Judit Durst,* Zsanna Nyírő,** Fanni Dés*** & Julianna Boros****

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Racial glass ceiling: The glass ceiling and the labour-market segmentation of first-in-family Roma graduates in Hungary

* [durst.judit@tk.hu] (Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest and UCL, Department of Anthropology, UK)
** [nyiro.zsanna@tk.hu] (Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest)
*** [fanni.des@stud.uni-corvinus.hu] (Corvinus University, Budapest, Doctoral School of Communication and Sociology)
**** [boros.julianna@pte.hu] (University of Pécs, Faculty of Humanities, Department of Community and Social Studies)

Abstract

According to the neoliberal mantra, anyone who is willing to work hard can get ahead in our society. In an era when belief in the myth of meritocracy has become widespread, greater social mobility would represent the promise of escape from rising social inequality. This paper challenges this myth and offers insight into the fallacy of individualized explanations of the role of merit in social ascension. Drawing on 103 interviews with first-in-family (FIF) minority Roma graduates in Hungary, and using the lens of intersectionality, it explores the hidden barriers to career advancement for those Roma professionals whose parents do not have a degree. The paper shows how the intersections of class and racialized minority status matter in relation to what career one has in the labour market. It illuminates why FIF Roma professionals can rarely enter elite occupations and why, career wise, they tend to concentrate in jobs dealing with Roma issues. It explores the effect of the dynamic interaction of structural hidden mechanisms and the Roma's response/adaptation to them that contribute both to Roma professionals' labour market segmentation and to the phenomenon of the glass ceiling. The paper calls these two characteristics of the labour market situation of the FIF Roma graduates the racial glass ceiling.

Keywords: upward social mobility; first-in-family graduates; Roma first-generation professionals; glass ceiling; racial glass ceiling

1 Introduction

Johnny is the founder-director of an alternative secondary-provision school[1] that was established 15 years ago by him and his colleague as a (tuition-fee-free) church foundation school mainly for Roma students aged 14–18 to prepare them for A-level (final or Abitur) exams. The school's ethos is creating a supportive, inclusive, and nurturing, family-like educational environment in the northern part of Hungary and was inspired by Johnny's own experience of

[1] Names of all people and institutions are pseudonymized to protect the anonymity of our study participants.

institutional racial discrimination during his elementary school years. The school is located in one of the most economically deprived regions of the country where many socially disadvantaged Roma families live, and where only one percent of the Roma population have obtained A-level (upper secondary school) credentials.

> I was 19, a factory worker, with only an eighth grade (primary school) qualification when I was connected to an educational support programme in the nearby town. There I met with my sociologist friends who made me realise what an outrage it is against my Gypsy community that we are discriminated against within the education system. We do not have access to further study, even at the secondary level. This was a turning point in my life. This inclusive, supportive social environment, with a pedagogical team in that city who welcomed and fostered the desire of the Gypsy kids to study further, was the force behind my career path. I soon realised that if we want systematic change in education – that is, for our Gypsy children to be treated like equals in schools – we need to enter politics and also establish our own educational institutions.

Johnny comes from a lower-class Boyash Gypsy family and has six siblings and 35 cousins. They lived on the outskirts of a small village in a Gypsy colony that consisted of 15 houses. He affectionately tells us that it was his parents and his community that enabled him to make this 'big jump' – that is, to get a university degree (his parents did not even manage to finish elementary school). 'The values, support, safety net, and affection I got from my family and Gypsy community made me who I am today. I am proud of what I am: a Gypsy, from Hungary.'

As the first secondary-school graduate of not only his extended family but also of the whole Gypsy settlement where he spent his childhood, Johnny became a role model who fostered studying at the secondary level for the children of his community. Later, after acquiring his teaching degree, he established an alternative secondary 'gymnasium' for Roma children who would not otherwise be competitive in the selective and segregatory public school system in Hungary, much less experience equal opportunity. (See Berényi, 2022). 'We felt the need for a [second-chance] school like this as we realised that even the best educational support programmes could not reach the most disadvantaged students who live in poor families in segregated Gypsy colonies,' he stated, recalling his former motivation.

Despite his 20-year experience in the field of education, it took Johnny until he was 50 that he could acquire a first-time mortgage to buy a flat in a rural small settlement near the school. For the last decades, since he had left his family home, he had either lived in a dormitory while studying or teaching, or in the school itself. 'This is the first time after many years that I have a decent salary. That I can afford a mortgage on my own house. My cousins who earn three times more than me working abroad as manual skilled labourers always laugh at me. "You are the one who has a degree, and you earn peanuts!", they mock. But they are proud of me'.

Given his relatively low salary and the precarity of his job[2] but also the lack of recognition of his occupational expertise by the dominant, non-Roma segment of the labour market, Johnny wonders what kind of social mobility he has actually achieved. He feels that even if he has an extended experience of successfully teaching and mentoring Roma children from marginalised family backgrounds, having established his own foundational

[2] The school's future is dependent on the reigning governments' goodwill as its educational functions are financed by the state budget.

schools and despite his comprehensive overview of the educational system and the difficulties of educating Roma children, no one from majority society has ever invited him to take up a 'big job'. He tells us that despite his 'objective merits' (prestigious educational credentials [two degrees, one of them from a top university where he learnt alternative teaching methods]), strong work ethic and certain skills ('I am like a bulldozer – if I want to achieve something, I'll go 'til I hit the wall to accomplish it'), his expertise and talent have never been recognized in a 'top job':

> Do you think anyone has ever invited me to be the educational expert on an expert committee on one of the government's public education bodies? Or to join any decision-making group? No one, never – we Roma professionals have an assigned place in Hungarian society. Even 20 years ago, when I had my Abitur [final exam at upper secondary school] and became acquainted with my sociologist friends, they dreamt up everything for me that had something to do with helping: e.g., teaching, being a social worker, or a sociologist. I tried to tell them, even then, that I thought this was prejudicial. Why would I become any of these helper-types? Why do they expect me, the first Roma with an Abitur from his Gypsy settlement, to be a teacher or a social worker? To remedy the plight of the Roma who have been damaged over the last few centuries?

Johnny's notion of 'assigned places' for the Roma in Hungarian society (as in other CEE countries) takes us to the focus of this paper; namely, the identification of the hidden barriers to career progression. This article contributes to the thread of social mobility studies that draw attention to the fallacy of the 'myth of meritocracy' by exploring the inherent racialized (and gendered) inequalities in the career advancement of FIF Roma professionals.

Johnny is just one of the 174 FIF graduates whom we interviewed in our comprehensive project about the personal experiences of educational mobility.[3] Of the 174 study participants, 103 self-identified as Roma. In some ways, Johnny represents a 'typical case' in our study sample as he works in a racially segmented part of the labour market – in the civil sector that deals with helping disadvantaged Roma people to develop their social positions, either through facilitating their educational or occupational mobility or via human-rights activism. We term this job segmentation dealing with 'Roma issues' (see also Váradi, 2015; Nyírő & Durst, 2018; Gulyás, 2021).

The paper argues that the segmentation of the Roma FIF graduates into Roma-issues-related work is one of the factors – in parallel with the hidden mechanisms of the 'racial glass ceiling' for Roma professionals – that hinders them obtaining top positions in the labour market despite their 'objective merits'. In this paper, we challenge the widespread belief that with educational credentials, hard work, and 'talent' people belonging to racialized minorities can thrive in the labour market in jobs that they aspire to. In line with other social mobility scholars (e. g. Lawler & Payne, 2018; Friedman & Laurison, 2020), we call this belief the 'myth of meritocracy'. The myth of meritocracy is a form of cultural legitimation of neoliberal capitalism that ignores class, gender, and ethno-racial inequalities in society and the resulting structural barriers in the life paths of those from disadvantaged families, such as in education or on the labour market (Litter, 2018, pp. 1–21). It reinforces the individualist

[3] The project '*Social mobility and ethnicity: Trajectories, outcomes and hidden costs of educational success*' was supported by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' (NKFHI) research grant (no. K-125 497) between 2018 and 2021.

myth of neoliberalism that 'if you work hard, you will get ahead in life' (Kóczé, 2017). The public dialogue about social mobility is dominated by this myth and cases are framed as ones of individual failure or success instead of resulting from social processes (Lawler & Payne, 2018).

Instead, by analysing personal experiences of educational upward mobility, we demonstrate how the hidden barriers to career advancement – that is, the glass ceiling – work, and what the factors and hidden mechanisms are that erect and drive it in the case of members of a racialized minority middle class, such as the Roma FIF graduates. Here we build on the work of Ogbu (1978) regarding the phenomenon of the 'job ceiling' with regard to 'visible' and stigmatised minorities. Also, in the Hungarian Roma context, we draw on Szalai's (2014) work on the 'ethnic ceiling' in educational settings.

Through analysing the personal experiences of individual educational mobility trajectories of our Roma interviewees, we argue that we can explore how they perceive the job ceiling – i.e., how Roma professionals have fewer opportunities to use their higher educational qualifications to acquire jobs commensurate with their qualifications than their non-Roma counterparts. Our results also resonate with Árendás and Messing's (2022) work that explains why there are so few Roma in the business sector; despite fair employment laws and diversity employment policies, the development of a Roma business professional occupational class has been slower than that of the non-Roma.

But before we identify and analyse the main drivers of the glass ceiling and the fact that many Roma professionals concentrate in the labour market for jobs dealing with Roma issues (the two social phenomena which together we call a 'racial glass ceiling' (see also Brooks, 2017, for a similar concept for Afro-Americans' racial subordination in law and culture), we first provide the theoretical framework of our research study. Then we delineate the research context, followed by our research method. In the latter we show how we obtained quantitative data about the existence of the racial glass ceiling in the labour market. Finally, before we conclude our empirical findings, we turn our attention to reconstructing the mechanisms that create the glass ceiling in the labour market and contribute to the segmentation of Roma FIF professionals in jobs dealing with Roma issues.

At the end of this introductory section, we also find our language use worth noting. We believe that there is no adequate vocabulary to describe groups such as those Roma that are categorised the way they are in Hungary (Ladányi & Szelényi, 2001). After consulting with Roma colleagues, we call them 'racialized (ethnic) minority'. (See also Kóczé, 2020; Máté, 2021). Following the logic of scholars who speak about diverse forms of (ethno)racial domination (Wacquant, 2022), when we write about the hidden structural barriers that hinder FIF Roma career advancement, we call this phenomenon the racial glass ceiling, referring to a particular form of (ethno)racial domination and racial subordination (Brooks, 2017).

It is also worth mentioning that when we use the analytical notion of 'racial glass ceiling' we draw on scholars' racial domination concepts. Therefore, we do not speak about racism as an individual race prejudice, but we speak about the process of racialization (Gans, 2017). This is in line with Wacquant's (2022) conceptualization of the racialization of ethnic categories, Desmond and Emirbayer's (2009) notion of racial domination, Brooks's (2017) idea of racial subordination, and Rövid (2021) and Kóczé's (2020) argument about the racial oppression of the Roma. According to this thread of thinking, racialization means the encompassing economic, political and social cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources, and power between

majority and racialized ethnic minorities.[4] This unequal distribution benefits 'whites' (majorities) and disadvantages 'people of colour' (racialized minorities) overall as a group, or rather as a constructed category. (See also Nyírő & Durst, 2021 for the case of FIF Roma upward mobility in Hungary.)

Lastly, on occasions when we refer to literature associated with the US context, we cite them using their original categories such as 'black' or 'people of colour'. Although these notions might sound strange to European readers, they allow us to refer to similarities in the structural oppression of 'racialized people' and to the historical pervasiveness of colour discrimination against the Roma in Hungary (as in other Eastern European countries; see Grill, 2017).

2 Theoretical background

The metaphor of the glass ceiling describes the invisible yet durable barriers that members of racial-ethnic minority groups and women have historically experienced in the elite segments of the labour market. It draws attention to the fact that what we conventionally understand as the effect of individual merit is not the only or even main determinant of career success. The term 'glass ceiling' was first used by a journalist in 1984 to refer to the phenomenon that women are not able to move beyond the middle management level. In the 1980s it was used mostly to describe women who were left behind in the labour market hierarchy due to social inequalities (Boyd, 2012). It is a product of gender inequalities in society that can be traced back to material inequalities between men and women and to socially expected gender roles (Ridgeway, 2001). Gender roles that contribute to inequalities between men and women include the burden of care work on women that prevents them from progressing in the labour market, as well as the fact that managerial positions are more in line with the gender roles expected of men (Ridgeway, 2001). Women often only have a chance of moving up to higher levels in the labour market if they can afford to outsource the care work that they are expected to do, or if they fulfil the gender roles expected of men (Nagy, 2017).

The glass-ceiling phenomenon refers not only to gender inequalities in the labour market, but also to the fact that women find it increasingly difficult to assert themselves in the workplace hierarchy the higher up they go (Baxter & Wright, 2000). Female employment declines in proportion to the number of children women have (KSH, 2016). Glass and Fodor (2011) draw attention to 'the maternity penalty' – discrimination against women with children in the Hungarian labour market.

The glass ceiling literature also reveals the 'class penalty': women from working-class backgrounds have been historically excluded from elite occupations (Skegg, 1997; Friedman & Laurison, 2020). The same penalty applies to members of ethnoracial minorities. Even when they are just as talented and hardworking as their majority counterparts, they are less likely to get into or flourish in elite jobs; that is, to achieve the same reward for their 'objective merit' as their majority fellows (Ogbu, 1978; Szalai, 2014).

The term 'glass ceiling' is commonly used today to refer to the phenomenon of racialized minorities and oppressed groups in society that are unable to move up the labour mar-

[4] Here again, we refer to ethnicity following Wacquant's (2022, p. 78) suggestion that '("thin") ethnicity is an arbitrary category that is grounded in the vagaries of history and culture.'

ket hierarchy and obtain elite positions despite their high level of educational attainment (Boyd, 2012). Ogbu (1978) speaks about the phenomenon of a 'job ceiling' when referring to the fact that Blacks do not have the same access to jobs as Whites in American society. He points out that the literature tends to attribute the failure of Blacks to succeed in the labour market to their fundamentally different socialization, whereas this is fundamentally due to the different and lower social expectations of Blacks that result from structural inequalities in US society, which do not equalize their access to the labour market. Using a similar line of thinking, the concept of 'ethnic ceiling' (Szalai, 2014) indicates how structural inequalities are decisive in the socialization of ethnic minorities. The ceiling appears in the education system, where discrimination against ethnic minorities through differential grading practices is systemic and continues in the labour market. Discrimination and its subtle version, the presence of the ethnic ceiling in relation to Roma in education and the labour market, is a particular problem in the post-socialist region (Szalai, 2014).

Friedman and Laurison's book *The Class Ceiling* (2020) focuses on the social mobility and labour-market position in Britain of people originating from the lower classes. The book concludes that the phenomenon of a glass ceiling in the labour market in elite occupations can also be applied to people from lower-class backgrounds. People who have lower-class parents often do not get as high up the job ladder, and earn less than their counterparts with elite, highly educated parents. The authors also find that different racial-ethnic groups from lower-class backgrounds are even more disadvantaged on the labour market. Thus, the phenomenon of intersectionality can also be applied to the phenomenon of the class ceiling (Friedman & Laurison, 2020, p. 42).

The concept of intersectionality originally captured the unequal position of Black women in society compared to those of White women. The concept drew attention to structural inequalities in the American second-wave feminist movement between Black and White women (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). The notion highlights that, based on their different economic and social position, the everyday experiences of women from different social classes and racial-ethnic backgrounds are not the same. According to Friedman and Laurison (2020), this phenomenon can also be applied to the intersecting relationship between class and ethnicity in the context of the class ceiling. Friedman and Laurison (2020) identify the hidden mechanisms that drive the class ceiling. The list is extensive, from direct discrimination (in terms of sexism and racism) to the subtler and more insidious effects of 'othering', stereotyping, sponsored mobility, and homophily.

A relatively small body of literature is concerned with the labour-market segmentation of racialized minorities. Collins (2005) showed that those African-Americans who have achieved occupational mobility are shifted into niches in the labour market that are created to meet the needs of African-American people. Such niches can be found in sectors, institutions, and occupations. She highlights that African-American entrepreneurs, professionals and administrators in the public sector work in niches that deal with managing African-Americans, administering policies oriented around African-Americans, and delivering services and products to African-Americans. She concludes that African American '…skills remain "functionally segregated" in [the] labour market' (Collins, 2005, p. 190.). Beasley (2011) demonstrated that a high proportion of African-American college graduates work in racialized and/or community-oriented occupations (in the social service sector); that is, in occupations directed at, or whose services are mainly used by Blacks. The author highlights that African-Americans' labour-market segmentation is associated with considerable pay penalties (i.e. their average earnings are lower than those of their White counterparts).

Last but not least, for the purpose of this paper, we found Brooks' (2017) work on the phenomenon of the racial glass ceiling of Afro-Americans especially influential. Although he focuses on the area of law and culture, he elucidates how the racial glass ceiling, a form of racial subordination, impedes racial progress in the U.S. He argues that the racial glass ceiling is a complex and little understood phenomenon that perplexes even the most well-meaning employers. However, it produces devastating consequences that affect both poor and socio-economically successful Afro-Americans.

With this article, we aim to contribute to the understanding of the working of the racial glass ceiling in the case of our FIF Roma study participants. However, before we turn our attention to exploring the drivers of the racial glass ceiling, we delineate our research context: the educational and labour market situation of Roma in Hungary.

3 Research settings: Roma graduates in the Hungarian labour market

The Roma are the most marginalised and vulnerable racialized minority in Hungary. Their disadvantage is reflected in many spheres of life, including their educational attainment: according to census data from 2011, 5 per cent (10,775 people) of the Roma completed high school with A-level credentials (matriculation or Abitur) (total population 30 per cent), and only 1 per cent (2,607 people) graduated from higher education (total population 17 per cent) (Bernát, 2014). Radó (2000) identifies four interrelated problems that contribute to the failure of Roma students at school: discrimination; the social marginalization of Roma families; the lack of enforcement of minority rights; and problems related to the quality of education. Bernát (2014) emphasises that school segregation and the practice of sending Roma to special classes and schools without justification are the main reasons for the school failure of Roma children. In recent decades, Roma children have significantly caught up with non-Roma students in terms of successfully completing primary school, while the gap between them has significantly risen in terms of finishing secondary school and participation in higher education (Hajdu et al., 2014).

Data about the participation of Roma graduates in tertiary education and the labour market is limited, although the census of 2011 provides some information about these topics that we can compare with the characteristics of all first-generation graduates and the total graduate population.

Roma differ from the total population of first-generation graduates in their choice of subject of study. Roma graduates are overrepresented in the field of humanities and arts and health and social care compared to first-generation graduates. However, they are underrepresented in the field of technical-, industrial-, and construction training, and finance, compared to first-generation graduates (Durst & Nyírő, 2021). These study choices may affect the labour-market outcomes of Roma graduates, as we will demonstrate.

In terms of economic activity, data derived from the 2011 census indicates that the rate of employment was around 70 per cent for both Roma graduates and the total graduate population. In 2011, the unemployment rate was much higher among Roma graduates (10 per cent) than in the total graduate population (4 per cent). The proportion of retirees was only 7 per cent among Roma graduates while it was 19 per cent of the total graduate popula-

tion. According to the main occupational categories, there is not much difference between Roma graduates and FIF graduates: the majority of both populations are managers and professionals or technicians and associate professionals.[5]

The opportunities for Roma graduates in the labour market are influenced by the fact that Roma are exposed to a variety of forms of prejudice and discrimination in Hungary (Csepeli et al., 1998; Vajda & Dupcsik, 2008). Open prejudice decreased in the 1990s and stagnated at the beginning of the 2000s, but after the economic crisis in 2009 xenophobia and anti-Roma attitudes strengthened again (Keresztes-Takács et al., 2016). According to a survey by the Pew Research Center, nearly two-thirds of Hungarian respondents expressed an unfavourable opinion of the Roma in 2016 (Wike et al., 2016).

The prevalence and extent of discrimination are very difficult to determine (Lovász & Telegdy, 2010) as there is no single indicator or method that could provide a reliable estimate of its extent (Sik & Simonovits, 2010). According to the results of an EU-MIDIS survey in 2016, 32 per cent of Roma in Hungary felt they had been discriminated against because of their Roma background at least once in the past five years in at least one area of day-to-day life. In 2014, 51 per cent, while in 2016 one-third of Roma people experienced discrimination during job searching, and in 2014 17 per cent experienced the same at work – the proportion was 11 per cent in 2016 (FRA, 2014; 2016). Sik and Simonovits (2010) point out that being of Roma origin significantly increases the degree of the perception of discrimination in the labour market, education, and access to different services. In a very recent study, Kertesi et al. (2022) showed how ethnic (racial) prejudice turns into occupational discrimination.

4 Methodology

By pairing quantitative data on the glass ceiling and labour-market segmentation with interviews with Roma graduates, we are able to provide generalised evidence about the existence of the glass ceiling and labour-market concentration of Roma graduates and explore some of the factors that lead to these phenomena.

The purpose of the quantitative analysis is to prove that Roma FIF graduates are concentrated in certain segments of the labour market and that the glass ceiling hinders their career advancement. Our quantitative data is derived from a non-representative online survey and a secondary analysis of national, representative statistical data. The online survey asked FIF respondents about their mobility and career paths and the emotional cost of their journey. The target population was those who are the first in their families to graduate from college or university. The questionnaire was anonymous and self-administered. It was disseminated through different channels including Facebook pages (e.g., university alumni pages, and our research project page), paid Facebook advertisements, and social networks.

The questionnaire was available for respondents between October 2019 and July 2020. It was filled out by 6,063 respondents. The gender distribution of our sample significantly differed (women are strongly overrepresented) from the weighted data on first-generation graduates from the micro census in 2016. The age distribution of the survey sample is also

[5] Source: Census 2011, own calculation.

divergent from the micro census data in the case of 40–49 and 50–59-year-olds (who are overrepresented in our sample), and those aged 60 and over (who are underrepresented in our sample). However, the distribution by county of residence is close to that of the micro census.

Although the sample is not representative of the population of FIF graduates in terms of socio-demographic variables, the aim of our analysis is not to generalise our results to this population, but to compare different subgroups from our sample and to reveal typical patterns associated with respondents, for which our database is suitable.

For the purpose of this analysis, we restricted the sample to those respondents who were working at the time of the survey. Thus, the restricted sample consists of 5,372 respondents.

The following question was used to determine the respondents' ethnicity: 'Which nationality do you feel you belong to? Multiple responses are possible!' The list of nationalities provided by the 2011 census was given as the options. All respondents who selected Roma nationality (even if they selected other nationalities as well) were identified as Roma. One hundred and nine Roma respondents filled out the questionnaire, among whom 95 had a job at the time of the survey.

The national, representative data set of the census of 2011 and the micro census of 2016 were also used to obtain statistical evidence about the glass ceiling that impedes Roma FIF graduates from getting into prestigious, top positions in the labour market.

Quantitative data can only tell us whether the labour-market segmentation of Roma FIF graduates and the related glass ceiling exists. However, it cannot explain how and why these phenomena exist. Therefore, the aim of our qualitative analysis is to reveal some of those mechanisms that lead to this labour-market segmentation and drive the phenomenon of the glass ceiling in the case of the Roma FIF graduates. The qualitative part of this study draws upon 103 in-depth life interviews with Roma FIF graduates. The interviews were conducted as part of a four-year research project, as mentioned above, that examined the personal social mobility experiences of FIF college-educated people. One hundred and seventy-four interviews were conducted as part of this project between 2018 and 2021. Among the respondents, there were both majority (non-Roma) and minority (Roma) interviewees, the latter which consisted of those who self-identified as Roma. This study analysed the narratives of the 103 Roma respondents. The participants were recruited using the snowball sampling method, via public advertisements in social media, and through an online survey. The nine interviewers, among them both Roma and non-Roma researchers, recruited Roma respondents by using different networks to find study participants. These latter channels were not used to reach Roma participants in particular, but to identify FIF graduates, among them both Roma and non-Roma. These processes ensured that we avoided recruiting our Roma respondents from only a few homogenous circles. Interviewees in this study were aged between 24 and 64 years old. Sixty interviewees were female, and 43 were male. Interviewees were recruited from both urban and rural locations in Hungary. In order to protect the anonymity of all participants, we have used pseudonyms for the interviewees and for the names of the settlement of their origin in the study. Furthermore, broad categories were used to describe the jobs and workplaces of the respondents to ensure that they are not identifiable.

The first part of the interviews involved a narrative section, and the second part a semi-structured interview. The latter section focused on the following topics: family background, educational attainment, career path, intimate relationships and children, family relationships and friends, self-characterization (identity), life satisfaction, and success. Interviews were audio-recorded, then transcribed and entered into ATLAS.ti 8.

Finally, we believe, along with a few other scholars (among them Németh, 2016; Friedman & Laurison, 2020; Kovács, Gárdos & Vajda, 2020; Máté, 2021), that it is necessary to reflect on our own positionality as it certainly affected not only how comfortable interviewees felt sharing their personal experiences of the sometimes painful road to mobility but also how we interpreted our findings. The diverse positionality of our research team and of the four authors of this paper, among them both young and middle-aged man and woman Roma and non-Roma researchers, hopefully contributed to lessening the bias involved when generating and interpreting our interview data. Our research team was concerned with 'epistemic justice' (Morley, 2020), too: Roma researchers such as one of the authors (Boros) of this article were in the position of being knowledge producers rather than simply objects of inquiry (see also Boros et al., 2021).

5 Findings and discussion

5.1 Occupational segmentation and the underrepresentation of Roma graduates in management

The aim of this section is to provide statistical evidence of the labour-market segmentation and glass ceiling that affect Roma FIF graduates on the Hungarian labour market.

Several approaches were used to reveal whether Roma professionals are concentrated in racialized and/or community-orientated occupations because the available statistical data are limited in this regard.[6] Our online survey contained some questions related to the respondents' sector of employment that we could use to approach this topic. According to the results of our qualitative research, the Roma graduates who work in the field of social services and the non-profit sector, almost without exception, work in the field of Roma issues.

The online survey asked respondents whether their job is related to helping others in the field of social issues.[7] The characteristics of those not working in social services were compared to those of respondents working in this field by using multinominal logistic regression[8] (see Tables 1–8).[9] The reference group of those not working in the social services does not differ significantly according to gender. The odds of working in social services increase slightly with age. According to the type of settlement, those who live in smaller settlements are more likely to have jobs related to social services. Roma are more likely to work in the field of social services than non-Roma respondents.

[6] We regarded working in the social service and non-profit sector in the case of Roma graduates as a proxy for working in a racialized and/or community-oriented job because our qualitative results showed that all Roma respondents working in the social service and non-profit sector were dealing with Roma issues. We were not able to use the census of 2011 because that database does not contain any information on the sector (public, private or non-profit) of employment. The micro census of 2016 contains information on the sector of employment, although that database involves a 10 per cent sample of Hungarian households and thus allows for only uncertain claims about the employment sector of Roma graduates due to the small number of cases.

[7] The following question was applied: 'Is it part of your job to help others in the field of social issues?' We regarded those respondents as working in the field of social services if they responded positively.

[8] Multinominal logistic regression was used to filter out the effects of differences in the demographic composition of Roma and non-Roma respondents.

[9] Nagelkerke pseudo R2 = 0,036; McFadden = 0,021.

We also asked respondents in the questionnaire whether they worked in the private, public, or non-profit sector.[10] Three models were built to compare the characteristics of those not working in these areas with those who were working in these spheres (see Tables 3–8).[11] Ethnicity was not a significant predictor variable in the model for working in the public sector, while it was significant in the model that was used to examine the non-profit and private sector. Roma were more likely to be working in the non-profit sector compared to non-Roma respondents. The probability of working in the non-profit sector rises modestly with age. According to gender and settlement type, there is no significant difference between those not working in the non-profit sector and those working there. Roma are less liable to work in the private sector than non-Roma respondents. The chance of working in the private sector slightly decreases with age. Those who live in Budapest are more likely to have a job in this sector than those who live in regional centres, towns, or villages. This shows the role of geographical inequalities in labour market opportunities (Árendás & Messing, 2022; Árendás, Messing & Zentai, 2018). There is no significant difference between the two groups according to gender.

In sum, Roma respondents are more likely to work in the field of social services and the non-profit sector, and less likely to work in the private sector compared to non-Roma participants. These results strengthen what can be inferred from the census data about the Roma graduates' subject of study – that is, their overrepresentation in the fields of humanities, arts, and social care (Durst & Nyírő, 2021).

Working in the non-profit sector is associated with a pay penalty in Hungary. According to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, the average annual gross earnings of employees working in the non-profit sphere were 331 thousand forints less than the national average in 2019, 338 thousand forints less in 2020, and 81 thousand forints less in 2021.[12]

According to the results of our qualitative research, nearly half (49 per cent) of those Roma interviewees who had a job at the time of the interview[13] were working full time in the field of Roma issues. More than a quarter (29 per cent) of them had part-time or voluntary work in this area. Meanwhile, only about a fifth (22 per cent) of the Roma respondents were not working at all on Roma issues.

Moving on to the question of the vertical segregation of Roma graduates, the analysis of the census data in 2011 showed that the representation of Roma graduates in management is slightly below that of the total graduate population: while 12.0 per cent of the total graduate population work in managerial positions, the proportion is 9.5 per cent among Roma graduates (see Table 9).[14] This finding may be surprising; however, it is possible that Roma

[10] Multiple responses were allowed regarding the sector of employment because our qualitative research revealed that many Roma FIF graduates often have more than one job. Therefore, we built three models with dummy dependent variables in the case of each sector.

[11] Model of working in the non-profit sector: Nagelkerke pseudo R2 = 0.018; McFadden = 0.013,
Model of working in the private sector: Nagelkerke pseudo R2 = 0.093; McFadden = 0.055,
Model of working in the public sector: Nagelkerke pseudo R2 = 0.068; McFadden = 0.039.

[12] Source: https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/mun/hu/mun0046.html
https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/mun/hu/mun0050.html

[13] Of the 103 Roma respondents, 90 were employed or self-employed at the time of the interview.

[14] It is important to note that belonging to Roma ethnicity is based on self-identification in the census. Therefore, it is possible that some of the Roma respondents did not identify themselves as Roma in the questionnaire situation.

managers' self-identification as Roma in a survey situation is greater than that of non-managers. However, as we will see, there are differences between the distribution of Roma graduates and the total graduate population within the group of managers.

There is one occupational group within management positions where the proportion of Roma graduates and the total graduate population differs greatly: while 24 per cent of the total graduate population work as heads of units assisting in business activities, the same proportion is only 17 per cent in the case of Roma graduates. There is a slight difference between the proportion of Roma graduates and the total graduate population in the case of legislators, heads of administration, and heads of special-interest organisations, where Roma graduates are slightly overrepresented (Roma graduates 12 per cent, total graduate population 8 per cent, see Table 10).

Since most (70 per cent) of the Roma graduates in managerial positions work in production and as specialised services managers, we were only able compare the proportions of the Roma graduates and the total graduate population within this group because case numbers were too low within the other groups. Within this group, Roma graduates are overrepresented compared to the total graduate population in the case of social welfare managers, educational managers, restaurant managers, other services managers, and cultural centre managers. Except for other services managers, these are managerial positions associated with lower average gross earnings (see Table 11). That is, the horizontal segregation of the Roma graduates in these managerial positions also entails vertical segregation in terms of earnings. In other words, this concentration of Roma graduates in managerial positions with lower earnings can be regarded as a sign of a glass ceiling.

The next section reveals some of the mechanisms that contribute to the existence of a racial glass ceiling for Roma FIF graduates in the Hungarian labour market.

5.2 The different drivers of the racial glass ceiling: Findings of a quantitative study

We identified several drivers that contribute to the racial glass ceiling affecting Roma graduates. Our previous study (Nyírő & Durst, 2018) found that an important mechanism that leads to the labour-market segmentation of Roma professionals is participation in training and employment programs for Roma. These programmes, in addition to facilitating mobility, often set the path for Roma graduates in the field of Roma issues. Another important factor is the particular characteristics of their social capital (e.g., their participation in ethnic-specific social networks and a lack of heterogeneous social ties) that contribute to the labour-market segmentation of Roma graduates and can hinder their career advancement. However, due to word limits this paper will only elaborate on the role of the following mechanisms that were frequently recalled in many of our interviewees' narratives: (1) the role of schools and teachers, (2) discrimination on the basis of racialized differentiation, (3) tokenism, (4) the expectation of 'giving back', (5) self-efficacy, and (6) financial insecurity or the lack of 'the bank of Mum and Dad'.

5.2.1 The role of schools and teachers in the development of the racial glass ceiling

The Hungarian education system is one of the most selective in the European context (Radó, 2018; OECD, 2018). Mechanisms of selection are highly complex and include both institu-

tional and informal processes (Radó, 2018; Papp Z. & Neumann, 2021). This selectivity is the general context of Roma (educational) segregation (Radó, 2018). Through gross mechanisms like racialized differentiation, segregation, selective school systems, and inadequate funding and facilities and staffing for schools with Roma students (Fejes & Szűcs, 2018), schools collude in maintaining Roma's inferior status and thus support their historically sustained 'second-hand citizen' status (Szalai, 2014). As Ogbu (1978) explains in the case of lower-caste Blacks in the US, through the repetition of this process through different generations schools contribute to maintaining and rationalizing the job ceiling for those students whom they judge as coming from an inferior social group background. In addition, Roma people are over-represented among those living in poverty and are strongly affected by spatial segregation and ongoing discrimination by social institutions in Hungary, all of which contribute to the degree of educational segregation (Vajda & Dupcsik, 2008; Feischmidt et al., 2013).

Our study of FIF graduates shows that even if Hungarian Roma students attend the same schools as non-Roma Hungarians (sharing facilities, funding and staffing equally with the latter), their performance may be valued as less given the stigmatisation, racialized differentiation and discrimination of teachers against the Roma. Robert's memories of primary school resonate with some of the personal experiences of discrimination of our interviewees:

> By Year 7, I had given up studying. Although I had the nicest handwriting in my class, my Hungarian literature teacher never gave me a better grade than 2, or rarely a 3. [In Hungary the highest grade is 5, and the lowest is 1]. For us, darker-skinned Gypsy kids, we had to perform three or four times as well to get the same grades as the White Hungarian children. The idea of supporting Gypsy students to carry on studying at secondary level did not even come up in our teachers' minds. No one from my Gypsy settlement had ever gone on to study further, before me. (Robert, 42, teacher)

Robert's account of his teacher's subtle and insidious process of grading to differentiate Roma students from non-Roma in such a way that the former are rated as inferior is a hidden mechanism that develops the job ceiling by assigning Roma students a lower educational status. Szalai (2014) also claims that this mechanism contributes to the development of the ethnic ceiling in the labour market. Beyond this discriminative grading practice, Robert's recollection, as cited above, draws our attention to another hidden mechanism that contributes to the construction of the racial glass ceiling; that is, the lower expectations of schoolteachers towards Roma students than non-Roma ones on the basis of ascribing racialized differences in attitudes and behaviours to Roma children who do not identify themselves as such.

We must note, however, that many of our study participants mentioned the highly important role of a protective agent (Stanton & Salazar, 2004; Bereményi & Carrasco, 2017) at some point in their primary school careers. This protective agent was sometimes a supportive teacher who discovered the talent in our interviewees and therefore pushed them to achieve their full potential by encouraging them to further study. It could also have been a civil support programme/initiative or a foundation that aimed to (partially) compensate for the inequality of the education system by fostering the further study of those students who come from socioeconomically disadvantaged family backgrounds through mentoring and stipends (Boros et al., 2021).

As demonstrated in Section 3, Roma graduates are overrepresented in college- and university-level programmes that are related to the helping professions such as social studies and education. This contributes to the fact that many Roma graduates work in the field of

Roma issues. While many students selected these programmes themselves, several interviewees participated in preparation courses for university entry which targeted Roma students, and these courses usually prepared them exclusively for the entrance exams to sociology and social work courses. That is, this former group had no possibility to choose their own fields of study. In a similar vein, another interviewee who studied geography reported that her thesis topic was related to Roma issues because one of her teachers recommended that she choose it since she is Roma:

> R: …when I was writing my thesis, because I studied that topic, social and economic integration…
>
> Q: And why did you opt specifically for that topic?
>
> R: Because the professor whom I really liked and was very close to me advised [me to do it], since I am of Gypsy origin and come from Káposztás [there is a Gypsy settlement there] – that's why. (Aranka, 25, science teacher in a primary school)

These cases refer to the fact that the tacit opinion of some members of the majority society is that Roma people should deal with Roma issues, and this contributed to the career path of some of our interviewees.

5.2.2 Discrimination in the labour market

Another important factor that limits the free career choice and career opportunities of our respondents is discrimination against Roma people on the Hungarian labour market (Bodrogi & Iványi, 2004; Babusik, 2008; Sik & Simonovits, 2009; EU-MIDIS, 2009). Exclusion from mainstream occupations shifts them into 'racialized' (racially oriented) and/or social-service career paths. Furthermore, positive discrimination and affirmative labour-market programmes may also lead to the labour-market segmentation of Roma graduates when employers seek to hire Roma employees for certain racialized workplaces and job positions.

However, the effect of discrimination is not just that employers exclude or include certain employees, but one economic theory suggests that job seekers who experience discrimination will shape their job searches in ways that minimise the chances of encountering a discriminatory employer. That is, self-selection of labour-market opportunities is a strategy for avoiding discrimination. These job-search strategies by racialized minorities can be regarded as a form of adaptation to discrimination that strengthens segmented labour-market placement (Pager, 2015).

Many of our respondents mentioned cases of discrimination during their job search. For instance, Dóra, who graduated in the field of humanities, reported that she was not able to obtain employment as a high-school teacher, but she was welcomed into work in the civil sector:

> Finding a job as a secondary school teacher, which I could have done [which I was qualified for], I applied to a lot of places, but they didn't call me back, and then this sector found me [the NGO]. I also taught at a language school, but I never managed to get a job at a secondary school, although I tried many places – about forty. I had no luck. Some of the schools answered but most did not, and it was a shitty feeling. (Dóra, 32, project manager)

Some interviewees ended up in jobs related to Roma issues because of positive discrimination. Among them there are some interviewees whose previous career paths were a notable distance from the field of Roma issues. To offer an example, Hanga (40) graduated as a language teacher and was employed at a vocational high school when she was invited to work as an equity expert at a public organisation. Our respondents also mentioned cases of vertical discrimination when they were not allowed to advance above a certain level in the organisational hierarchy – but this takes us to the next mechanism that drives the racial glass ceiling; namely, tokenism.

5.2.3 Tokenism

As we have seen so far, the essence of the racial glass ceiling for our Roma professional interviewees is that even though they had equal educational qualifications and expertise to their White fellows, the phenomenon of the job ceiling denied them equal access to jobs commensurate with their training and abilities (Ogbu, 1978). Many of them perceived that they were only allowed to occupy jobs above this ceiling if they could be used as 'token Gypsies' by their employers. As Ogbu (1978) explained, we can speak about tokenism or 'token integration' when firms or institutions employ Blacks (or other visible or racialized minorities, or people of colour: Yosso, 2005) in occupations 'above' the job ceiling in an attempt to comply with 'fair' and 'diversity'-based employment policies or pressure from the Black community and local White liberals. Although there are many variations of tokenism, the motif is always the same: 'People-of-colour' (a racialized minority) college graduates are hired for window-dressing to demonstrate that their firm is an 'equal opportunity employer' (Ogbu, 1978). The excerpt that follows resonates with the experiences of many of our study participants:

> I felt many times, at different workplaces, that they needed a Roma face, they needed a Roma colleague to be able to say that they 'work with Roma'. But they never allowed me into decision-making roles, into management, or the leadership of the institutions. Despite the fact that I have two degrees and I speak advanced-level English, I was always assigned only to coordination tasks. (39-year-old woman, working in a ministry in the field of social services)

Another form of tokenism in Hungary that our study participants complained about is when Roma professionals are assigned by their most well-meaning non-Roma bosses – regardless of whether they want to – to work on projects that deal with Roma topics to legitimise the projects in the eyes of the Roma community. This has happened more often in recent years in parallel with the empowerment of the Roma emancipatory movement with its claim against racial oppression and for shared knowledge production (Bogdán et al., 2015). One of our interviewees recalls why she felt uncomfortable about her assigned roles in her department and therefore decided not to accept her 'token integration':

> Paraphrasing our famous Roma writer, Menyhért Lakatos, my professional desire is to be a researcher Gypsy not a Gypsy researcher. The emphasis is that I want to be an expert, a researcher who happens to be Gypsy. But at my workplace and everywhere in Hungary I have a racialized identity, unlike my Hungarian non-Roma colleagues whose identity is racially unmarked. They

> are just researchers. But I am a Gypsy researcher in their eyes, and therefore I am assigned or nicely pushed to deal with Roma topics. It just does not feel right. They confine me to a role where I can only be a Roma researcher. They deprive me of [the chance to be] a multicultural cosmopolitan scholar. Instead, they pushed me to deliver tokenistic tasks. They shouldn't have needed to show their positive affirmation support this way. They should rather have let me follow my research interests and they should have trusted my professional knowledge. (38-year-old woman, social scientist)

5.2.4 The expectation of 'giving back'

Many of our interviewees reported that they wish to 'give back' to their wider community but several respondents highlighted that this is also expected of them, and this may contribute to the Roma graduates' intention of finding jobs that are related to Roma issues. Our previous study (Nyírő & Durst, 2018) highlighted that ethnic support groups and organizations may strengthen this feeling of responsibility. Some programmes state this expectation, while others do not claim it, but their institutional habitus mediates a value system; a way of thinking that is in line with this direction. Gulyás (2021) found that Roma graduates encounter this expectation from majority society and the Roma community as well. She emphasised that some interviewees accept this requirement, while others reject it, but even members of the latter group do not reject their role as intellectuals in the field of helping the Roma community. Our results also support the claim that Roma graduates meet this expectation of members of the majority society and of the Roma community. Aside from Johnny, whom we already met at the beginning of this paper, many other study participants also talked about this situation. As one of them put it,

> There was moral pressure on us in 2000. There was this expectation that if you are a graduate [which is a rare and privileged position among the Roma] then you should go back to help your community. Where did this moral pressure come from? I don't know. From everywhere. From the Roma, and from the non-Roma. (46-year-old Roma woman, Romany language teacher at a university)

We must note that many Roma FIF graduates, however, chose this field of work as their 'soul work' (Nyírő & Durst, 2018): as a 'calling' to help their community of origin, and to do something meaningful for 'their people' to make the plight of the racially oppressed Roma more bearable and less unjust.

5.2.5 Self-efficacy

Our empirical findings shed light on another decisive mechanism that contributes to sustaining the racial glass ceiling in the labour market. Drawing on the psychologist Bandura's (1997) work, we call this factor the lack of belief in self-efficacy. The original meaning of the concept refers to one's belief in one's own capacity to succeed at something and to be able to control their social environment or to execute behaviours necessary for achieving specific tasks or attaining specific goals. A strong sense of self-efficacy strongly influences the kind of challenges a person is disposed to take on, and the choices they are likely to make. We argue, on the basis of some of our interviewees' personal narratives, that many professionally qualified Roma do not even try to apply for promotion to top jobs in majority, non-Roma

dominated occupational fields because they are highly aware of the existence of discrimination and the ensuing racial glass ceiling. Roma professionals have long and widespread experience of their assigned place in the Hungarian labour market, and this perception of their limited control of their social situation and their confined perspectives function as a self-fulfilling prophecy (see also Szalai, 2014) and restrain them from applying to top jobs.

Some of our highest achieving Roma interviewees recollected memories about their own 'failure' to 'dare' or 'shying away' from accepting invitations from their bosses to apply for promotion at their workplace. One of them, Lilly, explains why she did not rise beyond the job ceiling at her university:

> I didn't even try to apply for the position of head of department. I was told by the current head that even if my capabilities, personal qualities, and qualifications made me an ideal fit for this role, our colleagues (all of them of the non-Roma majority) would not feel comfortable seeing a Roma as head of their department. It would be unprecedented. And I knew this, so I decided not to try. I don't need any more rejection. I've had so much already. (Lilly, 45, university lecturer in a social science department)

Freddie's narrative follows a similar vein. He explains that his lack of control over the discriminatory practices of senior colleagues is why finally, after many years of unsuccessfully endeavouring to be promoted to more major roles in his theatre company, he decided to leave and change career paths and become a freelance artist.

> It took me years to realise that all my efforts [to be promoted to major roles in plays] were in vain. Being Roma, I just did not fit the image of a traditional actor in the theatre. So, I just gave up and went away to become a freelance artist. (Freddie, 42, actor)

We interpret both of these rationalisations about 'giving up' trying to scale the job ceiling as mechanisms involving a weak belief in self-efficacy. These beliefs are a consequence of perceived social inequality and discrimination against their Roma community of origin. We consider this self-efficacy to be another significant hidden mechanism that drives the racial glass ceiling in the labour market for our Roma FIF graduates.

However, this explanation should not be misread as individual-level deficits of high aspiration or ambition. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'self-elimination', Friedman and Laurison (2020) remind us how a lower-class origin can guide upwardly mobile people's action through their perceptions of their (poorer) chances in the future. They often commit acts of self-elimination in top jobs, or shy away from promotion opportunities as a reaction to and in anticipation of structural barriers. When it comes to our FIF Roma respondents, many of their narratives illuminate the way in which the intersection of their lower-class and their racialized minority origin affected their anticipation of failure regarding attempts to 'rise above their station'. Through the anticipation of what is 'achievable' and what is 'unachievable' to them as members of a racialized and discriminated minority, they eliminate themselves from applying to promotion/top jobs. This is because they make calculations on the basis of their own and others' former experiences of structural barriers and these former (bad) experiences give them a troubling feeling of insecurity about what challenges they have to overcome. Therefore, unconsciously, in response to the structural barriers (racialized differentiation and discrimination) that they are well aware of, some of our respondents preferred not to strive for the top jobs. In this way, their activity is implicated in the construction of the racial glass ceiling as their self-elimination is another driver of it.

5.2.6 Financial insecurity and the lack of 'the bank of Mum and Dad'

Last but not least, it was salient in the narratives of many of our study participants how the lack of financial security via their parents – that is, the missing 'Bank of Mum and Dad' (Friedman & Laurison, 2020) – held them back from investing in low-paying, entry level jobs such as internships in the private sector. Although they knew that this kind of investment would have returns, and could have led to income rewards in time, they simply could not afford this kind of investment. Mona's case is an eloquent example of this kind of (class of origin related) mechanism that also contributes to perpetuating the glass ceiling in the job market.

Mona's parents always wanted their daughter to become a criminal lawyer. Although they themselves had no further formal education than the then-compulsory eight grades, they dreamt of a brighter future for their two children. To secure a better chance for their kids, they moved to the capital, Budapest, and took up all kinds of menial jobs to be able to send the children to an integrated school with quality education. Their dreams seemed to be coming true: Mona not only managed to get into a good university in Budapest, but also got onto a law course. After her graduation, and in parallel with her volunteering in the field of Roma issues in the NGO sector, she even got an internship with the help of a non-Roma middle class friend's parent in a highly successful private law firm. She did not last long there, however. After two months she decided to leave the company. This is how she explained her decision to us in the interview:

> After a few weeks of working 10 to 12 hours a day for peanuts, I just realized that I could not do it. I sat down with my boss and told him that I was sorry, but I could not manage the job financially. I could not work 10 hours a day and wait another two to three years until I started to earn success fees from the cases that I was working on. I could not sustain myself on the interns' salary. I had to pay my rent and utility bills. And then the owner of the firm said that he was very sorry that I could not 'rise [out of poverty] through them'. There was another partner in the company; he was a bit more normal. He told me that it was a pity that he was not there when I had had my job interview for this internship position because the first question, he would have asked me would have been about my family background. Knowing where I am from, he would have suggested that I did not even try this job. 'This is not for first-generation graduates', he said. (Mona, 35, leader of a Roma NGO)

6 Conclusion

In this paper we have argued that there are two main characteristics of the labour market situation of the first-in-family (FIF) Roma college graduates who participated in our research project. The first is that many of them felt that there was a low ceiling on the Hungarian labour market and in their workplaces beyond which they, as Roma, could not advance. This ceiling, be it called the 'glass ceiling' (Boyd, 2012), 'class ceiling' (Friedman & Laurison, 2020), 'job ceiling' (Ogbu, 1978) or 'ethnic ceiling' (Szalai, 2014), explains why only very few of them managed to obtain and get by in high-salaried, highly prestigious top jobs. Among our interviewees there were hardly any managers, either in the public or in the private business sector, and no doctors, lawyers, or university professors.

We cross-examined the personal experiences of our Roma interviewees about the wide prevalence of the racial glass ceiling with survey data regarding the occupational situation of Roma graduates. Our empirical findings obtained through an online survey among FIF graduates and also from the 2011 census data on Roma professionals and the 2016 micro census data on FIF graduates question the widely held belief that education for racialized minorities is one of the most important channels for achieving upward social mobility; that is, for advancing in occupational and income status.

The second characteristic of the labour-market situation of our Roma study participants is that they are segmented and concentrated in a particular part of this market; namely, in the field of Roma issues. In this field, there are jobs or functions that are created to help the disadvantaged Roma community improve their socioeconomic situation. This segmentation exists for various reasons. It is mainly driven by structural inequalities and by the belief of the non-Roma dominant society that Roma professionals can better help remedy (centuries-long) inequalities (Kóczé, 2011; 2020; Gulyás, 2021). It is, however, also partly driven by personal (constrained) choice and a feeling of collective responsibility for one's disadvantaged community of origin.

These jobs are emotionally and psychologically burdensome, with limited or no career progression and are insecure, precarious, and suffer from a 'pay penalty'. (For the same results in the case of the Black professional middle class, see Collins, 1983; for the Roma middle class Nyírő & Durst, 2018; Gulyás, 2021). The fragility of the social mobility of our interviewees who (used to) work in public administration or the civil sector serving their less privileged Roma fellows was salient in many of their narratives.

All in all, we argue that the dynamic and complex interactions of various structural barriers that hinder Roma from getting into and advancing in highly prestigious top jobs and their response or adaptation to these barriers through their self-elimination from top jobs in the mainstream economy and concentration on Roma issues (the segmented ethnoracially oriented part of the labour market) drive the existence of the racial glass ceiling. With all these empirical findings, the paper demonstrates the fallacy of the myth of meritocracy (see also Lawler & Payne, 2018; Friedman & Laurison, 2020). We argue that instead of considering mobility as an individual project of self-advancement involving moving up in the social hierarchy, where only an individual's 'objective' merits such as their educational qualifications, abilities, and skills matter, we should realize that class and racialized ethnic minority origin 'cast a long shadow over people's lives' (Friedman & Laurison, 2020). We have explored how the intersections of these categories affect career opportunities for Roma FIF graduates.

One of our main arguments is that it is not the 'deficiency culture' of the Roma or the lack of aspiration or the personality flaws of those with disadvantaged family backgrounds but rather the racialization of their minority status that ties them to less prestigious and segmented occupational positions than their White privileged counterparts with similar qualifications. The unequal distribution of occupations happens through the workings of the racial glass ceiling.

Although the intersection of racialized minority status, class, and gender play a role in the existence of the glass ceiling, racial domination seems to be so powerful that it overrides gender inequality in accessing top jobs for our Roma FIF college-graduate study participants. 'It is as if gender was less important in the context of "otherness"' (Szalai, 2014, p. 81) when it comes to the assignment of jobs available to Roma professionals in Hungary. As our research

demonstrates, coming from a Roma family background, and being of (visible) Roma origin impacts one's job opportunities and (structurally constrained) choices (Durst & Nyírő, 2019) and limits advancement in the labour market in a powerful way. Therefore, we call the phenomenon of the glass ceiling (the hidden barriers to career advancement into highly prestigious top jobs in the case of our Roma college graduates) a racial glass ceiling. With this argument, we employ a similar logic to Szalai's (2014) concept of the 'ethnic ceiling' by which she claims that through systematically distributed lower grades and messages about 'lower value' presented to Roma students, teachers (also) contribute to the development of the invisible ethnic ceiling in schools and then in the labour market – a ceiling above which children who belong to (racialized) ethnic minorities can rarely climb.

Finally, we explored six drivers or (not so) hidden mechanisms of the racial glass ceiling in the labour market. These are the following: 1. Schools' and their teachers' covert racialization and discriminative behaviour coupled with their hidden messages about the inferior status of Roma students (See also Szalai, 2014). This hugely impacts the way that Roma students and their parents think about the horizon of possibilities for Roma people in the job market. 2. Overt discrimination in the labour market by employers. 3. Tokenism – which is perceived by some of our interviewees as a covert and unwelcome means of (positive) discrimination. 4. The expectation of the duty to 'give back' to the Roma community. 5. The lack of self-efficacy originating from a long-lasting and ubiquitous experience of discrimination and from the perceived assigned inferior status of the Roma people by the dominant majority society. Last but not least, 6. Financial insecurity involving the lack of a Bank of Mum and Dad (Friedman & Laurison, 2020) to lean on while waiting to reap the income reward of educational attainments associated with taking up low-paying intern positions in highly prestigious, high-salaried private firms.

Our findings show that these are the main mechanisms that keep Roma professionals removed from the opportunities and positions available for their non-Roma majority counterparts with similar educational qualifications. The research results also draw attention to the fragility of the social mobility of a majority of our interviewees who (used to) work in public administration or the civil sector serving their less privileged Roma fellows. The changing priorities of reigning government policies, such as reducing or cancelling publicly funded programs which indirectly assisted Roma middle-class advancement in professional jobs, as we have shown above, have had a direct impact on the shrinking job opportunities of Roma professionals. This is especially concerning in circumstances when even high achieving Roma with a university degree can hardly find their way into jobs in the private, corporate sector (Árendás & Messing, 2022) – that is, into the wider, general economy (Collins, 1983) – which would provide them with a more stable basis for obtaining the rewards for their educational achievements that are measured in income and job security on the labour market.

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Appendix

Table 1 Distribution of respondents according to whether they work in the social sector by ethnicity

	Roma		non-Roma		Total	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
not working in the social services sector	29	37,7%	2746	66,2%	2775	65,7%
working in the social services sector	48	62,3%	1399	33,8%	1447	34,3%
Total	77	100,0%	4145	100,0%	4222	100,0%

Source: First Generation Graduates Online Survey, 2019–2020

Table 2 Logistic regression coefficients predicting the odds ratio of the probability of 'working in the field of social services' compared to the probability of 'not working in the field of social services' (dependent variable: not working or working in the field of social services, estimation method: Multinominal Logistic Regression)

Variables		**Exp(B)**
Age		1.01*
Ethnicity: Roma (reference: non-Roma)		3.86*
Gender: woman (reference: man)		1.02
Type of settlement (reference: Budapest)	village	2.10*
	city	1.92*
	chief town of a county	1.50*

Note: * p <0.01

Source: First Generation Graduates Online Survey, 2019–2020

Table 3 Distribution of respondents according to whether they work in the non-profit sector by ethnicity

	Roma		non-Roma		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
not working in the non-profit sector	53	67,1%	3854	89,5%	3907	89,1%
working in the non-profit sector	26	32,9%	453	10,5%	479	10,9%
Total	79	100,0%	4307	100,0%	4386	100,0%

Source: First Generation Graduates Online Survey, 2019–2020

Table 4 Logistic regression coefficients predicting the odds ratio of the probability of 'working in the non-profit sector' compared to the probability of 'not working in the non-profit sector' (dependent variable: not working or working in the non-profit sector, estimation method: Multinominal Logistic Regression)

Variables		Exp(B)
Age		1.01*
Ethnicity: Roma (reference: non-Roma)		4.28*
Gender: woman (reference: man)		0.89
Type of settlement (reference: Budapest)	village	0.86
	city	0.83
	chief town of a county	0.86

Note: * $p<0.01$

Source: First Generation Graduates Online Survey, 2019–2020

Table 5 Distribution of respondents according to whether they work in the public sector by ethnicity

	Roma		non-Roma		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
not working in the public sector	36	45,6%	1707	39,6%	1743	39,7%
working in the public sector	43	54,4%	2600	60,4%	2643	60,3%
Total	79	100,0%	4307	100,0%	4386	100,0%

Source: First Generation Graduates Online Survey, 2019–2020

Table 6 Logistic regression coefficients predicting the odds ratio of the probability of 'working in the public sector' compared to the probability of 'not working in the public sector' (dependent variable: not working or working in the public sector, estimation method: Multinominal Logistic Regression)

Variables		**Exp(B)**
Age		1.04*
Ethnicity: Roma (reference: non-Roma)		0.99
Gender: woman (reference: man)		1.07
Type of settlement (reference: Budapest)	village	1.65*
	city	1.75*
	chief town of a county	1.62*

Note: * $p<0.01$

Source: First Generation Graduates Online Survey, 2019–2020

Table 7 Distribution of respondents according to whether they work in the private sector by ethnicity

	Roma		**non-Roma**		**Total**	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
not working in the private sector	63	79,7%	2987	69,4%	3050	69,5%
working in the private sector	16	20,3%	1320	30,6%	1336	30,5%
Total	79	100,0%	4307	100,0%	4386	100,0%

Source: First Generation Graduates Online Survey, 2019–2020

Table 8 Logistic regression coefficients predicting the odds ratio of the probability of 'working in the private sector' compared to the probability of 'not working in the private sector' (dependent variable: not working or working in the private sector, estimation method: Multinominal Logistic Regression)

Variables		**Exp(B)**
Age		0.95*
Ethnicity: Roma (reference: non-Roma)		0.42*
Gender: woman (reference: man)		0.91
Type of settlement (reference: Budapest)	village	0.56*
	city	0.55*
	chief town of a county	0.59*

Note: * $p < 0.01$

Source: First Generation Graduates Online Survey, 2019–2020

Table 9 Distribution of employed Roma graduates and total graduate population according to main occupational groups,* 2011

Occupational groups	Roma graduates		Total graduate population	
	N	%	N	%
1 – Managers	179	9.5%	119 742	12.0%
2 – Professionals	1063	56.7%	565 613	56.9%
3 – Technicians and associate professionals	317	16.9%	175 320	17.6%
4 – Office and management (customer services) occupations	75	4.0%	42 255	4.2%
5 – Commercial and services occupations	125	6.7%	50 051	5.0%
6 – Agricultural and forestry occupations	10	0.5%	8 064	0.8%
7 – Industry and construction industry occupations	13	0.7%	10 437	1.0%
8 – Machine operators, assembly workers, drivers of vehicles	22	1.2%	6 094	0.6%
9 – (Elementary) occupations not requiring qualifications	56	3.0%	10 505	1.1%
0 – Armed forces occupations	15	0.8%	6 556	0.7%
Total	1875	99.9%	994 637	100.0%

* Hungarian Standard Classification of Occupations, FEOR-08*

Source: KSH, Census 2011

Table 10 Distribution of employed Roma graduates and total graduate population in occupational group of 1 – managers, 2011

Occupational groups	Roma graduates		Total graduate population	
	N	%	N	%
11 – Legislators, heads of administration, and heads of special-interest organisations	22	12%	9 538	8%
12 – Managing directors and chief executives of business organisations and budgetary institutions	...		2 667	2%
13 – Production and specialized services managers	126	70%	78 484	66%
14 – Heads of units assisting business activities	31	17%	29 053	24%
Total	179	100%	119 742	100%

Source: KSH, Census 2011

... data not disclosable

Table 11 Distribution of employed Roma graduates and total graduate population in the occupational group of 13 – production and specialised services managers, 2011

Occupational groups	Average gross earnings of full-time employees by occupation [HUF/person/month] in 2021	Roma graduates		Total graduate population	
		N	%	N	%
1311 - Agricultural, forestry, fisheries, hunting production manager	595 104	3 409	4%	...	
1312 - Manufacturing and mining manager	962 901	11 405	15%	11	9%
1313 - Construction manager	597 861	5 116	7%	10	8%
1321 - Supply, distribution, storing manager	791 861	5 453	7%	3	3%
1322 - Information and communications technology service manager	1 236 077	4 292	5%	7	6%
1323 - Banking manager	1 300 424	3 114	4%	...	
1324 - Social welfare manager	490 133	2 550	3%	10	8%
1325 - Childcare service manager	490 422	308	0%	–	
1326 - Aged care service manager	475 931	355	0%	...	
1327 - Health service manager	1 388 181	4 393	6%	7	6%
1328 - Educational manager	651 682	9 940	13%	20	17%
1329 - Other services manager	729 743	4 410	6%	14	12%
1331 - Hotel manager	584 324	1 089	1%	...	
1332 - Restaurant manager	389 002	1 794	2%	7	6%
1333 - Sales and marketing manager	605 656	12 832	16%	8	7%
1334 - Business service manager	1 051 905	2 865	4%	8	7%
1335 - Cultural centre manager	587 741	1 793	2%	9	8%
1336 - Sports and recreational centre manager	594 889	467	1%	...	
1339 - Other commercial, catering and similar service manager	521 036	2 899	4%	4	3%
Total		78 484	100%	118	100%

Source: KSH, Census 2011, https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/mun/hu/mun0059.html

– the observed statistical phenomenon did not occur
... data not disclosable