

CREATING JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR ROMA

10
INSPIRING
SUCCESS STORIES







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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET


This booklet showcases 10 inspiring stories of Roma women and men who have overcome socio-economic disadvantages and have secured a future for themselves by finding good jobs or creating their own business.

Roma jobseekers face many more obstacles to finding employment than the majority of the population: the jobless rate for the general population now officially stands at 25.5%, while for Roma it is estimated to be as high as 75%.

To help address these obstacles, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has implemented a project to provide coaching and monitoring services for Roma jobseekers. By providing individual guidance and advice to candidates, coaching and mentoring support has proved highly successful in overcoming some of the key obstacles faced by unemployed Roma and other people at risk of social exclusion, helping them to access available employment services and ultimately to enter the formal labour market.

The project, entitled 'Regional Support Facility for Improving Stakeholder Capacity for Progress on Roma Inclusion', is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).





The coaching and monitoring services were initially piloted in four municipalities throughout the country and produced dramatic results: more Roma candidates succeeded in participating in active labour market measures in 2014 than in the previous seven years combined.

The success of the piloted services led to their inclusion within the country's annual Operational Programme for Employment, with a budget allocated to fund these services in 2015.

As a result, over 1,000 Roma people were informed about and advised on available employment opportunities in 2015. After only a few months of coaching, 176 found a job (42% of the youth and 41% women).

In 2016 the Government decided to extend the coaching and mentoring services to cover the needs of other vulnerable people at risk of socio-economic exclusion.

UNDP's key partners in devising the new coaching and monitoring services include the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (which also served as the national coordinator of efforts within the Decade of the Roma initiative), the Employment Service Agency, local municipalities and civil society organisations.

Neiat Aliov is well known amongst his neighbours as having been for many years the only taxi-driver in the village of Crnik—a remote settlement near Pehchevo in the east of the country.



THE RIGHT CHANCE AT THE RIGHT MOMENT

A hardworking family man who has never been content to be unemployed, Neiat is proud of making an honest living to support his family. And he is especially proud of having recently taken the brave step of formalising his business and setting up his own taxi company.

"I've been driving a taxi for a long time," he says. "But I worked unofficially and that made the future very uncertain. I thought a lot about setting up my own company, but it just seemed too challenging with all the paper work. I didn't know where to find help with the legal procedures.

“Taking part in the Programme was a turning-point for me,” says Neiat. “The workshop gave me a real boost of confidence to go ahead and take the risk of starting up a company.”

Plus I didn’t have the funds to set the company up.” So when some friends told him about the Self-Employment Programme and the technical and practical assistance it could offer with designing a business plan and establishing a formal company, Neiat jumped at the chance.

The Programme assigned him an expert mentor, Zoran Bikovski, from UNDP’s Mentoring Programme, who advised Neiat on the procedure for applying to the Programme and supplied him with all the information he needed about the course requirements and the conditions of the grant for which he would be eligible through successful participation.

“Taking part in the Programme was a turning-point for me,” says Neiat. “The workshop gave me a real boost of confidence to go ahead and take the risk of starting up a company.”

Neiat successfully completed the course and proceeded to apply for a grant. He is now one of some 7,000 beneficiaries who have participated in the programme.

“The day I learnt that I would get the grant was one of the best days of my life,” he says. “It made it possible to turn a new page. I used the funds to buy a gas-device for my taxi to save money. I bought a taximeter and got a gas voucher. And finally,” he adds, “I reorganized the garage in the yard of my house to make sure my car is better protected.”



Taking part in the Programme and formalising his business has not only given Neiat much greater job security, it has also given him the confidence to develop bigger plans. Already he is working on expanding the business, discussing the best options for growth with the help of his mentor. Neiat is especially keen on recruiting the eldest of his four children, who has shown a strong interest in getting actively involved with the company.

Asked whether he has any advice for people thinking of setting up their own business, Neiat is quick to respond with a stirring message: “Do not miss any chance you are given!” he says. “Always look ahead and keep on working for your ambition – there is no other philosophy.”

A photograph of a male baker with a mustache, wearing a white chef's hat and a white long-sleeved shirt. He is leaning over a wooden tray filled with golden-brown, braided bread. The background shows a bakery interior with wooden shelves and other bread. A red rectangular overlay is positioned on the left side of the image, containing white text.

An irresistible aroma of freshly baked bread spreads through Elida Markets in Kumanovo. It is early in the morning but already a long line of customers has formed at the bakery's mouth-watering display of bread and bureks, small leek and spinach banitsas, pretzels and flaky buns.

FROM MECHANIC TO EXEMPLARY BAKER

The tireless bakers at the Elida Markets Bakery have been working hard since dawn. Amongst them is 28-year-old Rufat Demirovski, a relative newcomer to baking who has already earned himself a place as an indispensable part of the team.

"Rufat started as an apprentice to the main baker," says one of Rufat's colleagues, "but he quickly gained the skills and experience and now he can work independently. We're really pleased with his work, especially with his calm and methodical approach to each task. Nothing is too difficult for him."

Rufat's success story highlights the important role played by mentors, coaches, and the Roma Information Centres.

Given his obvious aptitude for baking, it is surprising at first to learn that Rufat originally studied to be a mechanic. He started looking for a job in this field immediately after finishing high school, but with no success.

"I trained to be a mechanic and now I'm a baker," he says. "People find that quite strange, but actually there are more connections between the two professions than you might think at first glance. For example, in both trades it's your hands that are the main tools."

Rufat was disheartened by the difficulty of finding a job as a mechanic, but the challenge also made him rethink his career options and ultimately persuaded him to gain more qualifications.


"I decided I needed to retrain," he says, "and eventually I applied for a training course in Baking at the Workers' University in Skopje."

After gaining a professional certificate as a baker in 2008, Rufat approached his local Roma Information Centre in Kumanovo and was assigned a coach, Ahmed Jasharevski, who helped him make a job-seeking plan, advising Rufat on how to focus his applications and how best to present his skills.

"With Ahmed's help we made a plan and stuck to it until I found a job," says Rufat. "And here I am today. I'm employed and I'm pleased with my work. I'm learning new things every day."



Rufat's success story highlights the important role played by mentors, coaches, and the Roma Information Centres. These have proved invaluable in informing and motivating members of the Roma population who face many more obstacles than most in entering the labour market. Mentors are able to give expert and informed guidance and advice on employment, helping young people like Rufat to develop their professional capacities and guiding them to develop realistic plans and adapt their expectations in line with the challenges of the labour market.



"There's hardly a single new house in the town that Seat Shaqiri hasn't had a hand in building," says Mustafa Bajrami, one of Seat's many satisfied customers in Tetovo. "Whether it's gutters or roof covers, it's always Seat they call because everyone knows he works fast and with high standards."

BOTH A CRAFTSMAN AND A BUSINESSMAN

Seat long ago decided to continue his family tradition and take up his father's craft as a tinsmith after completing secondary vocational education. For over a decade he earned a decent living, but the work was informal, the opportunities for growth were limited, and the future far from certain.

"As you grow older you start to want more security for yourself and your family," he explains. "I realised back then that the only way to achieve security was to take a risk and start my own business. But I kept hesitating because I felt I didn't know enough about things like book-keeping and finances."

My mentor encouraged me to believe in my idea and to keep on trying.

Eventually, in 2014, Seat resolved to take the risk and enrolled in training courses at the Employment Centre in Tetovo, where he earned excellent marks for his work. "Taking the training course was really useful because it stopped me being so afraid of starting a business," he says, "and the teachers at the Centre encouraged me to apply for the Self-Employment Programme."

The Programme training further helped Seat develop a good understanding of marketing and other crucial skills for running a company. Working closely with his employment mentor, Seat went on to develop a sound business plan.

"My mentor gave me a lot of good advice about the business plan and helped me to anticipate problems and see possible opportunities," says Seat, "He also encouraged me to believe in my idea and to keep on trying."

Soon after completing the Programme and successfully applying for a start-up grant, Seat was able to open his company, called SMA. With the grant funds he purchased all the essential materials and tools he needed to start his business immediately in several locations in Tetovo and the region.

Within months of starting up SMA, demand for the new company's services was so high that Seat was able to take on several employees of his own. "Once the business was formalised I soon started getting more orders for bigger jobs from major construction companies, restaurants and hotels."

SEAT SHAKIRI

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SMA is located in a workshop of 40m² and currently employs 2 tinsmiths, but Seat is already working on a plan to expand his business still further. "First we need to recruit some employees to take on bigger jobs," he says, "but at the same time I'm also thinking about the longer term and ways to expand in the wider region."

Seat's long-term plans for expansion are an indicator of how far he has come in the short time since he applied for the Programme. And these plans are putting even more of the lessons he learnt on the course into practice: "The course made me aware of the importance of marketing," he says, "and that's why I'm focussing now on promoting the business to reach a bigger market, for example through a company website."

Since starting up SMA, Seat has not stopped learning: he regularly visits the Employment Services Agency in Tetovo, for example, to obtain further information, tips and advice on how to develop his business.

"There is no looking back now!" he says. "I've come to see myself not just as a craftsman but as a businessman. I'm looking ahead all the time at opportunities for growth."



"I really believe we are making a difference to the lives of Roma in Kumanovo."

THROUGH PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO AN INTEGRATED COMMUNITY

"I've always wanted to work with people and for people," says 40-year-old Elvira Skenderovska from Kumanovo. "It makes me feel better when I see that my work improves people's lives. I'm involved in the Community Work

Programme now and I really believe we are making a difference to the lives of Roma in Kumanovo." For the second year running, Elvira has been engaged as Assistant Coordinator of Activities for the Roma population

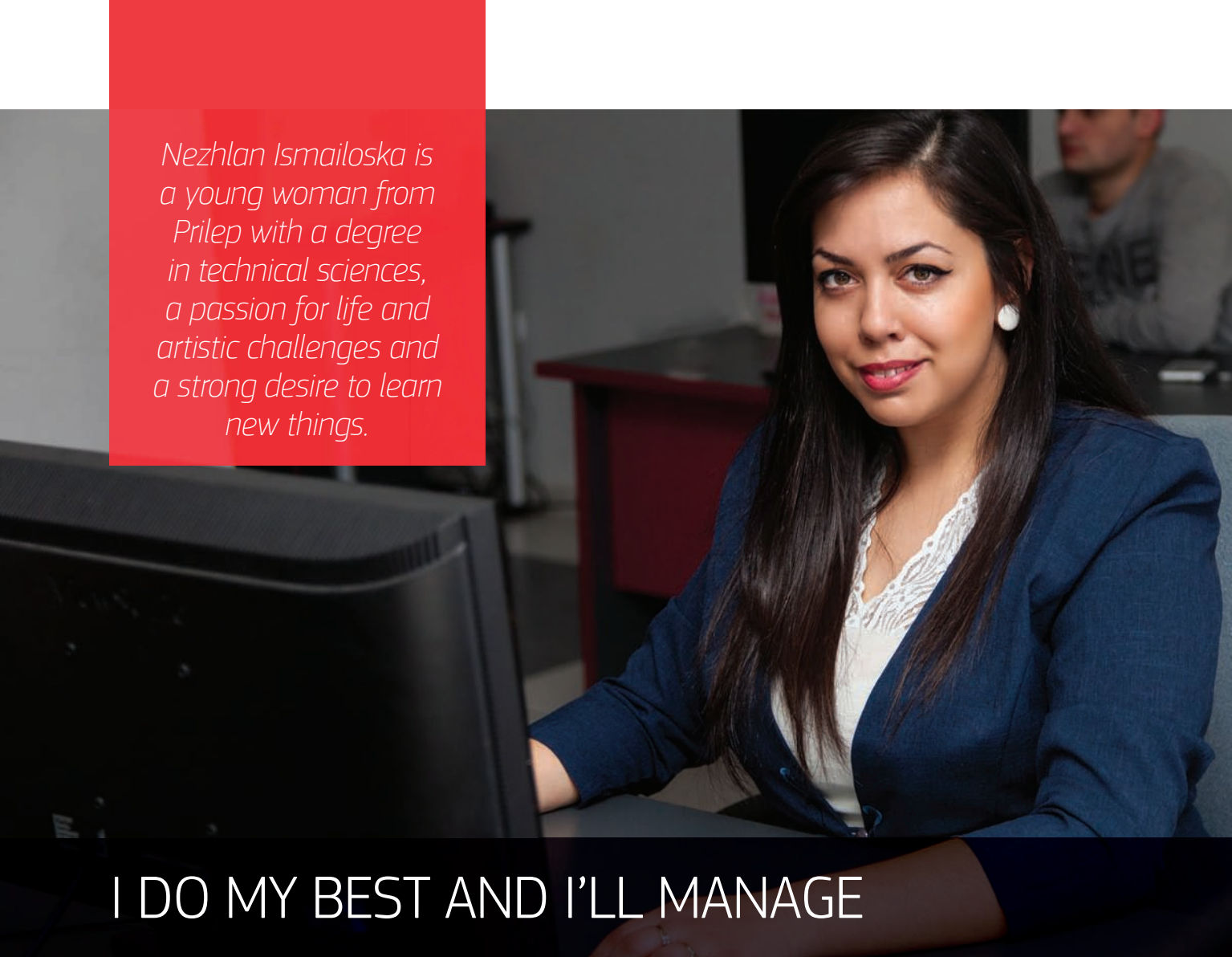
“I want to continue to work and gain as much experience as possible. This is the only way for me and other Roma like me to contribute to the true integration of our community in all parts of society.”

within the Community Work Program in Kumanovo. Building on her previous experience as a contributor to several civil society projects, Elvira now works daily on designing activities aimed at the promotion of Roma culture and language, while at the same time acquiring significant professional experience. She looks forward to the new school year, because she will be able to talk to children and together with them devise ways of easier and more successful motivation for learning and sharing experiences of their culture and traditions.

But Elvira's ambition does not stop there. She also wants to use the experience she has gained to achieve her main goal for the future: to achieve a better quality life with better education for herself and for the young Roma she works with. “I want to continue to work and gain as much experience as possible. This is the only way for me and other Roma like me to contribute to the true integration of our community in all parts of society.”

The Community Work Programme is being implemented in the Municipality of Kumanovo for the third year now. Roma people are an important part of the Project aimed at increasing awareness and general education among the members of this vulnerable community. The cycle for 2015 succeeded in including 27 Roma from eight different municipalities.





Nezhlan Ismailoska is a young woman from Prilep with a degree in technical sciences, a passion for life and artistic challenges and a strong desire to learn new things.

I DO MY BEST AND I'LL MANAGE

Nezhlan Ismailoska is a young woman from Prilep with a degree in technical sciences, a passion for life and artistic challenges and a strong desire to learn new things.

Nezhlan is currently engaged as an intern in GrabIT - a programming company that works for the domestic and foreign market. Spending her working hours in a real work


“I’ve finally got a chance to apply in practice the knowledge I gained as a student of computer science,” she says. “My main goal during the internship is to acquire more knowledge and practical experience in the field of programming and computer logic. This internship has been one of the most valuable experiences I’ve ever had.”

environment and with real professional activities, she is gaining valuable work experience that can later help her to find permanent employment more easily.

“I’ve finally got a chance to apply in practice the knowledge I gained as a student of computer science,” she says. “My main goal during the internship is to acquire more knowledge and practical experience in the field of programming and computer logic. This internship has been one of the most valuable experiences I’ve ever had. One of the greatest lessons I’ve learnt is that learning doesn’t stop with a diploma – you have to put it into practice.”

Nezhlan’s example shows that the opportunity to gain practical experience and knowledge in a working environment is a successful formula for self-improvement and helps pave the way to finding a job more easily.



A photograph of an older man, Toze Petkovski, working as a welder. He is wearing a dark blue jacket with a 'LOS ANGELES' logo on the sleeve and is focused on his work. He is using a welding torch to weld a metal structure, with bright sparks and smoke visible. A red semi-transparent box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Toze Petkovski from Kumanovo once shared the fate suffered by many workers during the country's long period of economic transition: after more than a decade's experience working in a large factory, he found himself redundant.

FROM BEING UNEMPLOYED TO BECOMING HIS OWN BOSS

With a family to support, Toze faced a very difficult situation and was forced to pick up bits and pieces of casual work—odd jobs like helping to install doors and windows in buildings, with no contracts, no security and no real future.

"I didn't want to work like that," he says. "It's risky and insecure. You live in fear of controls and inspections every day. I wanted to work regularly, according to all the rules." Through the non-governmental organization Drom,

“Now that I had my own company,” Toze says. “The next step was to involve my son in the business. So I contacted my employment mentor for advice on how to make this happen.”

Toze learnt about some of the active labour market measures available for people in his precarious position. He contacted the staff of the local Employment Centre for more information and received detailed information about the opportunities offered within the Self-Employment Programme.

“The offer was immediately attractive – a way out of the rut I was in. The Programme included help with the technical side of setting up a business and the grant funds were exactly what I needed to formalize my work and start my own company.”

After successfully participating in the Programme, Toze qualified for the grant and used the funds to buy essential tools and equipment.

“Now that I had my own company,” Toze says, “the next step was to involve my son in the business. So I contacted my employment mentor for advice on how to make this happen. My mentor was great and soon got back to me with information about a training opportunity for my son.” Toze’s son decided to apply for a five-month course leading to a professional certificate as a welder.

TOZE PETKOVSKI

“Ehpo – Plast”

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“Taking part in the Self-Employment Programme has not only opened doors for me but has made it possible for me to help open doors for my son. Building a career is a different story when you have a diploma that proves you know how to do the job. My son won’t have to go through the insecurity of informal work. And if the business takes off, I intend to include other family members.”

Toze encourages other unemployed people from his community to follow his example and try starting their own business. “It’s true it isn’t easy, but that’s even more reason to keep trying. There are opportunities out there to help you if you look hard enough and don’t give up.”

Haris Jasharov is a young man from Delchevo with great ambitions. Until recently, however, there seemed little realistic prospect of him achieving his dreams in the small town.



MAN OF THE PEOPLE

“Like many people my age in this town,” says Haris, “I was pessimistic about the possibility of finding a job in Delchevo, especially a job I’d really want to do. Then I attended a workshop on Roma health rights organized by a local NGO

and it turned out the representative of the NGO was also an employment coach for the Delchevo and Berovo region.” Talking to the employment coach, Haris found out about employment opportunities through the Employment

“I am overjoyed. I have an incredible opportunity to move up in life and do what I want, working on the ground helping my own people.”


Service Agency. He made more enquiries and soon he received the great news that the KHAM NGO needed new workers to help people in the community fulfil their right to health services. “The work really appealed to me because I’ve always seen myself as someone who can make a difference to other people’s lives—a kind of ‘man of the people!’”

Haris applied for an internship in the NGO’s Health Programme. He was then provided with an employment mentor who helped him apply and successfully participate in several training courses on health insurance, reimbursements of funds, terms of hospital treatment and other technical knowledge needed for his job.

After the training, Haris was invited to work in the NGO as a Health Assistant in the Programme, which is scheduled to last until 2020. “I am overjoyed. I have an incredible opportunity to move up in life and do what I want, working on the ground helping my own people.”

Haris Jasharov has quickly mastered the first lesson in the world of work – that employers recognize responsible workers and appreciate those with a sincere desire to invest in improving their skills and dedicate themselves to their jobs. His example shows how individual efforts can make achieving successes a part of one’s personal story.





"When I heard about a training programme for hairdressers, I jumped at the chance", says Teuta Arifi.

PATH OF SUCCESS

What started out as a hobby for young Teuta, could become the basis for a serious career. "It started when I heard through the local media about the Twinning Project run by the Employment Centre," she says. "I was put in touch with an employment coach and mentor working on UNDP's pilot

project and they told me about a training programme for hairdressers. I jumped at the chance!"

After successfully applying for and participating in the course, with valuable assistance from her employment coach and mentor, Teuta obtained a certificate in

“Unfortunately, my family is not able to support my studies in higher education,” she says. “But I’m not disappointed. I learnt at a young age that you have to make your own way in life.”


hairdressing and is now finding it easier to get work in her chosen profession in order to support her college studies.

“Unfortunately, my family is not able to support my studies in higher education,” she says. “But I’m not disappointed. I learnt at a young age that you have to make your own way in life.”



Teuta's message to other young people is that persistence eventually pays off: “You have to make the initial effort yourself if you want to get anything worthwhile,” she says. “Only when you've taken the first step can you start to find your way.”





Sali Memed, a 35-year old journalist from Skopje's Shuto Orizari neighbourhood, is a great believer in the importance of news and information-sharing. Only when people are well-informed, he says, will we have the power to change things for the better.

IN THE WORLD OF INFORMATION

"I started on the Roma editorial board in the national service of MRTV," Sali remembers, "and then went on to become an editor of the first private Roma TV channel. MRTV was a great place to start out—I learnt from the more experienced

reporters and developed a journalistic sense of what news is and what is not news."

Sali heard of the Self-Employment Programme by chance but at first he wasn't sure about applying. "One of the things

“My coach and mentor also helped me with applying for the grant,” says Sali, “and I was able not just to get the basic funds for equipment but also additional funds for employing another person in my company.”

that finally persuaded me to apply was hearing about the help you can get to submit a successful application. That way I knew I wouldn't be leaping into the dark and maybe wasting time by submitting a weak application and business plan.”

With the assistance of his employment coach and mentor, Sali put his ideas down on paper and shaped them into a draft business plan for his application. “The day I was accepted was a very special day – the beginning of a new chapter in my life.”

With great ambition and determination, Sali successfully participated in the Programme and went on to open his own media business for Roma audiences, Three Peaks Media, together with a website called 24 Vakti. His goal is to offer an info-platform that will be a mosaic of information from all areas of society, especially on topics that most concern Roma.

“My coach and mentor also helped me with applying for the grant,” says Sali, “and I was able not just to get the basic funds for equipment but also additional funds for employing another person in my company.”

The number of hits on Sali's web portal is increasing daily and Sali is confident he's on the right track. “I have a clear vision of my long-term aims,” he explains, “and together with my team we are gradually building a relevant and serious media in the Romany language.”





The Osmanovski family has been selling beautiful flowers and high quality plants in Kumanovo for more than half a century now

CONTINUING THE FAMILY TRADITION

"When people think of flowers they think of Osmanovski!" says Shatz Osmanovski, the youngest of the family. "We've built a reputation in the town."

Shatz knew he wanted to continue the family tradition as florists from the moment he completed high school.

However, his first attempt to get basic business training and start up his own formal company through the Self-Employment Programme was not successful.

"It was really disappointing at first," he says, "but I didn't seriously think about giving up. I asked around about how

Shatz is currently working on expanding the range of flowers and plants, applying some of the basic business skills he gained through the Programme and through the guidance of his coach and mentor.

I could improve my chances of successfully applying and I found out there were coaches and mentors that could help."

Shatz worked closely with his employment coach and mentor on developing his business plan in more detail and on writing a stronger application for the following year.

This time he was accepted and successfully participated in the 2015 Self-Employment Programme.

"My mentor and coach were really helpful with my application," Shatz says. "I'm really grateful they took the time and made so much effort to explain what I needed to do to succeed. And they didn't just help with applying but supported me throughout the Programme and afterwards in obtaining a grant to set up my shop."

With the grant funds, Shatz equipped his flower shop with new shelves, floor tiles, and a fiscal cash register and started to work. The shop, called Shatz Junior 2015, is now up and running, full of bright flowers and evergreen plants.

"I'm getting more and more customers every week as the people in the town are getting to hear about my shop. I love my job and I'm determined to make the business grow."

SHAC OSMANOVSKI

"Shac - Junior"

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KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED

Since 2014, over **1800** people at risk of social inclusion were introduced to available employment opportunities in the country.

43%
under
29 years

29%
women

81%
roma

17%

long term
unemployed,
recipients of social
benefits, victims of
domestic violence,
single parents,
persons with
disabilities



1819 roma and persons
at risk of social exclusion



according to the type
of vulnerability

44%
under
29 years

37%
women

60%
long term
unemployed

30%
roma

2%
persons with
disabilities,
recipients of
social
assistance,
and single
parents



Supported total 267 employed / self-employed / or trained

After a few months
of coaching, **267** of
them found jobs, set
up their own business
or enhanced their
professional skills.

From the total **267**
employed / self -
employed / or trained
176 were Roma

49%
under
29 years

27%
women

44%
were employed
or self-employed

25%
built professional
skills through
completion
of vocational
trainings or
internship
programs

31%
had first work
experience or
rejoined the labor
market after years
without a job



176 Roma / employed / self-employed / or trained



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*