

Summary of Hilton project final evaluation

1. Project name

Improving access for Roma communities to employment opportunities in the hospitality industry (REP22-Hilton)

2. Duration

1 January 2023 – 31 August 2024

3. Countries

Hungary and Serbia.

4. Targeted groups

Roma communities (mainly youth) in Hungary and Serbia.

5. Who funded this project

The project was founded by Hilton Global Foundation and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. Additionally, the Hilton Hotel in Budapest provided a trainer for a round of training sessions, internship opportunities for some participants, and a venue to host the trainings.

6. Who were our partners

See <https://minorityrights.org/programmes/improving-access-for-roma-communities-to-employment-opportunities-in-the-hospitality-industry/>

7. What this project was about

See <https://minorityrights.org/programmes/improving-access-for-roma-communities-to-employment-opportunities-in-the-hospitality-industry/>

8. Why we delivered this project

See <https://minorityrights.org/programmes/improving-access-for-roma-communities-to-employment-opportunities-in-the-hospitality-industry/>

9. What we achieved

The project's primary goal was to address discrimination against Roma communities in the job market by empowering community members, particularly youth, to pursue careers in the hospitality industry. To achieve this, the project offered information sessions to raise awareness about the project among the communities, provided training to help participants better understand the industry, arranged internships at hospitality venues for hands-on work experience, and offered stipends to support further education and professional development.

Overview of achievements

- **138** Roma people attended **9** information sessions.
- **105** Roma people (**67%** women) participated in **6** training sessions.
- **31** training participants (**77%** women) benefitted from an internship at hospitality venues.
- **19** training participants (**74%** women) received stipends.
- **10** training participants secured a work placement in the hospitality industry.
- **4** Hilton team members engaged.

9.1 Information sessions

During the project, nine sessions were conducted, reaching 138 members of the Roma community. These sessions intended to inform participants about the project's goals and activities, and career opportunities in the hospitality sector. Additional meetings with civil society organizations and community representatives were also held to help partners establish connections and gain access to the communities.

9.2 Training sessions

Six training sessions were conducted for 105 Roma people (67% women) to introduce and prepare them for careers in the hospitality sector. These sessions were designed to provide participants with industry-specific knowledge, covering how different departments in hospitality function, the skills for securing employment, career planning strategies, understanding their work rights, recognizing workplace discrimination, and responding to discrimination through employment laws.

The training content effectively addressed the participants' expectations. For instance, Aleksandar, a trainee, articulated his goals, stating, 'I expected to gain new skills, experience, improve my knowledge in the field of hotel management, as well as gaining new contacts in the hotel sector.' Similarly, Sara reflected on her reasons for joining the program, sharing, 'I wanted to learn more about the service industry, to improve my knowledge and skills, and thus make it easier to find a job.' The desire to enhance their skills underscores the training's relevance to their career goals. Aleksandar also appreciated the structured organization of the training, noting that it created an excellent atmosphere where participants could engage in meaningful discussions.

81 participants (78% of the total) reported feeling more confident when applying for roles in the hospitality industry after the training. This is the case of Krisztina, who reflected on her personal growth from the training, stating, “The training helped me apply for higher positions with greater confidence.” Other participants found employment, like in the case of András, a high school student who secured a job in a restaurant to help cover his school expenses, while some others like Mihály have become involved with an NGO working with Roma children and young adults while also employed at a guesthouse

Some participants even created their own opportunities in the sector, like Orsolya, who, along with two other participants, opened a buffet. The knowledge and experience gained from the training sessions were crucial in their decision to embark on this venture. Beyond professional skills, they developed essential abilities in business management and financial planning, all of which are vital for running a successful business. This operation exemplifies collaboration, resilience, and entrepreneurial spirit, significantly enriching the community's social life and serving as an inspiration for others.

The training also covered employment law, workers' rights, anti-discrimination policies, legal protection of equality rights, and the promotion of diversity and inclusion in the workplace through practical examples. This topic was particularly appreciated as it helped participants better protect themselves in the workplace. For example, Valentina stated that, “I learnt a lot about the labour law and about discrimination. I feel more independent, empowered and have different perspective of my role.” Similarly Krisztina stated that “The training helped her gain a better understanding of labour law, which provided me with valuable new knowledge.”

Sara explained that, “The training gave me a better understanding of these topics. I learned a lot about things like notice periods, annual leave, and flexible working hours. I had no idea about the rules regarding harassment and discrimination. For the first time, I realized how much protection we as workers actually have. I learned a lot about my rights and the safeguards in place to protect us.” This was confirmed by Adrijana, another trainee, who said that, ‘I found the part about labour rights most significant... I left my previous job because the owner of the restaurant I worked in had not paid me two salaries. Before that, I had worked without a contract and paid contributions in another place. I believe that I know more about labour rights now so that I can protect myself from similar employers.’

An article about the training has been published on one of the partners' website (in Hungarian): <https://phirenamenca.eu/munkaero-piaci-felkeszito-trening-iii/>.

9.3 Internships

31 training participants (77% women) benefitted from internships at hotels, restaurants, and other hospitality venues in various positions. This was the case of Eszter, who completed her internship at a hotel in Hungary, where she worked as a receptionist, breakfast cook, and waitress. This experience deepened her knowledge and commitment to the hospitality industry, prompting her to

apply for a university degree in Tourism and Hospitality to complement her professional training. Her application was successful, and she is now an undergraduate student.

Thanks to the internship, Adrijana discovered her vocation for working in the kitchen: 'The kitchen surely left the biggest impression on me... The speed and organization in the kitchen amazed me the most... Besides, I had the opportunity to see how different dishes are made, which was additional experience for me.'

Aleksandar enrolled in the internship to improve his practical skills beyond the theory learned in his studies and training sessions. He explained how his CV benefitted from the project: "Each work experience adds value to my CV and positively affects my position in the hospitality sector." The project also led to job offers, which he turned down because he wanted to grow more: "My wish is to work as a top manager in the hotel industry or tourism, and I will strive to improve my knowledge and professionalism."

After the training, Nikola was also offered a practice opportunity in a Serbian hotel. He seized this chance to expand his knowledge and gain real work experience. Through this practice, Nikola not only acquired new skills but also discovered aspects of hotel operations he hadn't noticed before: "During the practice, I was surprised by some parts of hotel work... I realized how crucial the laundry department is... for the functioning of the entire system, and how, in the end, everything depends on that one relatively small department.' Completing the practice solidified Nikola's determination to pursue a career in hospitality: "I am absolutely thrilled with the opportunity. Everything exceeded my expectations! Now that I've seen firsthand how things work, I'm even more determined to develop myself and become a manager in hospitality to realize my dream."

Sara reflected on her internship at Hotel, saying, "In addition to hospitality knowledge, I learned a lot about myself. I pushed my boundaries and stepped out of my bubble. I knew my values, but I didn't realize I could adapt to different jobs so easily. This internship has given me confidence that I could work in hospitality. I dream of opening my own restaurant one day, and this internship will definitely help me when that time comes."

9.4 Stipends

19 participants (74% women) received stipends to enhance their work experience, support their education, cover daily expenses, and attend further training.

Aleksandar found the financial support invaluable for completing his studies at the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism and attending a language course: "The courses are a very good opportunity to further progress and open new chapters on a professional level."

Andrijana, recognized for her dedication, was also selected for a stipend after her internship, which she used to attend a chef course that improved her culinary skills: "It is very significant because it's not the same to apply for a job without experience and training. Learning and attending courses is crucial for my future career. Every employer looks for previous knowledge, speed, and responsibility."

Valentina received a stipend to complete an advanced housekeeping training course, which she considers more desirable and better paid: “I hope that, once the opportunity arises, I can find a job in the hospitality industry again and remain there.”

10. Conclusions

The project was highly effective in addressing discrimination against the Roma community in the job market by empowering its members, particularly the youth, to pursue careers in the hospitality industry. Through a multifaceted approach, the project combined information sessions, training, internships, and stipends to provide participants with the necessary skills, knowledge, and motivation to enter the sector. A total of nine awareness sessions were conducted, reaching 138 members of the Roma community, with a focus on raising awareness about career opportunities in hospitality. These efforts were further supported by meetings with civil society organizations to enhance community connections and broaden the project's reach. Additionally, six training sessions were held, preparing 105 participants—67% of whom were women—by equipping them with industry-specific knowledge and practical job-seeking skills.

The training sessions were crucial in helping participants gain confidence and knowledge about various aspects of the hospitality industry, including career planning, department functions, and recognizing and addressing workplace discrimination. Notably, 81 participants (78% of the total) reported feeling more confident when applying for hospitality jobs after the training. The legal education on employment rights, including anti-discrimination laws and workplace protections, was particularly valued, with many participants expressing newfound empowerment. For example, one participant, after learning about her labour rights, felt better prepared to avoid exploitation in future employment. This component of the training ensured that participants were not only equipped for jobs but also aware of their rights, fostering a stronger sense of independence and self-protection.

Internships played a key role in solidifying participants' practical skills, with 31 trainees (77% women) benefiting from hands-on experience in hotels, restaurants, and other hospitality venues. These internships allowed participants to apply their learning in real-world settings, deepening their understanding of the industry. Some found the experience transformative, leading to pursue a university degree in Tourism and Hospitality. Others even started their own ventures in hospitality. This entrepreneurial outcome exemplified the training's success in fostering not only job readiness but also the creation of new opportunities and business ventures within the Roma community.

The project also provided 19 participants (74% women) with stipends, which supported further education, professional development, and daily expenses. These stipends played a crucial role in bridging the gap between training and employment, allowing participants to complete their studies in Hotel Management and Tourism and attend vocational courses that enhanced their skills.

Overall, the combination of targeted training, real-world internships, and financial support resulted in significant personal and professional growth for participants, helping them overcome

barriers to employment and contributing to long-term improvements in their career prospects within the hospitality industry.