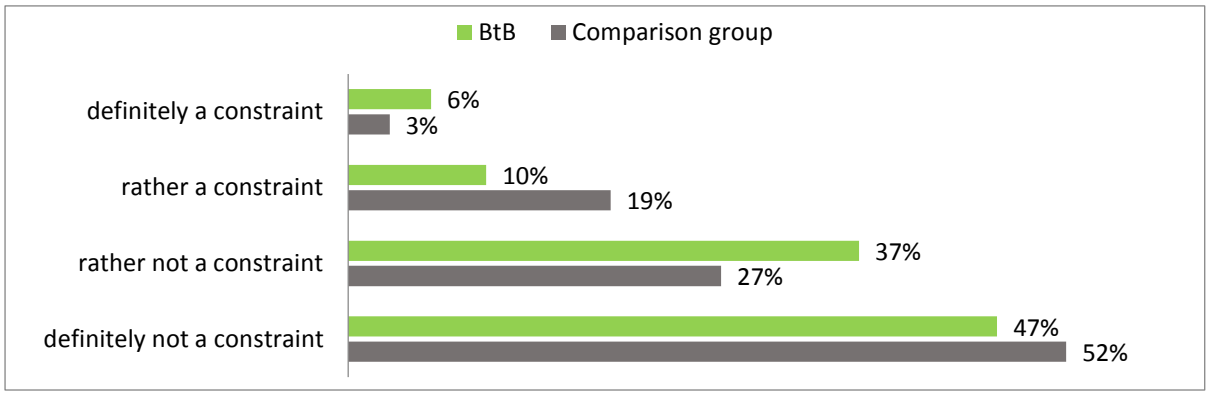
Figure 7. ***Ethnic background as constraint***



30% of educated young Roma feel that their ethnic background is a constraint. The place of residence comes next mentioned by a bit fewer educated young Roma (17%-18%). Place of residence can be changed but not so easily. Place of residence is related to status and provides opportunities such as access to goods and services, an address in segregated areas often functions as a proxy for ethnicity. Being a parent is mentioned as a constraint by 16% of BtB participants and 22% of the comparison group.

Having children is also mentioned as a constraint about 20% of educated young Roma, mostly by those who actually do have children. Some of those who do not yet have children (we remind that the average age of young Roma in our whole sample is about 25 years) are quite likely to experience this constraint in the near future, so it has to be taken seriously in the context of looking for a good job.

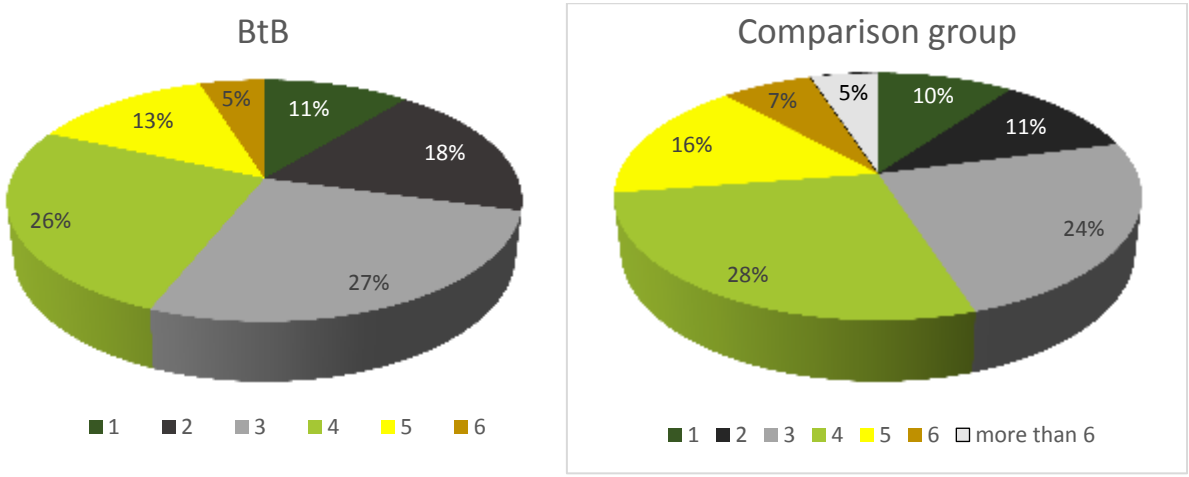
Figure 8. ***Being a parent as a constraint***



Between the comparison group and participants in BtB there are some differences in the probability of having children, while apparently this is considered by young Roma an important factor influencing their opportunities on the labour market. This is the reason why this indicator was also included in the matching procedure.

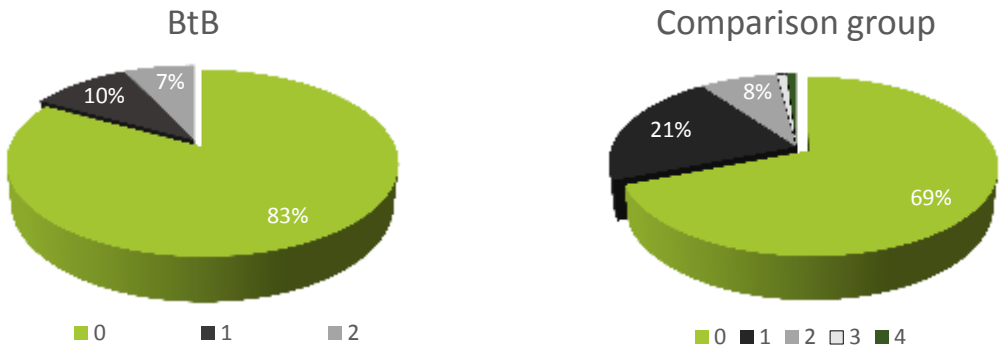
Being a parent is related to the structure and size of the household a person lives in, so it is also related to the need to dedicate time to the household and do housework. In the size of the households there is also some difference between participants in BtB and members of the comparison group.

Figure 9. ***Household size of members of the comparison group and BtB participants***



Participants in BtB tend to live in a bit smaller households; more participants in BtB live in 1 and 2-person households. This reflects the fact that they are a bit younger, which makes them more likely to live alone or have no children. In the BtB group there are no very large households. The size of the household was included among the variables used for matching the two groups.

Figure 10. **Members of the comparison group and BtB who had children at the time of the first survey**



Only 17% of participants in BtB had children at the time of the first survey. They had one child (10%) or 2 children at most (7%). More of the participants in the comparison group had children at the time of the first survey (31%) and a tiny proportion of them had more than 2 children. Women were more likely to have children (29%) than men (19%) and more likely to have more than 1 child. Women were also more likely to experience having children as a constraint beyond what can be explained by actually having children, apparently because they take more of the burden related to child rearing: 25% of women experienced this constraint compared to 12% of men.

Skill profiles, skill sets, opportunities

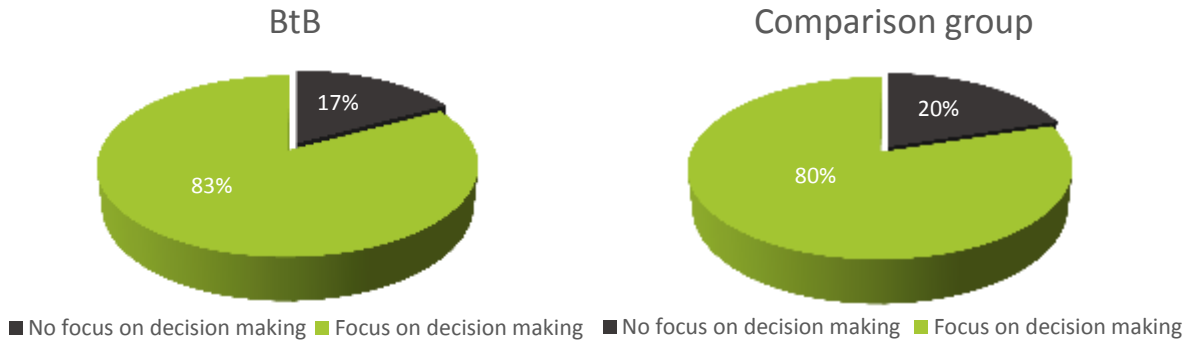
As noted above, programmes such as Bridge to Business rely on identifying a comparatively thin social layers among young well-educated Roma, and consider that relatively limited, minimal interventions for young people are needed to find appropriate employment – mostly related to soft skills. With few notable exceptions that we mention in the section concerning constraints, namely the command of foreign languages and IT skills, educated young Roma tend to think that they are not short on cognitive or technical skills.

Indeed the answers to concrete questions indicate that educated young Roma appear also to be making a good and frequent use of their cognitive skills. Over half of Roma with secondary or tertiary education have written at least one text exceeding 10 pages over the past half year. More than 70% of Roma with higher education have written at least one such text over the past half year and almost half of them have written a text of more than 25 pages. 70% of Roma with secondary or tertiary education have read at least one text over 50 pages (book, report, etc.) over the past three months. Almost all Roma with higher education have read a text exceeding 50 pages in the past 3 months.

The situation with non-cognitive skills appears to be quite promising as well in terms of chances for competing on the labour market.

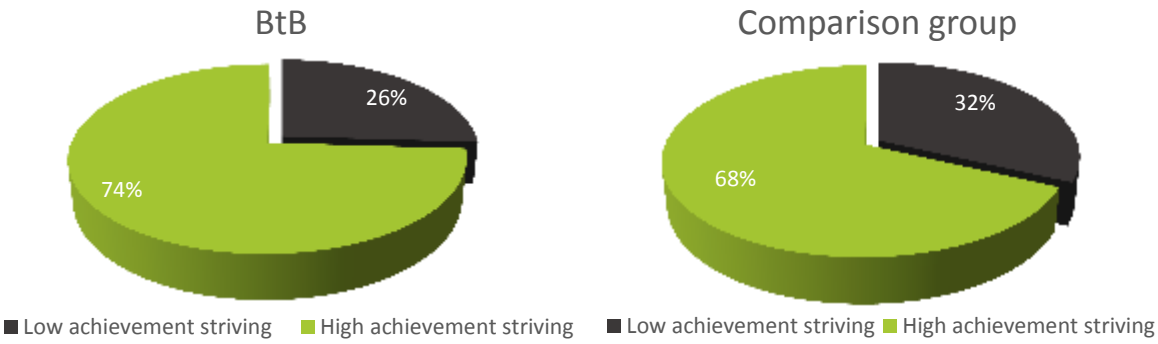
In our study, we have a set of questions that evaluate different psychological characteristics that are known to influence labour market performance. In this context, some of them are sometimes seen as important non-cognitive skills. Here we summarize some of those that are most important to our research.

Figure 11. ***Decision making***



For the most part, educated young Roma are very serious about decision-making. Four out of five educated young Roma carefully consider the consequences of their actions and the potential impact on others and are ready to seek help when they do not understand something – these are main components of the psychological decision-making scale. These are qualities that have been found to have a positive impact on chances on the labour market, most often in conjunction with other factors. In decision making, there are no major differences between the Bridge to Business participants and the comparison group. In *decision making* the average for the Bulgarian population in 2013 was 2.96 (SfW)[15], while the average for the educated young Roma in present survey reaches 3.55 on a scale where "almost never" is encoded as 1 and "almost all of the time" – as 4.

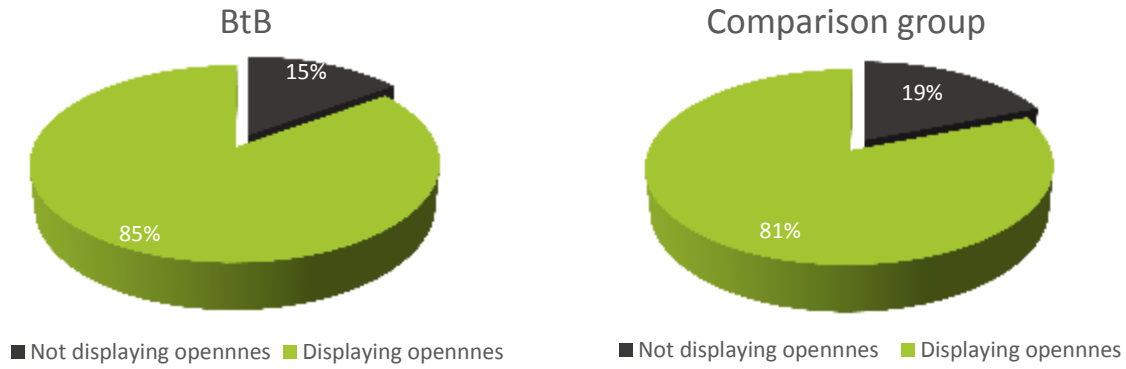
Figure 12. ***Achievement striving***



Educated young Roma are characterized with high achievement striving with just a small difference between the comparison group and BtB participants. Achievement striving is defined as a wish to outdo others, to perform better than expected, to strive for perfection and try to excel in everything one does. These are generally personal traits that an employer would wish to see in employees.

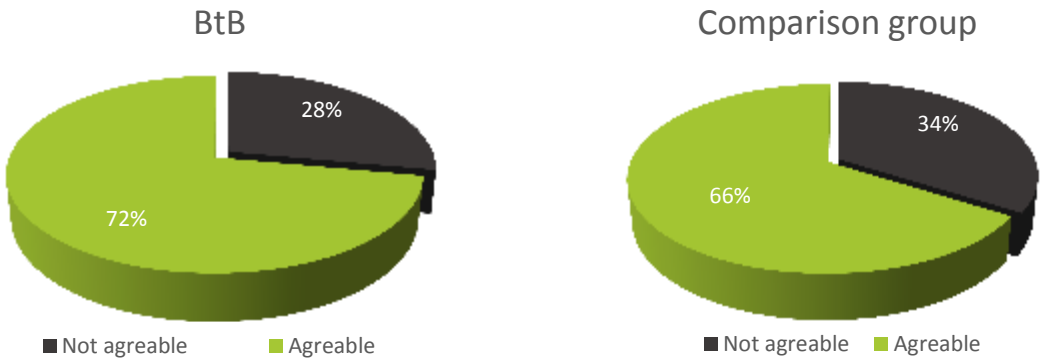
[15] SfW - Skills for Work in Bulgaria: The Relationship between Cognitive and Socioemotional Skills and Labour Market Outcomes, the World Bank, January 2016, data base of the Bulgarian Longitudinal Inclusive Society Survey implemented by the World Bank and Open Society Institute-Sofia.

Figure 13. ***Openness***



More than 80% of educated young Roma display openness without any substantial or statistically significant difference between BtB participants and their peers who were not in the programme. Openness is closely related to creativity, coming up with new ideas, having artistic talents and valuing art and being curious to learn and have new experiences. Though these qualities fall short of being ubiquitously beneficial for all kinds of jobs, they are valued and in high demand in some high-profile jobs in the creative economy, research, engineering, and consultancy among others which involve undertaking non-routine tasks and addressing difficult problems. In *openness* the average for the Bulgarian population in 2013 was 2.92 (SfW), while the average for the educated young Roma in the present survey is 3.55 on a scale where "almost never" is encoded as 1 and "almost all of the time" – as 4.

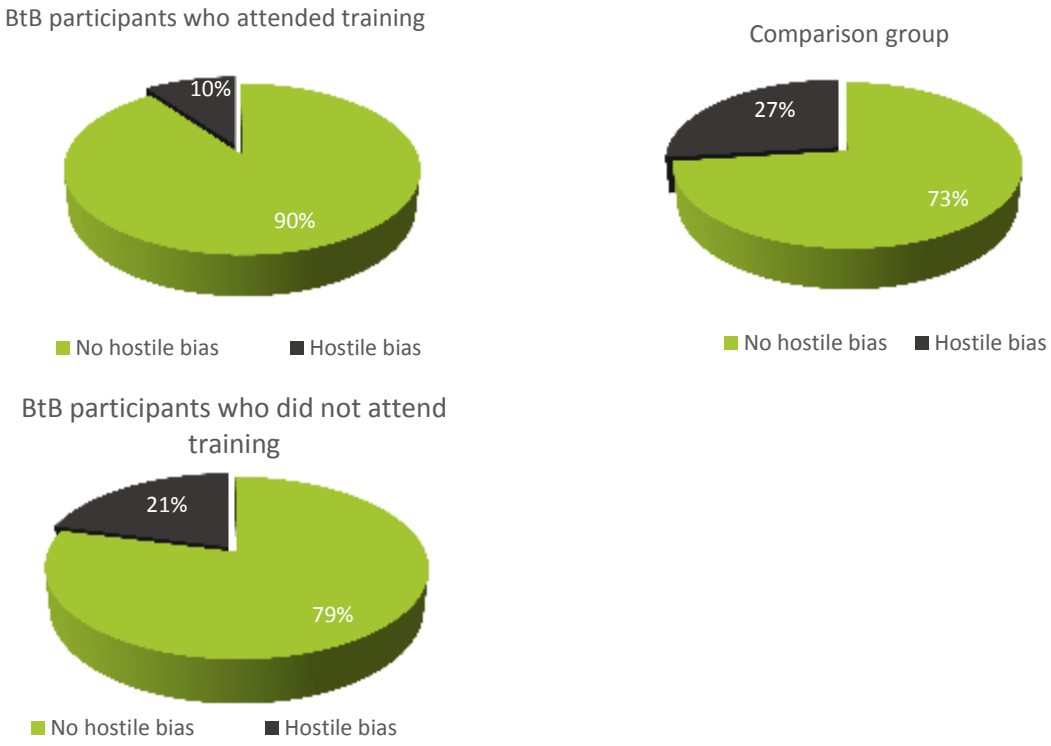
Figure 14. ***Agreeableness***



Agreeableness is a personal trait which makes a person friendly, facilitates the avoidance or resolution of conflicts and thus facilitates communication and team work. This is also a desirable trait for a large number of jobs. More than 2/3 of educated young Roma are agreeable persons (figure 14). As regards *agreeableness* educated young Roma score much better (3.21) than the average for the national population in 2013 (2.75).

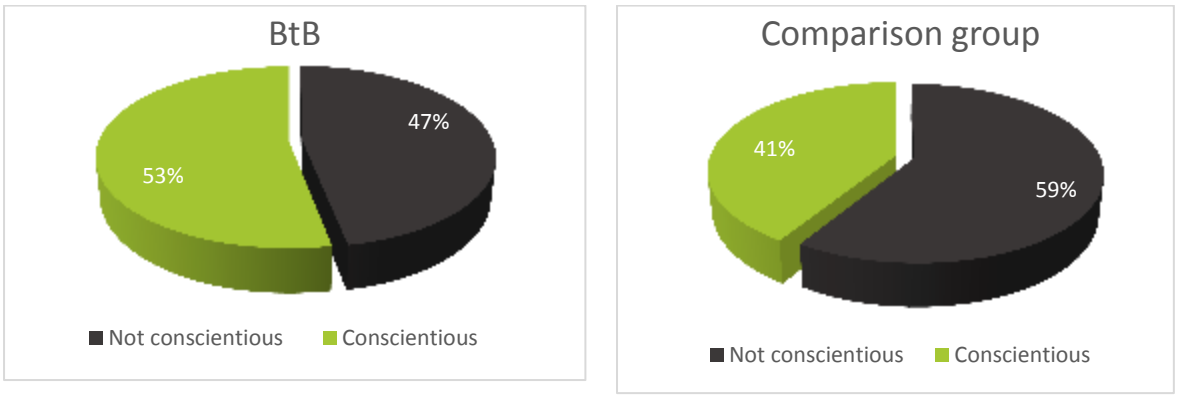
Quite few educated young Roma also display low levels of hostile bias (between a fifth and a quarter), despite the fact that some of them come from a deprived environment or have experienced discrimination. Hostile bias is defined as the belief that other persons are for the most part ill-intended and should not be trusted.

Figure 15. ***Hostile attribution bias***



In figure 15 we displayed separately those who enrolled in at least one training. Generally participants in BtB display a somewhat lower of hostile bias than the comparison group but the group of those who decided to spare time and see what the BtB training would offer displays a much lower frequency of hostile bias. Deeper analyses of the *hostile bias* show that educated young Roma were somewhat more prone to it by comparison with Bulgarian population in 2013 (SfW). But the higher hostile bias is entirely accounted for by those 40% who declared that had ever experienced discrimination; the rest had exactly the average for the whole population in Bulgaria.

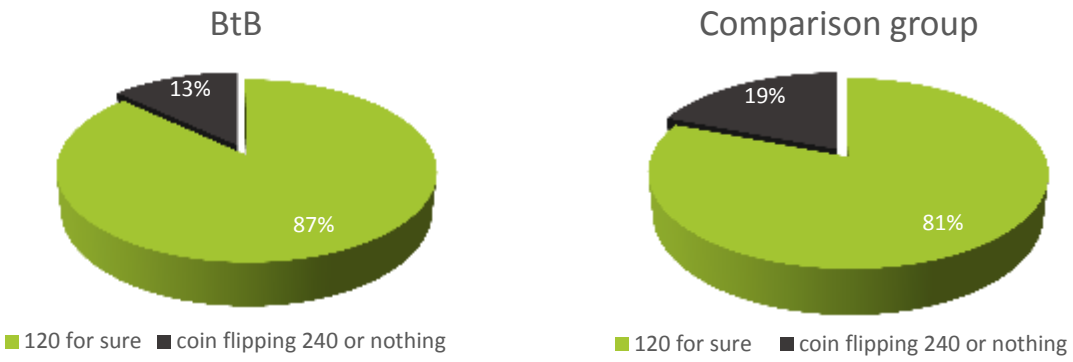
Figure 16. ***Conscientiousness***



Participants in BtB are more conscientious than their peers from the comparison group with a difference of 12 pp (figure 16). The conscientiousness scale includes being a reliable worker, doing a thorough job and being industrious (not lazy). Since this is a scale based on personal responses and self-assessment we could suspect that persons taking part in job searching programme would tend to slightly overstate their conscientiousness, which can explain the difference.

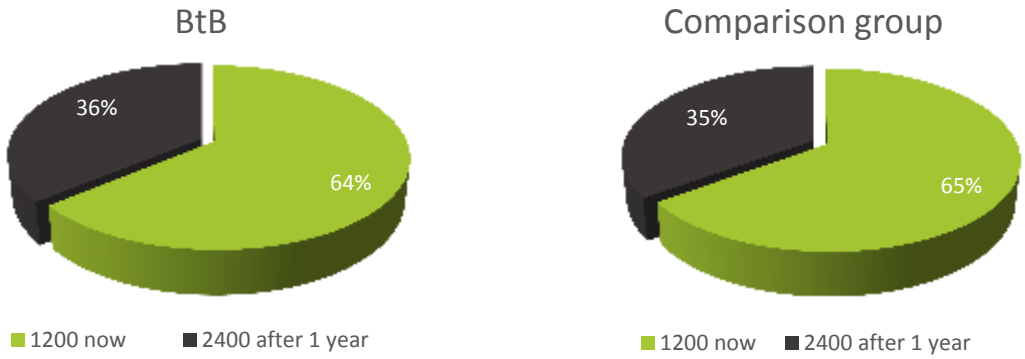
In general we can summarize that BtB had no positive net effects on the labour market. The comparison group and BtB performed similarly on the whole range of indicators.

Figure 17. ***Risk aversion***



The comparison group and Bridge to Business participants also do not differ significantly in their readiness to take risks. We tested their taste for taking risk (testing their chance) using one of the questions from a scale widely used in economic research around the world. The question offers to the participants to choose between secure winnings and a fair head-or-tail play. Most educated young Roma are strongly risk averse and tend to "play safe". Thus they appear no different from the general population with similar educational characteristics. Among the comparison group there are 6 percentage points more "risk lovers" but the difference is not substantial and does not have any explanatory power (figure 17).

Figure 18. ***Future-orientedness***



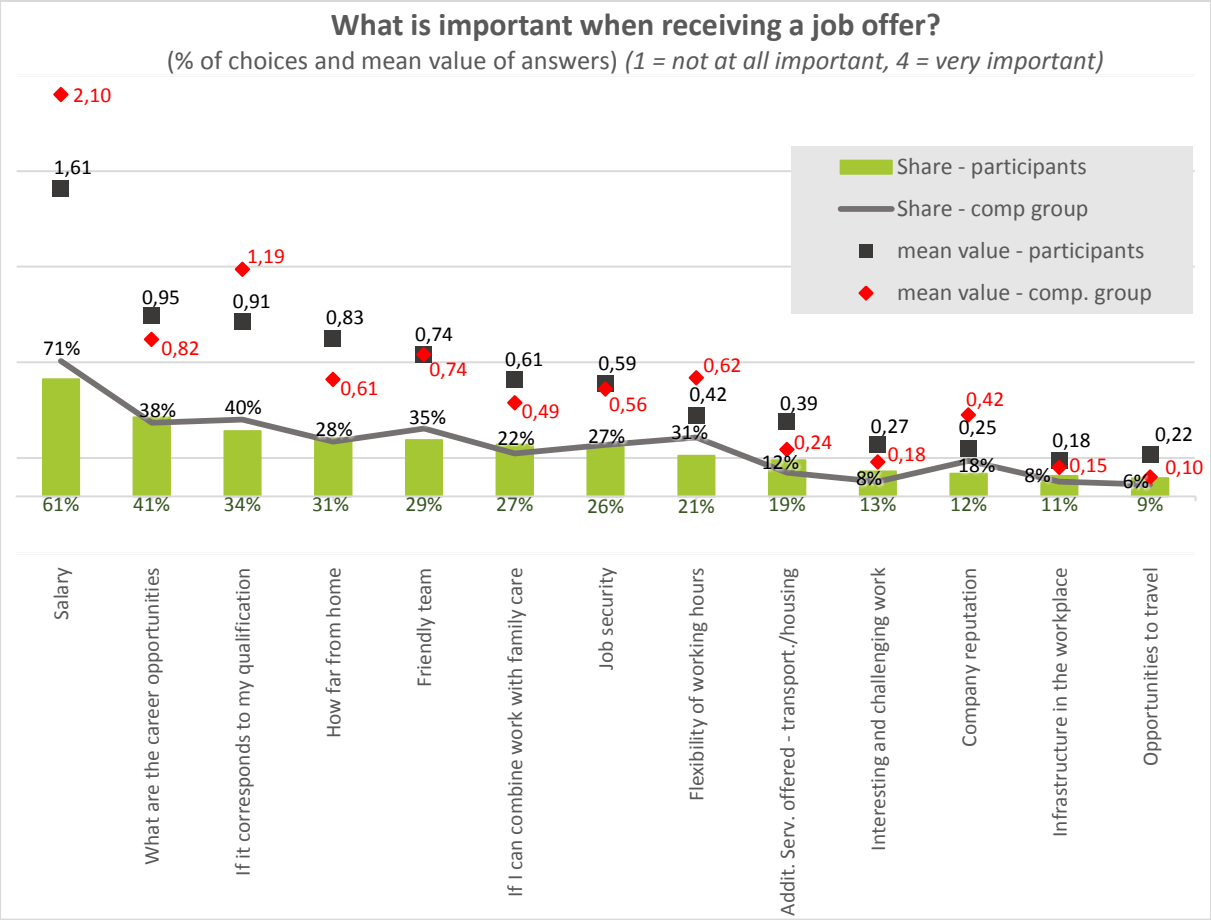
Two-thirds of the survey participants, both from the comparison group and in Bridge to Business, have a preference for reward rather than a high interest rate after a year (figure 18). This present-orientedness is not atypical for young people and can reasonably be interpreted in the sense that they expect a quick return to effort, not least from the work they do.

Plans, ambition, aspirations, preferences

When discussing chances to find a job, enrol in education or indeed to make any future choice, personal plans and aspirations are no doubt one of the key factors to be considered, though often they decide or predict just part of what actually happens. Plans and preferences tend to change with time; sometimes they are unrealistic from the very beginning. But in some cases plans and aspirations can provide the explanation why a person did not accept some offer

looking attractive from the outside and chose a different path instead. So, personal visions about the future coming in one shape or another have to be taken into account when assessing a programme.

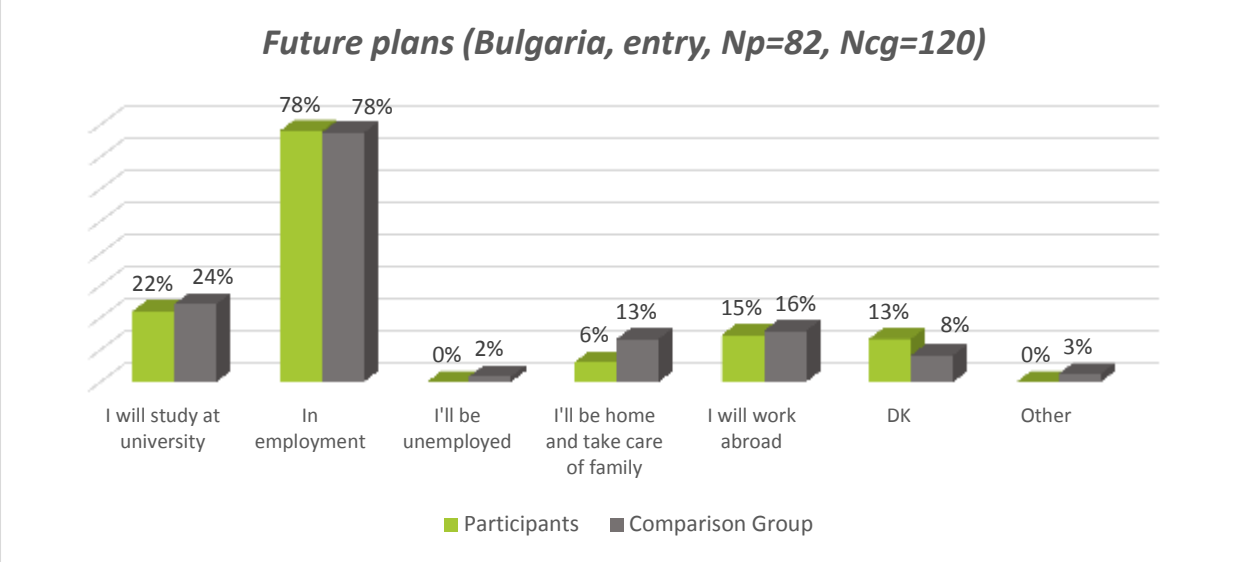
Figure 19. ***Subjective assessment of what is important when receiving a job offer***



When discussing with educated young Roma what makes a job attractive they would often mention some of the same issues which came out of the answers to question included in the survey. Salary comes forth as the most important issue followed by career opportunities. The third place is taken by the link between the job and the person's qualification. For educated persons in Bulgaria the typical case is to get a job which requires a lower qualification. Next come a group of issues related to the opportunities to combine a career with family life including proximity to home, a flexible working time and the need to dedicate time to the family.

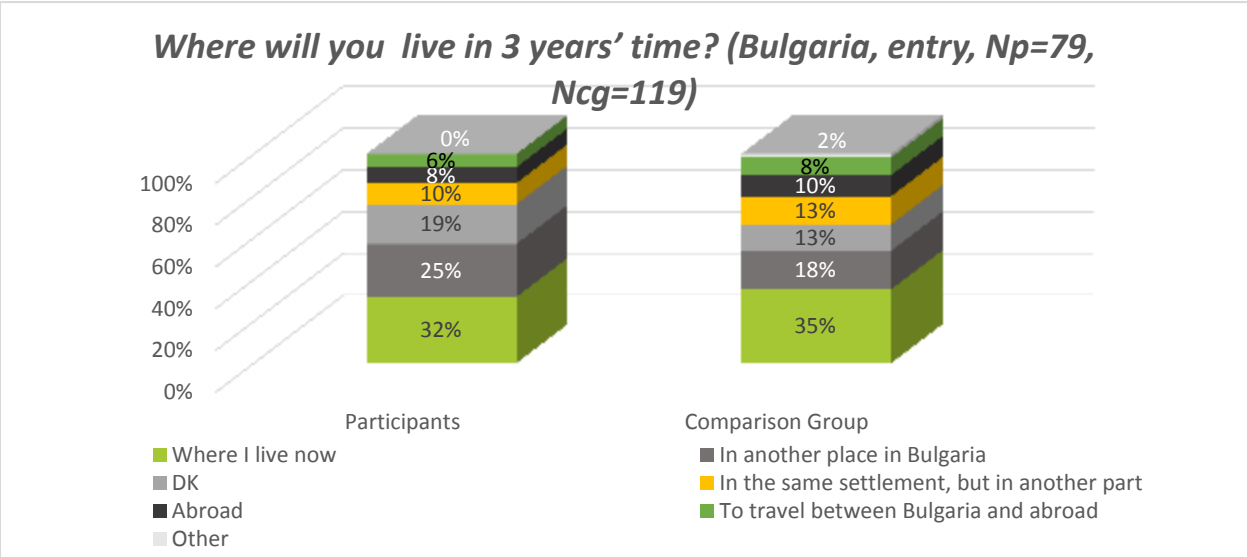
There are no significant differences between the main and the comparison group regarding the leading factors in the job search process. The comparison group gives a little more importance to pay as well as to the compliance with the qualification acquired and the availability of a friendly team at the workplace, probably due to the slightly higher qualification in this group and the somewhat longer experience on the labour market. In the main group a little more weight is put on the remoteness of the work from the place of residence, which is probably related at least partially also to the fact that a slightly larger part of the young people in the participants' group are enrolled in tertiary education and look for a job that is not distant from the place where they study.

Figure 20. ***Future plans about work and education***



Between a fifth and a quarter of educated young Roma had plans to study in the immediate future, the rest had a plan to work, some of them combining work with education. About 15% planned to work abroad. In the 6-months period we observed only 5 persons actually went abroad.

Figure 21. ***Mobility plans within 3 years***



When asked about their plans to move or stay about a third of educated young Roma expected that in 3-years' time they would have stayed where they are. About a third had plans to stay in Bulgaria but change the place they live either by moving to another part of the same settlement or to another settlement. About 15% had plans to stay abroad or move back and forth between Bulgaria and another country.

Experiences of discrimination (with special focus on experiences of discrimination in education and employment)

The main conclusion from our survey concerning discrimination appears to be that educated young Roma are still likely to become the target of discrimination but they have more tools to cope with it. Most of those tools are based on their own skills and coping strategies rather than on any institutional procedures in place. About 40% of well-educated young Roma in our survey state that they have been discriminated against at least once in their life. About 1/5 is the share of those who have experienced discrimination during the period we've observed - the last 6 months. On this indicator as well there are no serious differences between the participants in the programme and the other educated young Roma.

Despite having experience discrimination the majority of participants in the programme perceive themselves as similar to other well-educated young people, regardless their ethnicity. On the question of whether specific benefits can be identified for Roma with secondary and tertiary education, only one of the respondents in quality methods develops the thesis of Roma advantages concerning personal qualities such as tenacity and diligence that might stem from the need to achieve the same outcomes as peers from other ethnic groups wile relying on more limited financial resources not available for many Roma families:

„Well-educated young Roma are stubborn. They are also diligent. When they study higher education they need financial support, not all parents can support them. This is why those Roma are trying to take their exams on the first session thus avoiding the risk of repeating academic year."

Another advantage that young well-educated Roma think they have is that they have the chance to serve as examples and role models in their communities.

„I am even glad I am of Roma origin and that I can be an example. I do not think that the opportunity to help young Roma should be wasted. …. it would be a shame if we do not help them educate themselves and develop."

The topic of discrimination among well-educated young Roma is not a part of their priority agenda.

About 40% of them state that they have ever been discriminated against. With few exceptions discrimination occurred on the grounds of ethnicity and place of residence[16] which in these cases also appears as a proxy for ethnicity.

Table 9. ***Incidence of discrimination in one's lifetime***

Answers	Percentage – treatment group	Percentage – comparison group
No	47	28
Yes	41	43
I don't know	8	10
No answer	4	19

[16] It should be borne in mind that a large part of the Roma in Bulgaria live in ethnically segregated quarters/neighborhoods of settlements.

The share of those who have faced discrimination in the last 6 months is about 1/5.

Table 10. ***Incidence of discrimination in the past 6 months***

Answers	Percentage – treatment group	Percentage – comparison group
No	65	58
Yes	18	21
I don't know	8	10
No answer	9	11

The number of cases of discrimination in the education system and on the labour market (in the process of job seeking or at work) dominates. The chance of being discriminated against in education and at work is almost equal.

The most common strategy of tackling discrimination registered in our survey is by ignoring the situation. There are very few cases of measures taken by young well-educated Roma when experience discrimination. If any anti-discrimination action is taken, the preferred approaches to dealing with it are individual – every 4th person who has suffered from discrimination says he has tried to talk to the person who discriminates against him and explain to him that he did not feel well about what had happened. The cases of formal complaints are rather exceptional.

„Since I was young girl – from the first grade – I really met such problems about my ethnicity. But I overcame it. I am myself, without hiding that I am of Roma origin. I am not exactly a person to be influenced by someone's' opinion. It helped me that I felt clearly that I was just as much as they were – they did not have a greater mental capacity or greater abilities because they belonged to the Bulgarian majority."

In this respect, young Roma appear to be no exception. As noted in a report of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, cases of complaints concerning ethnic discrimination in the field of employment considered by the commission are giving way to complaints about other grounds for discrimination – 'in recent years protection against discrimination in the exercise of the right to work takes up and a significant part of the Commission's activities ... however, ethnicity gives way to many other grounds for discrimination mentioned in the Protection against Discrimination Act'.[17]

These data should not be hurriedly interpreted as a message that high education has the potential to solve the problem of discrimination. On the contrary, the comparison with the average for the country from the FRA study shows that on average the share of Roma who faced discrimination is about 1/5[18].

In other words, the growing communication outside the Roma communities of better educated Roma actually puts them more likely in an environment with increasing risk of discrimination.

The high sensitivity to discrimination makes it difficult to understand and accept the concept of positive discrimination by the Roma themselves – they believe that this would be an injustice with the opposite sign and the interviewed participants in BtB say they cannot find any reason for which employers should give priority to Roma job seekers ceteris paribus:

[17] Annual Report of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination for 2015, pp. 64-65
[18] EUMIDIS, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, FRA, 2016, database: In the past 5 years have you ever felt discriminated against because of skin colour / ethnic origin / religion in 9 areas of life?.

„I don't know if everything should be the same for everyone or else what would balance the scales, what kind of advantage in hiring."

„It is discrimination to give priority to Roma over another candidate, isn't it?! Everyone is equal in society. The question is what you have been specializing in, what experience you have."

Participants do not identify clear predictors of non-discriminatory treatment of Roma in the labour market. Part of them, consider discrimination as a phenomenon that can occur both in the private and public sectors, and they tend to accept that prejudices are on an individual level and can hardly be overcome by corporate policies.

„Not all private companies are made similar. I have worked in two private companies. From my present employer, I am pleased, but from the former I was not."

„I am of the opinion that this is not a matter of state or private institution. I just think everything is up to the people and the understanding they have ... Whether the person accepts the differences, the colour of the skin for something normal."

However, some of the interviewed participants in the programme are convinced that the risk of discrimination against vulnerable groups in larger multinationals is more subdued.

„In big companies – not that I have a lot of experience – but racism is forbidden there. You are not allowed to discuss people. So these policies of larger companies contribute to better communication and understanding among colleagues."

„Maybe large companies have a lower risk of discrimination."

„We really talk about a big company, a world-renowned entity, a German enterprise – people there are more open to different ones. They accept people as they are and give them a chance to develop. Because most people, when they hear 'Roma', say 'Beware'. This is what I learned about my friends and acquaintances that have been treated on the basis of a stereotype. But I myself never experienced it. Personally, no matter where I have applied for a job, wherever I've been working, I have not felt any different attitude because of my Roma background."

Examples of tackling different types of discrimination, incl. targeting other vulnerable groups (e.g. migrants) appear to have rather been a source of motivation to continue rather than to retreat for some participants in the programme. According to one of them, telling a personal story of a manager from a large company who worked abroad in a very classy restaurant and was refused a promotion because of his origin has 'positively charged' him to want to overcome the challenge and find a way to a better environment.

„My set of options expanded. I am currently open to work for large companies." (feedback from a participant in BtB training)

Effects from Bridge to Business

Looking for a job: job search skills and job search strategies. Influence of BtB

In Bulgaria we couldn't collect much information about programme beneficiaries after they had found a job as quite few job placements took place within a 6-months period. Those job placements that occurred over the whole period of programme implementation could be traced using non-quantitative methods. However all of the BtB participants but single cases were not employed by companies that knew about Bridge to Business. It such cases it wouldn't be desirable for the BtB participants to make it known to those companies that they had hired a person from a programme supporting educated young Roma. Therefore our main conclusions presented here rely primarily on the quantitative data, which we think are rich enough to support a reliable analysis.

Approximately half of the participants in BTB mention at least one thing they learned within the programme or at least one service they received. The core of the programme is formed by the participants in the training – roughly two of three enrolled in BTB. Almost all participants in the training indicate that they have learned the things that are contained in the training modules. These include CV writing, communication in the process of job search, especially during interviews, job searching strategies, and more. Part of the benefits of the training, which is mentioned by almost all participants, is the creation of social contacts, the opportunity to meet with other educated young Roma and with professionals in the business sphere. Meetings with employers as well as real job applications are mentioned by just under half of the training participants, which correspond approximately to every fifth participant in BTB. Real success in finding a job or switching to a better or better paid job is mentioned only by single programme participants, the best examples of employment being in the public, not the private sector.

For comparison, the expectations of the young persons included in the Bridge to Business were primarily to improve their skills, find a job, replace their work with a better paid one, and get acquainted with business representatives and other young Roma professionals.

Table 11. ***Expectations from Bridge to Business according to participants***

Expectations	Percent
My skills will improve	48
I will find a better paid job	40
I will meet representatives of firms/companies	38
I will find a job	37
I will meet young Roma professionals	30
My personal network of acquaintances will expand	23
I will find a better job than the previous one	23
I will gain experience in looking for a job	18
I will learn how to write a CV well	16
It will be a new experience	16
My living conditions will change	12
I will get mentoring	8

A large part of these expectations were met for almost all the young persons who said they had them. **A notable exception is the expectation to find a job or move to a better-paid job**. These important transitions for the most part did not take place during the observed period of about 6 months since joining officially the BTB programme. It should be noted that the list from which candidates were able to choose their initial expectations was largely drawn up, taking into account the offer and ambitions of the programme. It is possible that within a broader list of options, the participants would have given priority to other desirable developments or outcomes, although during the discussion groups and in-depth interviews most participants found it very difficult to point other needs, the satisfaction of which would help them in finding a job and through their future careers.

For illustration, a participant explained why he would like to learn more about entrepreneurship and management of a small business:

„I do not want to work for someone else. If I open a company, others will work for me. I want something, which is mine. Finance - the rotation of money, how to minimize the risk of losses. That's what really excites me."

It is no coincidence that every 6th participant in the programme imagines that in three years she would have his own firm or work for the family business.

Table 12. ***Outcomes from Bridge to Business according to participants***

Results	Percent
I learned how to write a CV well	42
I gained greater self-confidence	42
I met young Roma professionals	39
I gained experience in looking for work	38
I was prepared by professionals for how to hold a job interview	38
My communicative skills have improved	36
I have better plans for my professional development	35
I met other young professionals	32
I met representatives of firms/companies during the trainings	25
I applied for a job	22
I received mentoring from a representative of the Bridge to Business programme	16
Firms/companies have paid more attention to me	7
I found a job	4
I found a better job than the previous one	4
I found a better paid job	4
I found a suitable job	4

The programme produced very good levels of satisfaction among those participants who benefited from services even when interactions with the programme were limited in scope and duration. Programme participants at the outset had two types of expectations – one related to the instrumental part of the programme – what they will be able to learn or what services they would be able to receive. The other type of expectations is related to the expected benefits and outcomes – finding a job, shifting to a better job, getting a better wage. The concept of a good

job includes a whole variety of expectations. Among them the payment plays an important role but is not always dominant and is even not always explicitly present.

The instrumental expectations from the programme were fulfilled to a very high degree for those who used the services offered by BtB. Not all young persons who were approved for participation after successfully going through the whole application process later chose to use any service.

A large part of Roma young people who complete secondary education do not get a chance for career guidance. Often their parents and relatives are unable to help them, and there are also no such opportunities at school. Therefore, these young people need alternative programmes such as Bridge to Business that can offset these deficits in social capital and the education system:

„I do not know exactly what I want. I need to sit alone to think, decide and know how I want to move on."

„Lots of people in my neighbourhood graduate from secondary school. There are quite a few graduates ... But then, there is a barrier. They do not know where to go. They just stop there and say, "I'm done, that's it". They could rely neither on advice, nor on direction. There is no one around to tell what to do. Because to us, unfortunately, that's how it happens - someone has to tell you, someone to give you a hand and jog you. It is important to explain to children completing secondary education, how to continue, how to realise what they like and strive to get it."

„After living with, communicating and knowing persons from the ethnic minority, I see great potential that could develop in different spheres. I see potential in the Roma – not just working with their hands but also mental potential. And I'm really sorry, I'm sick when I see that for many of them life has passed just like that ... For many of my relatives the priority is to get married after graduation and have a child, eventually."

The survey data show that those participants in BtB who studied in segregated school environment benefited most from this type of support offered within the programme – 44% of them report improvement of their plans for the future professional development while the share among participants who studied in desegregated secondary schools this share is only 29%.

The Bridge to Business programme is perceived by a large number of candidates as a typical job finding programme – only a slightly different employment agency on the labour market which acts as an intermediary for young Roma who are formally eligible to participate. However, many of them lacked the qualifications and skills to enable them occupying white collar positions as was initially intended. Furthermore, this wide opening of the programme entrance may have initially caused some caution in more prepared Roma candidates who wanted to stand out among those who had barely met the requirements for enrolment. Some of the best-qualified candidates may have had all the requisite skills to find good jobs by themselves using their existing personal and social capital without any further support. In fact, input data from programme participants and the comparison group show that around 60% of educated young Roma have found jobs on their own and the majority of their job placements have been on employment contracts.

Table 13. ***Type of employment contract***

Type of contract	BtB participants (percentage)	Comparison group (percentage)
Not specified	41.3	35.3
Indefinite contract	20.7	32.4
Fixed-term contract	23.9	14.4
Civil contract	8.7	7.2
Self-employed or a sole trader	3.3	2.2
Trainee without civil or employment contract	0.0	1.4
Without contract	2.2	3.6
I do not know	0.0	0.7
Volunteer / traineeship	0.0	1.4
Other (please specify)	0.0	1.4

After BtB selection, every third of the participants was university graduate, each second was student and only about 1/5 did not continue their education after having received a secondary education diploma. It means that BtB ultimately managed to get a pool of educated participants which is probably quite representative of the Roma with tertiary education but less so for the Roma with only secondary education.

On the one hand, openness to a wider range of young people gives a chance to more of them, meeting the minimum requirements of the programme and thus gaining access to the services offered. But the low threshold for admissions entails a risk that some of these young people are disappointed that they have not received the expected support.

Because of the wide filtering procedure used in the initial selection additional selection already within the programme occurred naturally among already enrolled participants. It could be defined as self-selection process of the young Roma who became official participants. Of these, every 4th person did not receive any service during the observed programme period of half a year, and every 3rd person did not join any of the offered training activities.

Income, subjective assessment of situations on the labour market and transitions to work and education

The evaluation of the Bridge to Business programme was carried out using three main sets of outcomes, some of them with more than one component.

The **first set** includes only the change in the income of programme participants and the comparison group. The earnings of participants in the programme and of the members of the comparison group were calculated on the basis of the answer to the question asked in the first and second questionnaires. The question allows measuring the change in income that happened within about half a year.

In addition to this main indicator, several important transitions between labour market and education related states were used, which form **the second set of indicators** for programme evaluation. The main transitions within the 6-month study period that we examined are the following:

1) Transition from expressed desire to become employed to employment, i.e. finding a job within 6 months after expressing a strong wish to find a job;

2) Transition from unemployment with and without active job search or from household work to employment;

3) Transition from any other situation that does not involve employment to employment;

4) Transition from unemployment with or without active job search or from household work to higher education;

5) Transition from any other activity that does not involve participation in higher education, including employment, to participation in higher education.

Approximately 20 indicators are used in the **third set** to evaluate the impact of *Bridge to Business*, which capture the subjective judgment of the participants about their work and their working environment. One set of indicators is based on questions asked only in the second questionnaire. These questions have the character of a generalized retrospective assessment. With the typical question of this type, the respondent is invited to assess what change took place over the past half year to his/her income, career prospects, the atmosphere at the workplace, the attitudes of the management, relations with colleagues and others. Only those who had a job in the last half year responded to this set of questions. The second set of questions was asked at the start and after 6 months. These are questions that assess the situation at the point in time when the question is asked. The respondent evaluates on a four-step scale how satisfied s/he is with his salary, job security, workplace convenience, and more. Conversion into evaluation indicators is done by evaluating transitions within 6 months to greater or lesser satisfaction or preservation of the same condition.

The effects of the Bridge to Business programme were evaluated both on all participants in the programme and separately on the participants in the trainings alone following the way in which participation in the programme was defined in Hungary and testing to what extent training had a special place among other services.

The matching procedure built a sample of 94 members of the comparison group and the 92 BtB participants all grouped into 5 balanced blocks. The number of treated and controls refer to actual nearest neighbour matches 57 members of the comparison group could not be matched and were ignored in the assessment of various transitions. When only persons who attended at least one kind of training are considered including a short training focused on the preparation of motivation letters, the treatment group contains 57 members while the comparison group contains 88 members.

Income

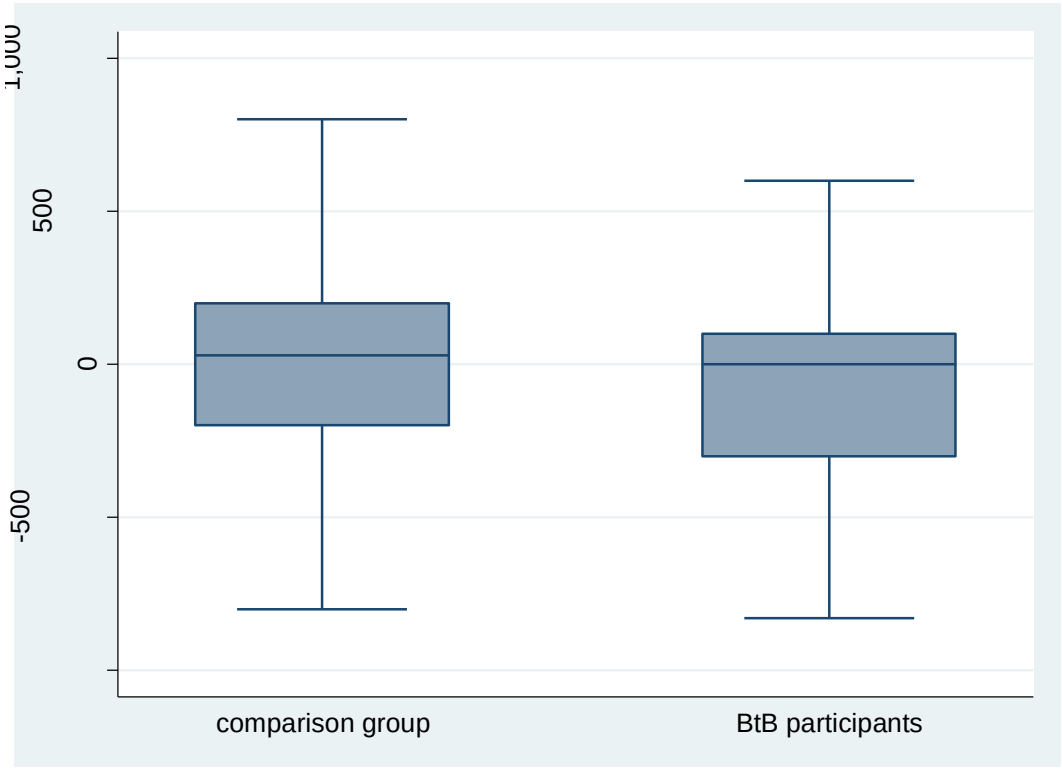
Income is without any doubt one of the most important economic indicators and usually the main indicator used to assess inequality at least in a market economy. Educated young Roma clearly understand how important income and money are. Getting a better paid job was one of the stronger expectations from Bridge to Business while the lack of money was among the top three obstacles to realizing their plans and ambitions mentioned by the respondents both from BtB and the comparison group. In our questionnaire we asked about (personal) income, not explicitly

about wage or remuneration. However the main income of young person usually comes from work. This pattern is clearly discernible in our data as well as income is closely related to the status of the persons on the labour market. The average income of young Roma with a secondary education in our dataset is BGN 630 and those with a bachelor's degree get on average 820 BGN. Young Roma with a master's degree gain on average 1110 BGN per month. The incomes of young Roma with tertiary education are comparable to those of higher education graduates in the country.

For young Roma with secondary education, the calculation of the average income includes unemployed persons without income. If we only take employees, they get on average 680 BGN including all those who do not work full time.

It is quite reasonable to expect that under normal economic conditions a relatively large group of young persons will not experience a significant change in their income unless this was a group passing some important threshold.

Figure 22. ***Income change in a period of 6 months***



There is no any overall gain in income among BtB participants. As many of them lost income as gained so the net effect was zero. The comparison group performed a bit better. The difference is statistically significant at 95% confidence level when using for the matching the propensity score calculated on the basis of indicators previously described in the methodological section.

Figure 22 compares the change of income to the initial income levels registered at the beginning of the observed 6-months period. It can be seen that members of the comparison group experienced somewhat more increase and less decrease in incomes across a range of initial incomes.

Figure 23. ***Income at a fixed point in time (at the time of filling the first questionnaire) compared to the change of income over the following 6 months***

Both rise and drop of income is a bit more abrupt by members of the comparison group with some notable outliers, mainly persons who were in Bulgaria at the first interview but ventured to look for a job abroad by the time of the second interview.

Following the example of the Hungarian version of the BtB programme we decided to test the hypothesis that trainings could have delivered the main bulk of the effect. Since just a fraction of those who official joined BtB participated in trainings there could be reasonable expectations that other participants represent 'deadweight' on programme outcomes. In Hungary in contrast to Bulgaria in a similar intervention the Hungarian operator considered as part of the programme only those who attended a training that had a longer duration that the Bulgarian one. For this purpose we constructed a treatment group consisting only of those persons who attended at least one training provided by the Bulgarian operator. We should note first of all that participants in trainings had some features which distinguished them from the other programme participants, i.e. from all those who after being selected signed the official terms for participation. Participants in trainings were more likely to differ from those who didn't on a number of indicators. In particular they were more likely to have a lower income.

Figure 24. ***Income at the point of the first survey of the comparison group, BtB participants who joined at one of the trainings offered by the programme and BtB participants who did not joined any training offered by the programme.***

We used propensity scores to match a suitable comparison group to the pool of participants in trainings. In this case this was even more important as those participants unlike the full group of BtB participants differed significantly from the comparison group.

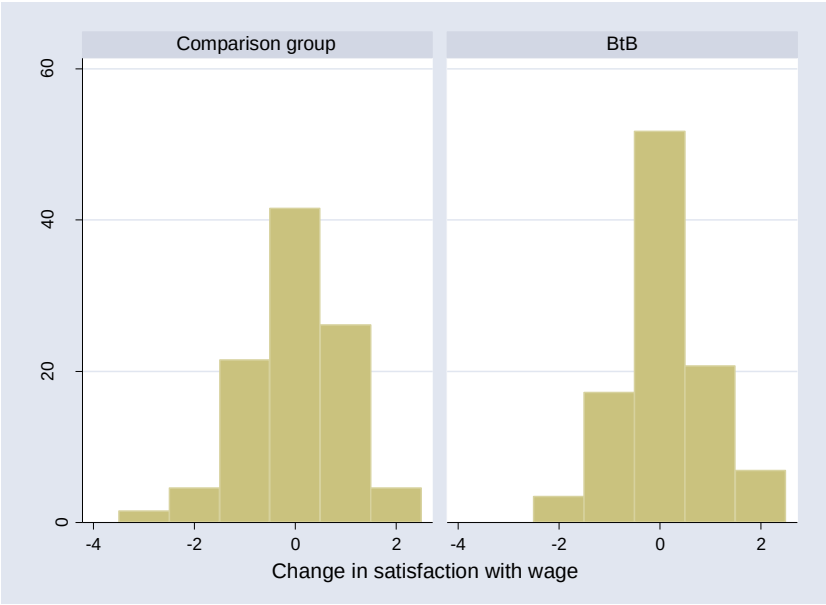
There is one negative effect in terms of lost income. Lost income comes from those who formally joined the BtB but did not use of the services. Apparently these were persons relying on the programme to find them a job without taking part in other activities. Such persons could have reduced their usual effort to look for a job trough other sources or even to look for an alternative source of income. The negative effect appears when we include in the propensity score the initial income and all circumstances related to each person's initial labour market participation.

Apart from being an indicator measurable in resource units, i.e. most often in money, income is also very important as a subjective indicator. In our survey we focused on wage satisfaction to assess to what extent young persons were happy with the income they can receive for the work they do.

Figure 25. ***Wage satisfaction at the point of the first interview (BtB and comparison group)***

Satisfaction with wage among Roma with secondary and high education who have jobs is quite high independent of whether they participate in BtB or not – three in four are rather satisfied or very satisfied. About 10% are not satisfied at all with the wage they get. It means that there is room for improvement by moving to a different job (with a different employer) or by advancing in one's career at the same workplace. BtB is mainly designed and equipped to assist applicants with looking for a new job with a new employer. The main positive net effect can therefore be expected from supporting applicants in finding really high profile jobs: this would eventually lead to a shift of those more than half who are moderately satisfied with their wage but would appreciate an improvement. The other positive effect can come from those (about a quarter) who are not satisfied with their current salary.

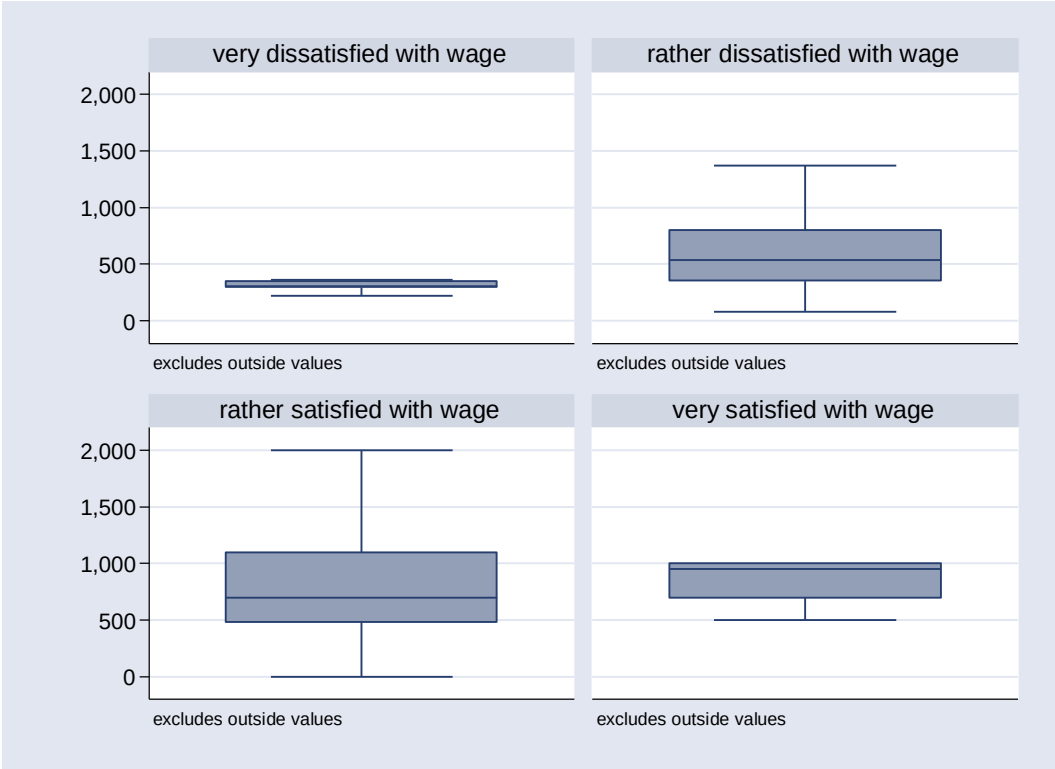
Figure 26. Change in satisfaction with wage in a 6-month period



As a net satisfaction with wage did not change much within a 6-months period, either among BtB participants or among the comparison group. But overall balance remaining unchanged some persons experienced improvement while others were less satisfied at the end than at the beginning.

Satisfaction with wage is quite correlated with income though far from perfectly and is not related to education. This means that educated young Roma largely form their wage expectations based on objective observations of the wage levels. There is however also a purely perceptional component in satisfaction as one would expect. I.e. a young person may come to like better one's earnings by getting used to it or by learning to use it better or for any other reason which is not related to a real growth in income.

Figure 27. Satisfaction with wage compared to income



This means that educated young Roma largely have a very objective and realistic attitude to their earnings and their earning potential and that they would normally respond adequately and predictably to monetary incentives.

Transitions between various states related to the labour market and education

The various transitions to work or to education from other states are described below. They use the same matching procedure.

1. *Transition to employment for those who were actively seeking a job*

This variable tracks the transition to work of those who didn't work at the time they filled the first questionnaire but had explicitly declared they wished to find a job (as soon as possible). The

group includes both those who said they were actively looking for a job and those who were not actively looking for a job but would like to start working. Not all participants in BtB had the intention to immediately start working. Some of them were still having their studies, some had jobs but declared an intention to find a better one sometime but not as a matter of urgency. We didn't find any statistically significant difference between BtB participants and the comparison group. The ATT was 0.012 – practically 0. The model used all 92 observations from the treatment group and 94 from the comparison group.

2. *Transition to work from unemployment and education*

This variable tracks how many persons who were unemployed, both seeking actively and not seeking actively a job, or were still in education found a job. The transition from education to employment was an important issue and potentially an important outcome as many programme participants were still studying. There were 28 such transitions in total for BtB participants and the comparison group. The estimated ATT was -0.069 with no statistically significant difference between the treatment and comparison groups.

3. *Transition to employment from unemployment and housework*

Some of the BtB participants and similarly some of the members of the comparison group have indicated that they were not looking for a job and not immediately ready to start working because they were involved in housework. In this indicator we track all transitions from unemployment (persons ready to start work, some of them actively seeking a job) and persons doing housework some of whom were not ready to immediately take a job but were willing to keep an eye on incoming options. There were 30 such transitions in total with a very small positive ATT and no statistically significant difference between the two groups. The table below shows the overall change of employment status in both groups within the observed 6-months period.

Table 14. ***Employment status of Roma in treatment and comparison before and after BtB interventions***

	Initial Survey		**Follow Up Survey**	
	Treatment group	Comparison group	Treatment group	Comparison group
In employment	46%	70%	49%	71%
Not in employment	54%	30%	51%	29%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

4. *Transition to employment from unemployment, education and housework*

This indicator tracks all possible transitions to employment in the treatment and the comparison group with the exception of transitions from one job to another (changing jobs without staying inactive). There were 41 such transitions in total. The estimated ATT was -0.068 and didn't show any statistically significant difference between the treatment and the comparison group.

5. *Transition to education from unemployment or work in the household*

This indicator counts the persons who decided to resume their studies in formal education after they had been unemployed or busy doing housework. This indicator was not included among the targets of the BtB programme but is still very important and captures one of the key life trajectories towards improvement of personal skills and gainful employment, which an individual

may follow. A total of 48 persons experienced such a transition in a 6-months period: of them 29 were participants in BtB while 19 were members of the comparison group. The estimated ATT was strongly positive and indicated a statistically significant difference at 99% confidence interval.

A composite indicator of labour market position change reflecting both strands of improvements – short term results (related to employment) and long run opportunities (continuing education) – shows that most of young Roma have kept their initial position in both groups improvements have achieved approximately a quarter and each fifth have experienced deterioration and programme participants do not perform significantly different from the comparison group.

Table 15. ***Labour Market Position Change***

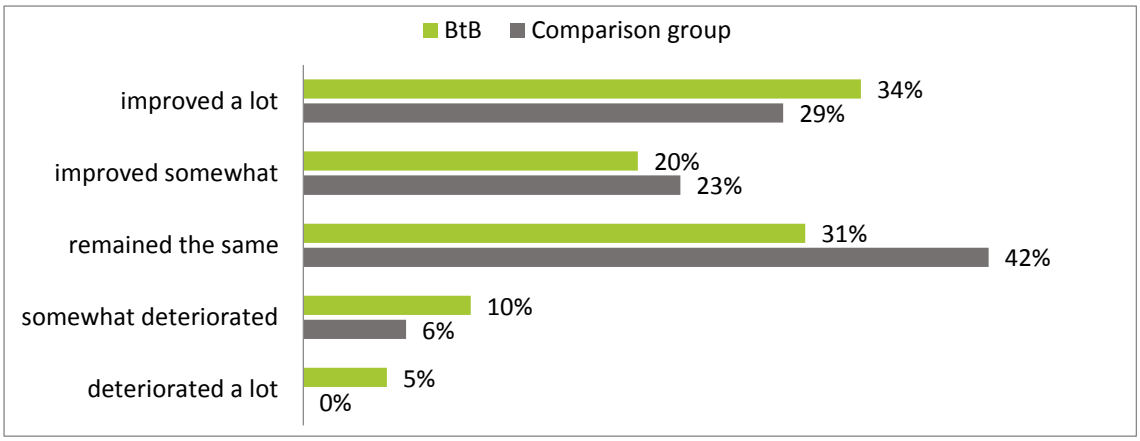
	Treatment group	Comparison group
No change	54%	58%
Improvement	26%	23%
Deterioration	20%	19%

Improved satisfaction from various conditions related to the job

Apart from looking at the income from an objective and subjective point of view we also used a series of repeated questions to evaluate satisfaction from the overall environment and relation at the workplace. We used upwards or downwards movements on the scale to assess whether our respondents from the BtB programme and the comparison group have spotted an improvement in the conditions at their workplace. Answers of both those who changed their workplace and those who stayed at the same workplace were taken into consideration. Not all respondents who had a job answered all of the questions. Respondents who did not have a job at either point of data collection separated by 6 months had their data missing as no change in perception could be calculated. Below we make an overview just of some of those indicators though we didn't find any statistically significant impact on any of them which attributable to the Bridge to Business programme.

Work environment

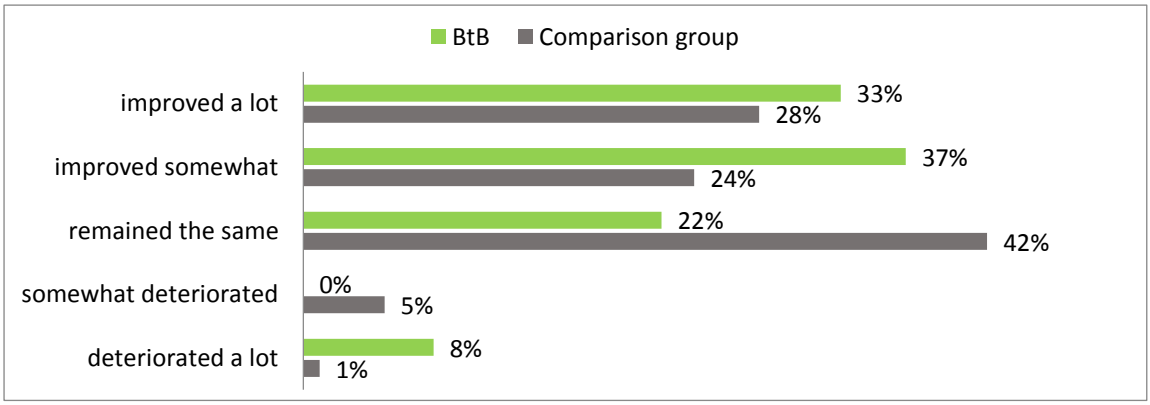
Figure 28. ***Subjective assessment of change in the work environment (NC=96, NT=59)***



Work environment displays a bit different pattern than income. Again at background of an overall improvement across the whole sample of educated young Roma, on balance there is no substantial difference between the comparison group and BtB participants. The comparison group generally displays less change both positive and negative but the balance is strikingly similar. The whole indicator does not uncover any statistically significant treatment effects.

Subjective perception of change in career opportunities

Figure 29. ***Subjective assessment of change in career opportunities (NC= 125, NT= 80)***

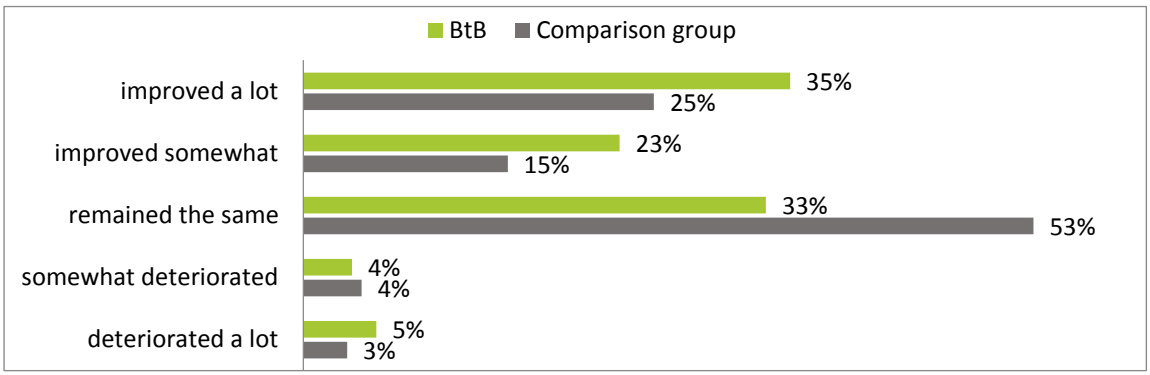


The assessment of career opportunities is similar. In this case BtB participants have a slightly better overall balance. They outperform the comparison group by almost 10 pp. on answers that constitute a slight improvement and loose a couple of points on strong positive balance and in the negative end of the scale. In summary especially after matching the two groups based on propensity scores there is no any significant treatment effect.

We will finally look at three subjective indicators where BtB has a significant positive balance compared to the comparison group, but still based on a very small sample and insufficient to prove a statistically significant positive effect. One of the indicators is not related to the labour market. It concerns the attitudes of their families towards the persons from BtB and the comparison group.

Job Security

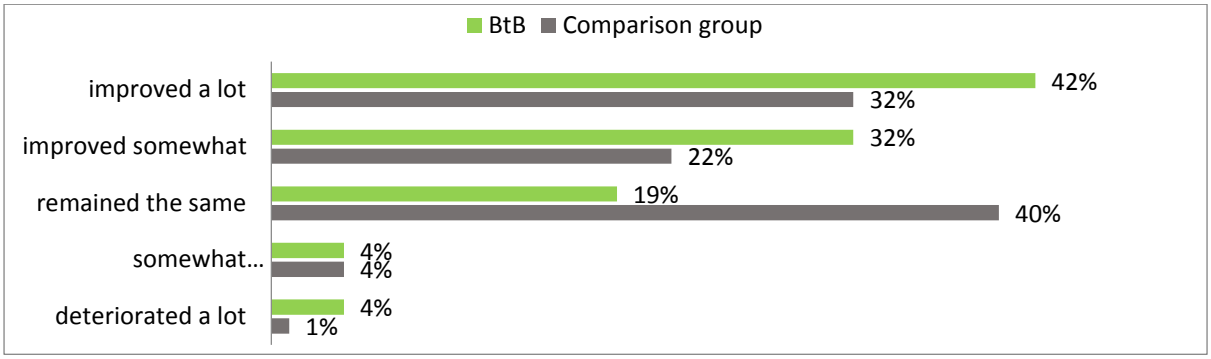
Figure 30. ***Job security (NC= 95, NT= 57)***



In subjectively perceived job security BtB participants have gained some 15 pp. more than the comparison group. We remind that this percentage is calculated from among those who

answered the question – if we take the full size of the groups the difference is reduced to 7-8 pp. The effect is partially due to the fact that more unemployed in the comparison group moved on to find jobs which do not seem particularly secure, jobs after spells of unemployment cannot be expected to generate too much trust. In contrast a much larger proportion of BtB participants chose to enroll in higher education and for them the question of job security became temporarily irrelevant. Therefore this result does not look nearly as convincing when included into a model where labour market circumstances at the outset have been taken into account.

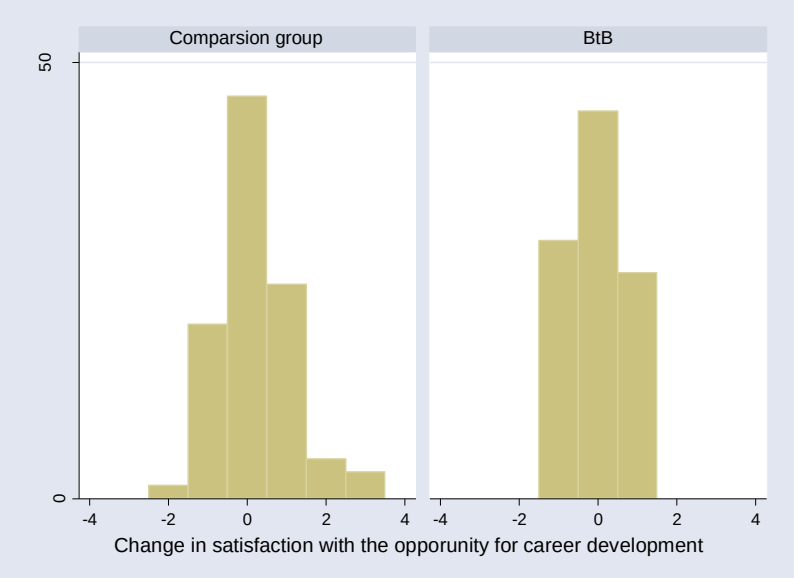
Figure 31. ***Overall satisfaction with the work (NC= 124, NT= 78)***



Career opportunity is a very important factor in choosing a job especially for young persons who have much yet to expect from their productive lives. It was therefore interesting to see to what extent were educated young Roma in general satisfied by the career opportunities they faced prior to benefiting from BtB and without participating in BtB at all.

Most of the educated young Roma who have jobs are generally satisfied with the career opportunities they have. A quarter of them are completely satisfied. However about 1/3 are not satisfied. The proportion of those holding a master degree who are not satisfied with their career prospects is very small – less than 15%. The next question was did this already high level of satisfaction improve even further for those who joined BtB compared to those who hadn't any relations with the programme.

Figure 32. ***Change in satisfaction with opportunities for career development (the points of increase/ decrease show the net change on a scale 1-4, i.e. -2 would mean a two-step drop in satisfaction and +1 would mean a one-step gain in satisfaction)***

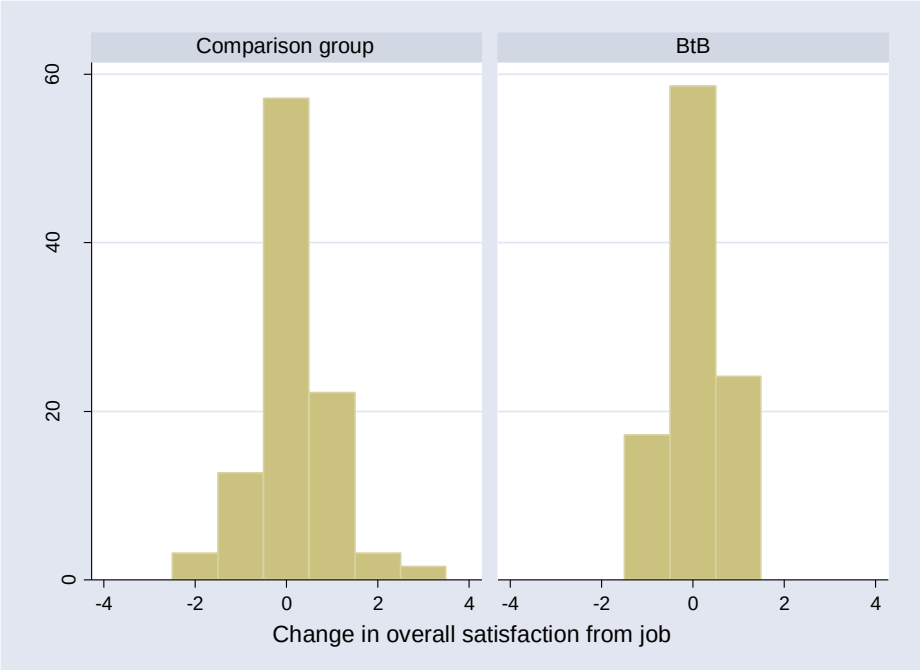


The ATT for the satisfaction with career opportunities is slightly negative (-0.314) but there is no statistically significant difference with 90% confidence, which means that participants in BtB would be equally satisfied with their jobs would they not become part of the programme.

Job Satisfaction

A summary question was asking the respondents to what extent they were satisfied by their job as a whole, i.e. taking into account all the aspects which they consider important. The vast majority of respondents from both the comparison and treatment group remained with their attitude to the job unchanged. The ATT was slightly negative (-0.049) but without a statistically significant difference at a confidence interval of 90%.

Figure 33. ***Change in overall job satisfaction (the points of increase/ decrease show the net change on a scale 1-4, i.e. -2 would mean a two-step drop in satisfaction and +1 would mean a one-step gain in satisfaction)***



BtB according to our data was unlikely to have produced any change in job satisfaction. On the balance both groups marked a slight improvement in their overall satisfaction from the job.

In summary, we found out that *Bridge to Business* had no statistically significant positive effects on any of the indicators related to the participation in the labour market, be it gain or loss of income or subjective satisfaction from different aspects of the work environment. There were also no negative effects for the participants in the training. In aggregate, when change in the income of participants in *Bridge to Business* is compared to the change of income of the comparison group, taking into account everybody's starting position in education and the labour market, their demographic characteristics and the family environment, **we found a slight negative effect from *Bridge to Business* on the income. The net negative effect is unrealized monthly income. This effect is largely due to what we consider being the major positive outcome of *Bridge to Business*.**

Finding high quality white collar jobs sometimes requires patience and previous experience with less-qualified jobs. One participant in the programme admits that she did not want to work as a

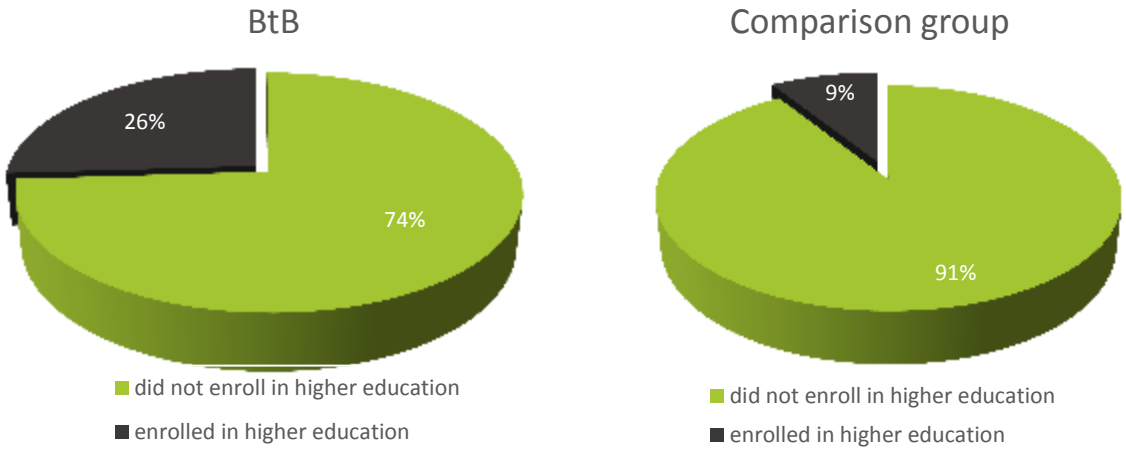
cashier at a big international chain store, but after a short internship in the company she changed her mind and understood that the lower job positions can be a useful initial step for further professional progression:

„I would do it precisely because of the possibility of career development." (feedback from a traineeship participant under BTB)

There is no guarantee that a possibility will turn into actuality. Within the relatively short scope of Bridge to Business and the even shorter period captured in detail by our data we cannot say with any certainty what will happen next with Roma employees: whether they will grow within the same company, change their employer or experience the 'sticky floor'.

The programme had a clear positive effect in an area that does not fall within its core objectives. **Participants in *Bridge to Business* were much more likely to make a transition from unemployment (with or without active job search) or housework to participation in higher education.** In other words, the unemployed and house workers were much more likely to continue their education after joining *Bridge to Business*. If they had not taken part in the programme, they would most likely have started some work. When spread over all participants in the programme the short-term (6-months) loss of earnings from this decision would total an average net amount of about 200 BGN (100 EUR) per person per month.

Figure 34. ***Transition from unemployment or work in the household to participation in higher education within a period of 6 months***



Additionally about 5 percentage points more in each group made a transition from work to enrolment in higher education. The hypothesis that *Bridge to Business* increased the probability of continuing education clearly emerges when reviewing frequency of transition from one state to another within 6 months (Figure 34). Figure 34 shows the rates for participants in Bridge to Business and the comparison group. Within Bridge to Business the rate of transition from unemployment or work in the household to formal education is almost two and a half times bigger. Even when we take into account the fact that in *Bridge to Business*, unemployed persons were twice as frequent as in the comparison group (household workers were equally frequent) the probability of transition from unemployment to learning remains much higher for those in the *Bridge to Business* (about 30 pps higher).

The result is sizeable, statistically significant, and robust in using any model for matching the participants and the comparison group, including by taking into account the differences in participation in the education system at the point of the first survey) and the entire educational

history of each of the main group and comparison group. The comparison group and participants in *Bridge to Business* do not differ also in their initial plans and anticipations for personal and career development, incl. enrolment in higher education. However the stay in the programme has significantly changed the participants plans for the future – while the aspirations to enrol in tertiary education has slightly decreased in the comparisons group, in the main group has escalated by 26 percentage points and confirmed the conclusion that the programme encouraged participants to continue their education.

Table 16. ***Aspirations to apply for a higher education institution (percent)***

	Initial Survey		Follow Up Survey	
	Treatment group	**Comparison group**	**Treatment group**	**Comparison group**
Yes	42%	72%	68%	66%
No	25%	19%	17%	21%
Don't know	16%	9%	11%	12%
No answer	16%	0%	3%	1%

Bridge to Business from the participants' point of view

No matter whether a programme or indeed any human activity has any effects in quantitative terms, participating persons tend to generate rich narratives, emotions and attachment to what they do or experience. Although such aspects of a programme are not relevant to issues of effectiveness or efficiency, they are very interesting and revealing. In this section we describe some this feedback together with a bit of quantitative information, which summarizes opinions from the participants shared in our surveys.

Out of all participants in BTB ¾ received at least one type of support. Half of participants took part in one training. The share of those attending two trainings was 16% and those participating in three trainings only 2%. The third training is a short preparatory session for the microinternships, which only took place late in the implementation of BtB). The non-attendees in training activities are just over 1/3, and every 4th participant in the programme has not received any service.

Table 17. ***Service use by participants in BtB***

	Percentage
No training or service	27
One training	47
Two training sessions	16
Three training sessions	2
Not participating in trainings	36

According to the official registers of the programme, by mid-May 2019, among 120 participants, 30 (or about ¼ of all official participants) found some job, with 25 of them in the private sector. Some of the hiring occurred after the completion of data collection so it is not reflected in the quantitative data but is not likely to change the main conclusions.

Among the services provided under the programme, short-term consultations predominate, among which 40% of the participants take the lead in writing CVs.

„I learned to make a CV of the European format and how to prepare a CV at all. Before I did not know what to look for and what expressions to use when writing a CV.“

Job interview consultations complemented by this type of support and were received by every 3rd participant.

„What was important to me in the programme was how to prepare for a job interview – for example, for a higher position: how to communicate, how to speak, what expectations and what requirements I should have.“

Particularly valuable for participants is the format of brief internships in companies. It also has the most direct effect on securing employment for participants by establishing direct contact with employers and giving them the chance to get to know each other, which is an important prerequisite for hiring them in the companies offering short-term internship opportunities.

„Everything was fine, well done. The people who welcomed us were positive and responsive, and that allowed us to behave in a more relaxed way. I saw the situation, the working environment itself, the attitude of the people working there. I wanted to be involved with IT so I went to that company and learned a lot about the core of the work there ... Now I have applied to them and things have developed positively for me.“

„I really liked the real touch with the companies, that we were accepted by the companies. It really happened. We entered the company as if we were part of the company's team, and everyone had the opportunity to show as a person what he was capable of.“

„The whole day I spent there inspired me a lot.“

The participants particularly emphasize the role of the programme for the implementation of the internship format.

„We were there with you. This also contributes to a good attitude. I cannot go there on my own and say 'I want to come in and see how the company works'. This organization you did gave us a chance.“

An important contribution has been attributed to the programme by participants with respect to building some key soft skills such as job search and communication skills, which are also highlighted by every 3rd participant.

„I am, in principle, a very closed and shy person. And during my internships I had to leave my comfort zone - to break, to open myself, to communicate abundantly. And I'm not worrying anymore when I am among more people, as it was before.“

Participants who studied in segregated schools appreciate more services offered by the programme related to basic educational deficits such as communication skills and career orientation while those who completed secondary education in desegregated schools point out the advantages provided from BtB in relation to fine-tuning of CVs and contacts with companies and non-Roma professionals.

Table 18. ***Results from Bridge to Business as reported by programme participants***

Results	Desegregated secondary school	Segregated secondary school	Total
I have better plans for my professional development	29	44	35
My communicative skills have improved	33	41	36
I learned how to write a CV well	49	32	42
I met other young professionals	36	26	32
I met representatives of firms/companies during the trainings	33	12	25

As noted by one of the participants who studied in a desegregated school and lived in a settlement where the Roma were not much different in socio-economic terms from the rest of the population:

„Being a Roma you tend to think "The important guys, they do not know me". The goal is not to know only the ghetto. The goal is to know all people in town. You never know who can help you when the time comes. You need to try knowing as many people as you can."

Among the perceived effects of the programme, young Roma also highlight the space it has created to explore and promote the expansion of the community of young well educated Roma – 39% of the beneficiaries underlined this benefit from the BTB.

„First of all, I was impressed by the trainees – the rest of the programme participants I met. I was impressed by some of them and I saw even greater potential in our ethnic group."

According to 42% of participants the BTB contributed to overcoming low self-esteem and limited confidence and self-esteem of young well-qualified Roma:

„Self-confidence is lacking in many young Roma. They know how to speak but do not believe in themselves, most of the time they are very worried. They need someone to ignite them: to take them by hand and tell them "Go ahead, you can do it".

„Many of our people seem embarrassed and feel uncomfortable when applying or even when they are already at work. You are not sure about yourself, what you do, you are uncertain if you are good... While a person who is a specialist knows what he is doing, he sees people appreciating it, he feels calmer."

„I have motivation – I even applied for a job in a company. Most importantly, the programme taught me how to unleash my potential – where and how to exercise my choice."

Building self-confidence is one of the two main outcomes of the programme that are shared by the majority of participants.

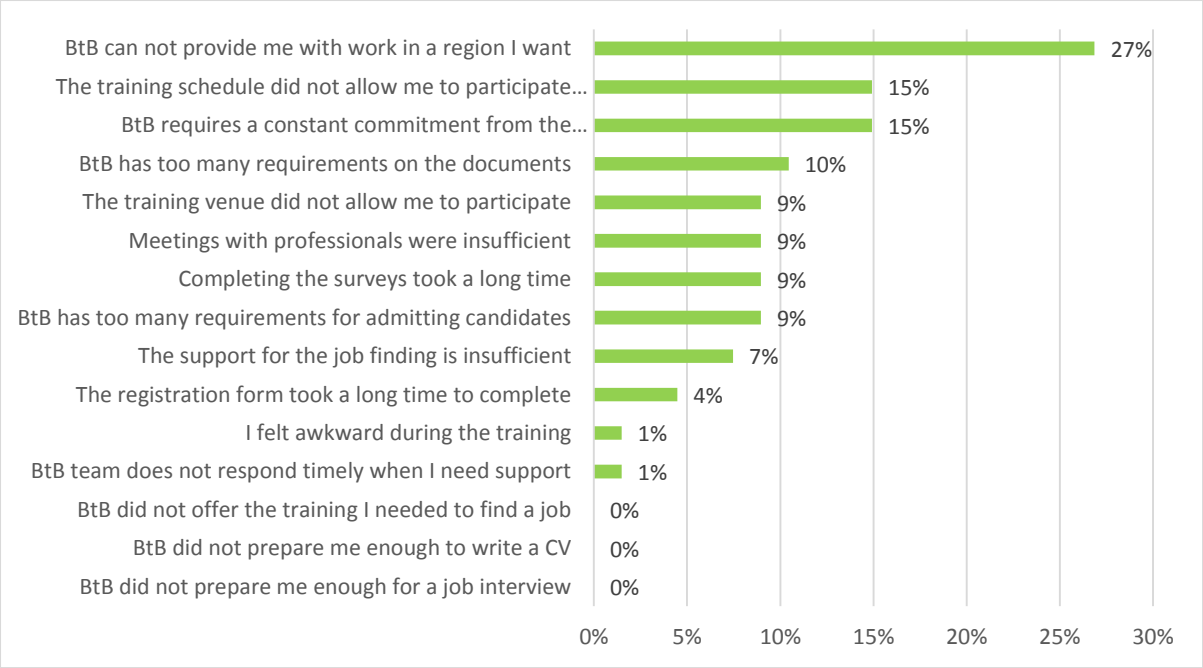
The young persons, who, as beneficiaries of the programme, have gone through all its stages – from applying to finding specific support – were usually not able or willing to spot weaknesses or recommend improvements. Among the few additional services they consider relevant are measures that would require a serious reformulation of the model and prerequisites of the programme – such as conducting longer courses for basic IT and foreign language trainings.

„Programmes like Bridge to Business would be helpful in providing support to young people to learn English and form more soft skills.“

„The work you are dealing with and how you are trying to motivate us. The whole organization and all this desire to integrate us, to introduce us to other companies, even to recommend us really impressed me and touched me ...“

In the field questionnaires some BtB participants however noted some features of Bridge to Business that limited their ability to make use of the services offered.

Figure 35. ***BtB problems as perceived by participants (N=67)***



The only important limitation of BtB mentioned by a quarter of respondents was the failure to offer a suitable job for them in the region they preferred. Some of the participants in BtB indeed declined job offers because they couldn't or were unwilling to move and the supply of jobs outside Sofia as noted also by the programme implementation team was quite limited.

Conclusions and the way ahead

Probably, in some way, the *Bridge to Business* programme has shown to some of the participants who were not prepared to join the high segments of the labour market where the programme had the ambition to position them, that it is not a bad idea to further build some of their more fundamental skills. This that can only be done by returning within the education system. In Bulgaria, the recruitment of participants eligible for *Bridge to Business* was harder than in Hungary, and this had required some compromise with the selection criteria. As a result, there was an inflow of participants in *Bridge to Business* who could not fully benefit from the services of the programme. This problem paradoxically may have led to an increased reorientation of young persons to education. This unexpected result of the programme is highly positive, although it does not correspond to the programme's original intentions and even may be considered to contradict some of them. In the short term, participation in education reduces the potential for generating income - most of unemployed participants in *Bridge to Business* who chose to enroll in tertiary education did not try to combine education with work. In the longer term, it is not unlikely that this investment will be paid off if we consider general data about the Bulgarian labour market.

The experience from Bridge to Business could serve well a programme for promoting participation in higher education – one which Bulgaria needs both for meeting its own education targets and for making higher education more accessible to underrepresented groups. Meetings with representatives of companies that have many jobs requiring high quality education or the intensive use of high-edge knowledge and skills may obviously have an inspirational effect on learning. This can be combined with short-term trainings focusing on the acquiring of important skills. Institutions of tertiary education wishing to attract more students could organize, either alone or in partnership with appropriate business representatives, short-term trainings for upper secondary school students, young people with secondary education and a bachelor's degree. *Bridge to Business* seems to indicate that such trainings can potentially have a more stimulating effect than campaigns specifically aimed at attracting students.

It is also possible, based on the experience from *Bridge to Business*, to develop programmes designed primarily for Roma with higher education or Roma university students. The rising (albeit slowly) number of Roma students and Roma university graduates suggests that the range of potential beneficiaries of a modification of the *Bridge to Business* programme with a focus on graduates from and students in tertiary education could rely on a large enough pool of participants. According to the Roma Education Fund, only the number of students receiving scholarships from their programme from 2000 to 2018 had reached 1 602. Roma higher education graduates are considerably more, as there are persons supported by other programmes and institutions, and many Roma students who didn't apply for scholarships. Such a programme can maintain the objectives of helping Roma to find high-quality jobs and put a special emphasis on combining learning and work - career planning along with planning for the development of additional skills, including more fundamental skills. The programme may also be applicable to young people from other vulnerable groups or even universally applicable. Stimulating lifelong learning is a major deficit of the Bulgarian education system and a challenge to the economy.

A lot of educated young Roma do express explicit preference for working in the public sector. Among them there is a strong interest to professions related to education and care. Participation

of well-educated Roma professionals in the public sector (teachers, health and education experts, social workers, etc.) would need little encouragement (motivation is there). If secondary education becomes more inclusive and produces more graduates with the appropriate level of skills to pass their matriculation examinations, this would almost certainly guarantee a larger supply to professions in the public sector experiencing shortages.

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