EXPLORING THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN THE CASE OF ROMA STUDENTS IN ROMANIA

Explorarea procesului de dezvoltare a carierei în cazul studenţilor romi din România

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EXPLORING THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN THE CASE OF ROMA STUDENTS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

This study used semi-structured interviews to explore the career development process and influencing factors among eight Roma students. Following the analysis, eight areas emerged: 1) criteria for choosing a career option, 2) role models, 3) proactive personality, 4) support, 5) barriers, 6) work values, 7) critical consciousness, and 8) relevance of career guidance. The results show that the family is an essential source of moral support, role models, and persuasion in choosing certain educational and career options. Participants made decisions based on interests in certain areas and had work values predominantly related to prestige and appropriate financial rewards for their needs. All participants received support through positive measures and demonstrated a proactive personality in capitalizing on the support they received and overcoming the barriers they encountered, the most common being financial constraints. All students have a clear picture of how their ethnicity is

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perceived in society and the labor market and some of them are actively involved in improving the socio-economic context of young Roma.

Rezumat

Acest studiu s-a bazat pe interviuri semi-structurate pentru a explora procesul de dezvoltare a carierei şi factorii de influenţă în rândul a opt studenţi romi. În urma analizei, au fost sintetizate opt domenii: 1) criterii de alegere a unei opţiuni de carieră, 2) modele de rol, 3) personalitate proactivă, 4) sprijin, 5) bariere, 6) valori în muncă, 7) conştiinţă critică, 8) relevanţa îndrumării în carieră. Rezultatele arată că familia este o sursă esenţială de sprijin moral, modele de rol şi persuasiune în alegerea anumitor opţiuni educaţionale şi de carieră. Participanţii au luat decizii în special pe baza intereselor pe care le aveau în legătură cu anumite domenii şi au valori de muncă legate predominant de prestigiu şi recompense financiare adecvate nevoilor lor. Toţi participanţii au primit sprijin prin măsuri pozitive şi au demonstrat o personalitate proactivă în valorificarea formelor de sprijin primite şi depăşirea barierelor pe care le-au întâlnit, cele mai frecvente fiind legate de constrângerile financiare. Toţi studenţii participanţi au o imagine clară a modului în care etnia lor este percepută în societate şi pe piaţa muncii şi unii dintre ei sunt implicaţi activ în îmbunătăţirea contextului socio-economic al tinerilor romi.

1. Introduction

The Roma population represents the largest ethnic minority in Europe but is also one of the most marginalized (European Commission, 2011). Fairly extensive research efforts have been dedicated to analyzing the problems of access to education among the Roma, but not as much in career research, which could have better captured the cultural particularities in terms of transition to work.

To better understand how the issue of access to decent work can be addressed, the career literature must begin to focus more on the perspective of the Roma community on the link between education and decent work. Qualitative research has been used before to analyze the transition from education to work among minorities, and we consider it extremely useful in this case. This study will focus on Roma students as representatives of the new generation of professionals. Qualitative research will allow a better understanding of how Roma students were able to gather information about their careers and succeed despite the problems of marginalization.

1.1.   The context of the Roma population in the European Union

There are only estimates of the Roma population, the most recent data being those of 2012, aggregated by the Council of Europe, with an average of about 11.2 million. The lack of a coherent and effective data collection system in the case of the Roma population is acute and affects the understanding of the problems they face.

However, the efforts of European agencies, NGOs, and academia that have tried to compensate for the incoherent vision are noteworthy. The Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey, conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2016 among Central and Eastern Countries, reveals that 80% of Roma live below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold of their countries and half of them feel discriminated because of their ethnicity. The situation in the field of education and access to the labor market remained extremely unfavorable compared to non-Roma peers, especially for women. The report published by FRA in

2020 shows that the situation is more difficult for Roma and Travellers from Eastern European Countries.

The European institutions are aware of the problem and have tried to act, the most obvious efforts being the National Roma Integration Strategies (European Commission, 2011). However, although the evaluation of these strategies shows progress in areas such as education, the goals of reducing discrimination and exclusion are far from being achieved (European Commission, 2018).

Rostas (2019), in his analysis of the reasons why Roma policies fail, argued that, together with a history of abuse, discrimination, and poverty leading to the current situation, the lack of Roma political influence and involvement in formulating relevant policies for them in the present can be considered root causes for the failure of such policies. Therefore, he observes a low relevance of public policies, as they do not consider the diversity of Roma groups and their problems, instead involving them formally in discussions without thoroughly researching the situations they face.

1.2.   Access to education and decent work

In Romania and Eastern Europe, we find extensive research in the field of Roma education, primarily supported by NGOs and international donors. Surdu, Vincze & Wamsiedel (2011) and Bhabha et al. (2017) observe similar problems regarding the situation of Roma students, the first study being carried out in Romania and the second study in Serbia: students and their families value education and consider it fundamental for a better life, but poverty, segregation and the biases of teachers and society make them lose their confidence that they could pursue higher education.

A qualitative study conducted by Beremenyi (2020) provides important insights into the decision-making process and access to career counselling among the Roma population in Hungary. Close family members, especially parents, have a crucial role in choices related to elementary school. At the same time, for post-elementary, disadvantaged youth may be constricted by their socio-economic situation to limit their aspirations: choosing geographically

closer secondary schools, "realistic choice" options, which are more accessible for students with low school performance (e.g., VET instead of academic), less competitive professional sectors. Roma students have a limited overview regarding their career options, immature career development skills, and can be easily influenced by cultural beliefs. Beyond compulsory school age, family influence is replaced by informal influence through peers and labor market-related experiences. Career counsellors do not consider all aspects of guidance, are not well-trained, and even if they are well-intentioned, they are biased, insisting on a particular academic/labor track without previous thorough analysis.

Kende (2007) studied the educational and career path of young Roma, who reached college in Hungary, succeeding in overcoming social exclusion. The study showed that young Roma graduates choose between rejecting their ethnicity and being assimilated into the majority versus becoming activists, part of the Roma elite. Three major patterns emerged in the study: young people who were supported by family, although they did not have higher education; older students who were first-generation students and who suffered the shock of differentiating themselves from their families, who did not support them because they were not exposed to the benefits of higher education; respectively young people who were the second generation of intellectuals and followed the examples of their families. During their education, Roma students were especially influenced by their families, who were a source of role models and support, but also by other close people, such as teachers and members of NGOs. Unfortunately, the school had mixed effects on them, with cases of segregation and racism leaving their mark on self-confidence. The families attached to the Roma communities had the most difficulty supporting their children to go to college. The respondents showed agency in overcoming social exclusion, but to different degrees, they decided to assert their Roma identity, which shows interesting patterns of critical consciousness.

In Romania, access to career counselling is included in the Law no. 1/2011 on Education, but a counsellor is assigned to at least 500 students, as amended in 2020, without covering all schools (Dorin, n.d.; UNICEF Romania, 2021). This number is much too high to address the challenges of Roma students, especially since the counsellors are not specifically trained in the field of diversity and social justice.

1.3.   Theoretical frameworks

In the career counselling literature, two theories have more specifically addressed the influence of class, gender, ethnicity, and race variables, namely Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and Psychology of Work Theory (PWT). SCCT is a theory focused on learning but acknowledges the limits of freedom of choice. In SCCT (Lent & Brown, 2013; Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994), opportunity structure factors are categorized into two sub-groups: distal variables, including person inputs (gender, race/ethnicity, and other personal characteristics) and background contextual affordances, which include aspects such as opportunities for skill development and role-models that shape cognition and interests, as well as proximal factors, including emotional and financial support, job availability and socio-structural barriers. The theory mentions input variables as having an indirect effect on self-efficacy and outcome expectations through cultural socialization experiences that provide the information needed for their development. The literature supports the influence of race/ethnicity on career variables, but the theory needs to be tested on more diverse samples (Flores, Navarro & Ali, 2017). Results can be different across ethnic groups, such as the mixed findings regarding the effect of ethnic identity on career decisions (Gushue, 2006; Gushue & Whitson, 2006; Gushue et al., 2006).

The theory that is the most focused on the elements of career development among marginalized groups is the Psychology of Work Theory (PWT) (Duffy et al., 2016). This theory shifts the focus to sociocultural factors as primary in understanding all people's career decisions and work experiences, particularly in the case of disadvantaged categories. In PWT, decent work is the central concept, aiming at fulfilling needs related to survival, social connection, and self-determination, with work fulfilment and well-being as outcomes of needs satisfaction. Predictors of securing decent work are Economic Constraints and Marginalization, which, according to FRA reports, are common among Roma people, while a series of variables mediate (Work Volition and Career Adaptability) and moderate (Proactive Personality, Critical Consciousness, Social Support and Economic Conditions) the relations between predictor variables and decent work. Based on Intersectionality theory (Cole, 2009), PWT helps to better understand the variables that influence marginalized people based on ethnicity in trying to get a decent

job. Thus, we consider exploring the effects of the variables that can moderate or mediate the effect of ethnicity as topics that can be included in our interview guide.

Qualitative analysis has been used in several career development studies that have focused on the particularities of minorities, especially Consensual Qualitative Research (Hill, Thompson & Williams, 1997). Such studies have been conducted primarily among US minorities (Fouad et al., 2008; Pearson & Bieschke, 2001). It has also been used to study relational influences on career development (Schultheiss et al., 2001, 2002). Fouad et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of studying the particularities of minorities without starting from comparisons with the majority but based on how study participants build their career meaning, without excluding the application of the lens of theories such as SCCT (Pearson & Bieschke, 2001). These studies have revealed the influence of cultural factors and relations with others on various aspects of the career and how personal factors helped to meet the challenges.

Using this approach and a combination of SCCT and PWT as theoretical frameworks, we aim to answer the following research questions:
1. How are Roma students taking career-related decisions?
2. How do personal and social factors shape their career?

2. Method

2.1.   Participants and procedure

This study involved 8 Roma students (6 women and 2 men) aged between 19 and 23 years old. 7 students are undergraduates, most of them in the last year, and one is a master's student. 4 of them study Social Assistance, and the others study Sociology, Finance-Banking, Political Sciences and Education Sciences. 6 participants are first-generation students, and 5 out of 8 are currently employed. The participants were recruited by one of the authors of the present study, a Roma researcher, based on her contacts through the NGO where she works. Participants received an email with the interview guide and informed consent to ensure transparency in the process.

2.2. Interview protocol

After obtaining the approval from Commission of Ethics of the University of Bucharest (93/08.12.2021), we created a semi-structured interview protocol based on the literature review for this study. The questions were constructed in relation to the two theories used as lenses for the study: SCCT (Lent & Brown, 2013; Lent et al., 1994) and PWT (Duffy et al., 2016). The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. The questions covered aspects such as: how students made choices related to education and career, role models that inspired them, sources of support and barriers, expectations about the ideal job, and how they perceive the opportunities of young Roma in the labor market, respectively how they perceive the role of career counselling.

2.3. Analysis

The analysis was performed in the following way: the transcripts created following the interviews were divided into an initial set of domains based on the questions from the interview protocol and literature review (choosing an educational or career option, role models, support, barriers, and asserting their Roma identity). Subsequently, the transcripts were analyzed in detail and used to create categories and sub-categories included in the initial domains. These have been revised according to their frequency and led to the merging or separating codes up to the final version included in the article. The research team consisted of a doctoral non-Roma student who conducted the interviews and analysis and a Roma activist researcher who verified the level of cultural appropriateness of the study and gathered the participants.

3. Results

The analysis of the information resulting from the interviews with the 8 participants led to the creation of 8 domains related to their careers in relation to the research questions. These codes are: 1) criteria for choosing a career option, 2) role models, 3) proactive personality, 4) support, 5) barriers, 6) work values, 7) critical consciousness, and 8) relevance of career guidance. For

almost every domain, categories were formulated, and for broader categories, sub-categories were also created. These categories partially correspond to the concepts in SCCT and PWT, depending on how they emerged from the participants' answers to the questions. We did not include sub-categories of 1-2 respondents, but we did mention them if they were relevant.

Table no. 1*. List of domains, categories, sub-categories, and the number of cases in which they appear*

Domain	Category	Sub-category	N
1. Criteria for choosing a career option	1.1 Social persuasion		6
		1.1.1 From family	4
		1.1.2 From friends	4
	1.2 Interests		7
	1.3 Accessibility of options		4
	1.4 Relevance to the labor market		3
	1.5 Need for a change of plans		7
2. Role models	2.1 Sources of role models		6
		2.1.1 Family	4
	2.2. Characteristics		6
		2.2.1 Success	4
		2.2.2 Overcoming barriers	3
		2.2.3 Competence and virtues	6
3. Personality	3.1 Proactive personality		7
4. Support	4.1 Moral and emotional		8
		4.1.1 From family	8
		4.1.2 From friends	4
		4.1.3 From NGOs	3
	4.2 Financial and institutional		8
		4.2.1 Scholarships	3
		4.2.2 Positive measures	8
5. Barriers	5.1 Discrimination		4
	5.2 Family expectations		4
	5.3 Financial constraints		6
	5.4 Health issues		3

Domain	Category	Sub-category	N
6. Work values	6.1 Prestige		7
	6.2 Financial reward		7
	6.3 Helping others		4
	6.4 Job security		3
	6.5 Opportunities for development		5
	6.6 Relationship with colleagues		4
	6.7 Independence		4
7. Critical consciousness	7.1 Asserting their ethnicity		8
	7.2 Critical reflection		8
	7.3 Critical action		6
8. Role of career guidance	8.1 Perceived relevance of career guidance		8
		8.1.1 Exploring new options	4
		8.1.2 Providing support	5

We will present further the conclusions for each domain and will summarize the answers to research questions in the discussions section.

3.1.   Criteria for choosing a career option

The domain refers to criteria used by the participants to make the most critical decisions in a career-related context: choosing a high school and college with the related specializations, respectively choosing an internship, a job, or volunteering opportunities. This domain summarizes the participants' answers to questions related to the way they chose a certain educational and professional path. The most important criterion for decision-making, found in seven out of eight cases, was their interest in certain areas. Specifically, they chose specializations and jobs based on preferences for certain fields, both well-defined and even transformed into passions, or by excluding some fields that they deeply disliked. The following criterion was the persuasion of others to choose a certain option, mentioned in six out of eight cases. The primary sources of persuasion were family and friends (either peers or family friends). Persuasion had stronger effects when they were young, especially when they had to choose a high school. The next important decision-making aspect mentioned by the four participants is the

accessibility of options. Accessibility refers, in most cases, to the school performance they had, which restricted their access to certain specializations, being forced to choose other options where their scores allowed them to be admitted. In one case, accessibility was related to the choice of a faculty in Romania, instead of one in another country that would have had fees impossible to cover. The relevance of options for the labor market has been a specific issue considered in decision-making by three participants, especially by young people who value job stability. One of the participants chose the specialization in high school based on the mix of her interest in the field of pedagogy and the possibility of having a diploma that would allow her to get a job immediately after high school.

We also noticed adaptability in the decision-making process when the initial plans did not work. Seven out of eight participants changed at least one of their educational choices: they moved from one high school to another, from one specialization to another, changed faculty after a year of study, or dropped out of the admissions process after an initial option that was not accessible. In most cases, the participants transferred because they had a wrong image of the chosen field and realized they were not performing as well as they would have liked. Thus, they managed to outline more realistic options and follow specializations that better suited them. In one case, a participant had to transfer because she was the victim of discrimination but the support she received from her family helped her to move to a school where she was respected and was able to perform well.

3.2.   Role models

Role models are those who have influenced or even inspired participants in their career choices. Although only one person explicitly mentioned that their role model was the one that determined the choice of a particular career option, six participants said that they had people who influenced them in their career when explicitly asked about this. These six participants talked about the role that these people had and the characteristics that inspired them and what they wanted to develop too. Four participants identified role models in their families, either their parents or their cousins, two participants saw role models in teachers or trainers, and two identified as role models

celebrities or popular people they met at events. Two participants did not identify anyone who influenced them, one of them mentioning that they are first-generation students. All participants who identified role models for their careers admired the competencies and virtues that these individuals – which are valued by the Roma community – had, such as being scholarly. In four cases, the success of the role models inspires the participants to follow in their footsteps, and three participants admire those who succeeded against the odds. Two participants recounted how, despite financial difficulties and discrimination, their cousins got highly prestigious jobs, and how inspired they are to follow their example and build a successful career.

3.3. Proactive personality

This domain focuses on proactive personality as a trait that helps participants succeed in changing their environment, despite the challenges they have to face, a trait that acts as a moderator in the Psychology of Working Theory (Duffy et al., 2016). It is important to note that no specific question was asked about their personality. Instead, seven out of eight participants mention about themselves, on their own initiative, those traits that they perceive as important in their career development, especially in defining and pursuing their career goals, traits that fall under the domain of proactive personality. They either explicitly state how ambition is what defines them in their career because they want to overcome their condition or describe how they are willing to put in as much effort as possible to achieve their goals and seek the resources they need. One participant mentions that this attitude was inspired by their role models. This proactive personality is also seen as necessary to capitalize on available support.

3.4. Support

All eight study participants received moral and emotional support (encouragement, reassurance, guidance, etc.) and financial or institutional support (positive measures, scholarships, money explicitly offered to pursue a career goal). In the case of moral and emotional support, all participants mention family as the main source. Even though they did not always agree

on the options chosen by the students, their parents encouraged them. Parents supported them even in cases where they did not have higher education. In four cases, their peers or close family friends provided moral and emotional support, and NGOs provided encouragement or mentoring.

In the case of financial and institutional support, all participants mentioned the most important source of support was the positive measure of having places specially dedicated to Roma students. They all benefited from it in at least one cycle of studies and considered that it helped them a lot, even if, in some cases, they could get that place without a special allocation, because they had good grades. The main benefit of positive measures in college is that it gives them stability, they are not afraid that they will have to pay taxes, and they also feel inspired to have a better performance. The view shared by the participants is that these positive measures help disadvantaged students to have access to better opportunities. In addition to the positive measures, three beneficiaries also received financial support in scholarships from NGOs that support Roma youth. Two mentioned that their parents provided them with the money they needed to pursue their dreams. The participants who received scholarships consider that these helped them overcome financial barriers.

3.5.   Barriers

This domain refers to obstacles systematically encountered by participants, which have hindered or even blocked their path to a particular educational or career goal. The strongest barrier encountered in six out of eight participants is financial constraints. For this reason, most of them needed scholarships and jobs to cover their expenses. Participants who have not experienced discrimination considered these financial barriers the strongest influence on their careers. However, four out of eight participants encountered numerous situations in which they were discriminated against. Discrimination ranged from occasional insinuations to systematically differentiated treatment, in which participants received lower grades in school and were insulted. The consequence was that they had to move to institutions that no longer allowed such behavior. As students in the social sciences field, most of the participants felt that their colleagues and teachers, by studying the

phenomenon of discrimination and working with marginalized groups, have a better understanding and avoid this type of behavior. Another barrier was related to the different expectations of the family, which did not allow the students to do certain activities, for example, volunteering, or they didn't encourage the students to make certain choices, because of the negative reputation of those educational institutions. However, most students chose to go their way and ignore their parents' opinions. A barrier encountered by three participants was related to health problems. Although none of them suffers from chronic diseases, they have various problems that prevent them from pursuing careers that require excellent physical conditions, such as military or acting. The pandemic affected two participants, blocking their access to relevant traineeships, which would have helped them figure out if the studied field was right for them.

3.6.   Work values

Under this domain, we have included the attitudes that the participants have towards work and the expectations from an ideal job. The most common value was the prestige of the job, found in seven out of eight participants, and included the desire to have jobs in which they are respected, have a high status in the community and society, and even leadership positions (in the case of three out of the seven participants). There is a tendency to value office work, being perceived as a good job where you interact with competent people and have an adequate salary. The financial reward is also important, but mainly to cover the needs and not as a fundamental goal to accumulate wealth. Four out of eight participants are also focused on helping others overcome their barriers and to give something back to the community. Another more common value for five participants is to have opportunities to grow. They want contexts and challenges to learn and become more successful. Independence is also important, being mentioned by four participants. They are either already committed to financial independence or want a job that meets their needs without being dependent on anyone else, without excluding, in the case of a female participant, the possibility of respecting the traditional role in which the male earns more. The quality of interaction with colleagues and managers is seen as important by four participants interested in jobs in which they can interact with many people with whom they have a positive

relationship, based on respect and good understanding. Last but not least, three participants mention job stability as important because they want to have a steady income and predictability, especially in a volatile labor market.

3.7.   Critical consciousness

In the Psychology of Working Framework, we find Critical Consciousness as a variable with a moderating role and defined based on the literature as being "comprised of critical reflection (a critical analysis of social and structural contributions to societal inequities), political efficacy (the perceived capacity to effect social and political change), and critical action (individual or collective action to change perceived inequalities) components" (Freire, 1993; Watts et al., 2011, as cited in Duffy et al., 2016, p. 137). We chose to focus on critical consciousness because Roma people are often victims of discrimination, and it is relevant to see how their careers are influenced. First, all participants assert their Roma identity. Everyone did this in college, but some participants were reluctant to do it in high school, fearing a negative differential treatment. After getting used to their colleagues, they asserted their identity. From the perspective of integration, the identity of some young Roma may lie in the conflict between the two worlds if they are "whiter" or have a non-Roma parent. Still, knowledge of their history helps them better reconcile with their own identity. All eight participants have a clear picture of how their ethnicity is seen in society but consider those virtues that make someone "human" more important than ethnicity. Six out of eight participants are actively trying to improve the situation of their ethnic group: they talk about Roma history, try to change the image of Roma in society, volunteer, and even act as role models and mentors for other young Roma, feeling they have "a moral duty" because the community helped them.

3.8.   Relevance of career guidance

Although only two of the participants received career information just in the form of a visit from students who presented their college options, all participants considered that career counselling was relevant to the careers of Roma youth. The most important thing that counselling should include is

to give Roma youth support through encouragement and guidance to understand what options they want and what path they need to take. Four participants also mentioned the need to broaden the horizons of young Roma, show them various career options to choose from, and even help them with visits to various workplaces. Two participants also mentioned the need to improve the self-esteem of Roma youth and help them "dream" of a better future.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to analyze the decision-making process related to the career of Roma students and the factors that influenced this process. We took this approach based on two lenses of analysis, through a theory that better explains decision making, namely Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent & Brown, 2013; Lent et al., 1994), respectively a theory that better explains how social and personal factors influence access to decent work, namely Psychology of Working Theory (Duffy et al., 2016). The study results provide information coherent with these theories but nuanced and enriched with the perspective of the eight Roma students included in the study.

The first research question, related to how Roma students made decisions, was covered by two domains: the criteria for choosing a career option and the influence of role models as an important source of information in this regard. The criteria for choosing a career option presents the main issues that students consider when making career and education decisions. The strongest source of information was their interest in a field, derived from the perceived competence or pleasure of studying a certain subject. The following criteria are social persuasion, accessibility of options, and relevance to the labor market, highlighting the importance of social expectations and resources. Similar to the findings of Bereményi (2020, 2022), the participants in our study take the accessibility of options into account (close to home, with the possibility of quick employment), but also aim for prestigious schools (most of them graduating theoretical high schools). However, seven out of eight students changed their options, realizing that the initial choices did not suit them, and had to adapt to new options. Although only one student explicitly mentioned his role model as a source of information for his career, six out of eight students considered they had role models. Their families are the main

sources of role models, through parents or cousins. Six students admired the role models' competencies and virtues, which they wanted to learn, four participants were inspired by their success, and three were inspired by how they overcame barriers.

The answer to the second research question, related to factors influencing the career development process, is developed around two categories of factors, consistent with the two theories covered by the study. These categories are personal factors, such as proactive personality, work values, and critical consciousness, respectively social factors, such as support, barriers, and the relevance of career guidance. Although no specific questions related to personality were asked, seven out of eight participants mentioned traits and behaviors that were assimilated to proactive personality. In terms of work values, prestige and financial reward predominate. They want to be respected, to have prestigious professions (three of them targeting leadership positions), and an income that covers their needs without focusing on wealth. Also, five of them want jobs where they can learn and develop professionally, four want independence, and three are very interested in job stability. The social component is also very important, four out of eight participants want to help society and to have a very good working relationship. Another important factor is critical consciousness, a component integrated into the Psychology of Working Theory and relevant to minorities. All eight participants asserted their Roma identity, even though they had moments when they were afraid to do so for fear of repercussions. They all had the same approach, unlike the participants in the study conducted by Kende in 2007, where not everyone asserted their ethnicity. All participants share a detailed view of their ethnicity and understand systemic barriers. Still, those who have been discriminated against perceive the influence of ethnicity on access to education and quality jobs as being a stronger barrier. Six of them are actively involved in changing the perception of their ethnicity.

Several social factors have positively or negatively influenced the lives of young Roma. The family was the main source of moral support for all participants, similar to the results of the studies conducted by Kende (2007) and Beremenyi (2020, 2022) and other minorities analyzed in career studies. Positive measures helped all participants study in prestigious institutions and gave them a sense of stability. However, most of them performed well anyway.

Some of them also received scholarships and mentoring from NGOs and consider that they were very useful. Many of these types of support mitigated the most common barrier in participants' careers, namely the financial constraints. Four of them also faced discrimination and needed additional moral support to overcome their situations, and four faced small conflicts with their families because of the different expectations. For some participants, the health problems and the pandemic caused by SARS-Covid influenced their access to the study or work options they wanted, forcing them to look for other options or to wait longer for new opportunities.

Although it is not a concept included in the theories covered by this study, we asked the participants about their expectations for career counselling, in order to better understand what their needs are. Participants considered that the most important needs are the support given to young people to make choices and create career plans, respectively, to explore new options. This is consistent with the conclusions of Beremenyi (2020, 2022), who emphasizes the limited horizon of career options that a young Roma has. The need to support the increase of self-esteem among young Roma has been mentioned as a way to fight against the labels and to reach their potential.

4.1.   Implication for practice

This study has implications both in terms of counselling practice and in terms of public policies dedicated to young Roma. Interviews revealed the need for career counsellors to help Roma students know their potential and fight the preconceptions that affect their self-esteem. Career counsellors must have a good understanding of the Roma ethnicity and can use group coaching to help them achieve social justice (Meldrum, 2021). It would also be useful for some communities to have access to Roma career counsellors. Counsellors should help young Roma explore new career options beyond the traditional or popular ones in their community and help them identify solutions to achieve their goals. At the level of public policy, it is essential to enhance the access of Roma youth to institutional and financial support to repair the historical disadvantage they have because of slavery and social exclusion. All participants in the study received such support and became students and employees who demonstrated their competence. Career counsellors need

to understand the factors influencing Roma students' careers and be actively involved in creating policies and interventions that provide them with support for access to decent work.

4.2.   Limitations and implications for future research

Our study allowed in-depth analysis of the career development of some Roma students, both as an overview of how to make decisions and the factors that influence them. The study provides relevant information that contributes to the nuancing of career theories focused on the social component from the perspective of a significant minority in Europe, a topic very little studied in career development.

The study includes both First-Generation Students and Second-Generation Students, respectively, working students and students without working experience. However, the sample is not very diverse from the perspective of gender and educational specializations, being composed mainly of female participants and students in humanities. Furthermore, the students were not randomly selected but through the help of an NGO.

Future studies can better mitigate these limitations using Consensual Qualitative Research, using randomized sampling if feasible, and compiling a more diverse sample of gender and specializations that can more accurately reflect the perspective of Roma students.

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