

# SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION OF ROMA GIRLS IN SERBIA

RESULTS



**NSHC**  
NOVOSADSKI HUMANITARNI CENTAR

# SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION OF ROMA GIRLS IN SERBIA



**Published by:**

CARE Serbia  
Scerbinova 6/20, Belgrade

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Novi Sad, March 2011

## ACRONYMS

**PW** - Power Within program

**NSHC** - Novosadski humanitarni centar

**MICS** - Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys

**REF** - Roma Education Fund (Fond za obrazovanje Roma)

**DILS** - Delivery of Improved Local Services  
(Pružanje unapređenih usluga na lokalnom nivou)

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# INTRODUCTION

The survey of education and social inclusion of Roma girls in Serbia was conducted in partnership between CARE Serbia and Novi Sad Humanitarian Center, from October 2010 to January 2011. The research was based on the experience gained in working on empowerment of Roma girls, in order to complete their education, through the “Chances and Choices for Roma Girls” project (2008-2010). The aim was to gain a comprehensive insight into the current state of primary school education of Roma girls in Serbia, so that these data are used for planning and implementation of the program on the empowerment of girls from marginalized groups in the next period (the program “Power Within<sup>1</sup>”). We believe that the results of this analysis will serve, not only for planning future programs and projects, but also as a means of advocating the improvement of the educational status of Roma girls.

Marijana Šerer, Project Manager

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

The survey was conducted in Novi Sad (Voivodina), Kraljevo (central Serbia) and Nis (south Serbia). In all three target cities there is a significant number of the Roma among domicile population, but also among those who are internally displaced from Kosovo and Metohija.

With this survey, we tried to get answers to the questions related to the availability and quality of education for Roma girls, but also preschool and primary school education, progressing to higher grades and enrolment in secondary schools, the possibilities of education for older girls who did not attend primary school, as well as gender-sensitive policies and programs in education, and their influence on the education of Roma girls. We were also interested in learning more about the social inclusion of Roma girls, their social networks and role models, as well as the ways Roma community perceives the influence of tradition and customs on the opportunity for education of girls. A special part of the survey was dedicated to the detailed analysis of strategies, legislation, policies, research and studies of education of Roma in Serbia.

The study covers nine primary schools in targeted cities, which are attended by a large number of students from Roma population: PS “Vuk Karadzic” , PS “Sreten Mladenović Mika” and PS “Radoje Domanović” (Nis), PS “Dimitrije Tucović”, PS “The Fourth Kraljevo Squad “ and PS “Jova Kursula” (Kraljevo) and PS “József Attila”, PS “Dositej Obradović” and PS “Đusko Radović” (Novi Sad). The study of school attendance of Roma Children was conducted in these schools, as well as the study of knowledge, attitudes and practices of teaching and professional staff. Roma communities were also identified in every city, and their representatives participated in focus groups.

The survey was organized in four interrelated parts:

a) **Desk survey** of the legal framework for the education of Roma children in Serbia, the accessibility of education and the inclusion of students from vulnerable groups, mechanisms for the prevention of discrimination in education, participation and inclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> Power Within (PW) - CARE USA program aims to strengthen 10 million girls around the world to complete primary education and develop leadership skills. Providing vulnerable and marginalized girls the opportunity to achieve their full potential through multiple activities, PW intends to remove barriers and improve the quality of education; provide the opportunity for extracurricular activities that develop leadership skills, social networks and civic activity; build coalitions, improve the legal framework and influence public policies; increase the capacity of governments and civil society to provide quality education and to protect the rights of all children; and to improve practices in the community in relation to gender norms and attitudes.

This part of the research was realized by examining and analyzing strategies, laws, action plans, and results of the research on education of the Roma in Serbia, and other relevant documents;

b) The study of **attitudes, knowledge and practice of the teaching and professional staff** in 9 target schools in relation to education of Roma children and gender issues, and their impact on education.

A standardized questionnaire, composed of three parts was used for gathering data:

- The first part aims at determining the practices and knowledge in schools about gender-specific education and programs that deal with the topics of gender tolerance and gender politics in general. The second part of the questionnaire deals with the problems and specificities of education of Roma children, but also the problems of inclusive education which has been introduced in schools in Serbia starting from this school year.
- The third part of the questionnaire was to determine the level of prejudice of teachers and expert associates towards the Roma and Roma girls, by using a scale of attitudes, which has already been successfully used in research on the territory of Serbia.

The examinees were persons who work in professional services (pedagogue, psychologist and social worker), class teachers of all 3rd and 4th grades, and class teachers of all 7th and 8th grades in schools. Also, the pedagogical / Roma assistants submitted their observations on the functioning of Roma girls and boys in school;

c) The survey of **school attendance of Roma pupils** was conducted in three towns in Serbia: Novi Sad, Nis and Kraljevo, by examining the registers in these schools. In schools in Novi Sad the survey was conducted from March to May 2010 and in schools in Nis and Kraljevo in November 2010. In each city, three primary schools were included:

- in schools in Novi Sad, the data are referring to the period from 1994/95 to 2009/10 school year;
- in schools in Nis the data are referring to the period from 2000/01 to 2009/10 school year;
- in schools in Kraljevo the data were gathered for the period between 1992/93 and 2009/10 school year;

d) **Focus groups** with Roma girls and boys of primary school age and their parents, as well as non-Roma pupils and their parents, were organized in order to obtain qualitative data related to access to education, participation in community life, social networks, obstacles in education and ways to overcome them.

12 focus groups were organized (6 in Novi Sad, 3 in Nis, and 3 in the Kraljevo) with the total of 157 participants. In order to allow each group to talk freely and express their opinion, focus groups were conducted separately with the girls (4), boys (4) and with parents - mothers and fathers together (4). Of the total number of focus groups, in order to compare the results, three were held with non-Roma girls, boys and parents. The conversations were recorded.

During the focus groups, participatory techniques such as group discussion, daily line for obtaining data on the distribution and amount of daily duties, sociogram, "fish and rocks", etc were used. The daily line is a participatory technique used to obtain information about the schedule and duration of activities or events in a given period (day). "Sociogram" technique (social network) is used to show who Roma girls consider as a person / group with the greatest influence on creating their vision of the world and their position in society.

## RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

# I) ROMA GIRLS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN SERBIA: REVIEW OF STRATEGIES, LEGISLATION, POLICIES, RESEARCH AND STUDIES

*Zlatica Jović*

## INTRODUCTION

There are many problems and barriers that Roma children are faced with and that make the education of most Roma children difficult and inaccessible: limited access to the educational system, high rate of dispersal and leaving the educational system early, poor quality of education, overrepresentation to special schools, classes, or schools for adult education, overexposure to different forms of hidden or open discrimination and segregation, disrespect of the Roma identity.

Besides all the mentioned difficulties and obstacles, it has been observed that there are specific problems when it comes to education of Roma girls, which make the access to their education even more difficult.

Roma women are the least educated group of women with the highest percentage of illiteracy, most of them are formally illiterate or without any qualification. In most cases, Roma women have no rights to make independent decisions about their education. Although they have better academic achievement than boys, during puberty they often leave school under the pressure of patriarchal traditions and stereotypes that 'girls do not need education', especially not the higher levels. Girls are expected to marry early and look after their family and household.

The combination of poverty and patriarchal tradition often leads to the fact that Roma women remain in 'a vicious circle of poverty'. Low level of education and professional training reduces the chances for successful integration of Roma women and contributes to their particular vulnerability, greater exposure to discrimination, violence and health disturbance.

Adoption of laws, strategies, action plans, as well as the signing of international conventions, is a prerequisite for the systematic solution of these problems. Serbia has adopted a series of regulations and strategic documents that present a framework for the education of Roma girls, and that are related to improving the situation of Roma, training and education, gender equality, children's rights and fight against discrimination. Adoption of the first strategic document by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, which relates to the improvement of the position of Roma, and which deals with the specific problems of Roma women, is certainly a positive example, but not sufficient.

Progress in improving access to education is only possible through a systematic, planned and coordinated action of all segments of society engaged in education and the position of Roma men and women.

This study was conducted in order to gather and analyze as many relevant sources and secondary data, to verify and document the specific situation of Roma girls in the educational system in Serbia.

The study consisted of reviews of literature and available resources, as well as gathering secondary data, quantitative and qualitative. Literature review included analysis of documents dealing with general education issues and documents dealing with education of Roma. The relevant legislation and subordinate regulations, strategies, action plans, research and reports have been studied.

During the research, we faced with multiple limitations. Lack of relevant and reliable data on ethnicity is a problem that has been pointed out in most strategic documents and reports. In Serbia, as in many other countries, there are no reliable data about Roma in educational system. The main reasons for the lack of reliable and valid data are: still present reluctance of Roma to declare themselves as Roma, which is a consequence of the negative prejudices and stereotypes; misinterpretation that every collection of data on ethnicity of students is prohibited by the Law on Basic Education from 2004; the Unique Information System in Education of the Republic of Serbia<sup>1)</sup> is still in the process of development, and at this moment it is still not possible to obtain reliable data from the database. Furthermore, although it has been five years since the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) began, the systematic methodology for monitoring the results achieved in all areas of the Decade, including education, has still not been established.

## **1. Context - Basic indicators of availability, limitations and barriers to quality education of Roma children**

### **1.1. The Roma population, the educational status of Roma and the estimated percentage of Roma children not attending school**

The total number of Roma population in Serbia is not known. In accordance with the laws and regulations that promote the respect for human and civil rights, a person can be considered a member of a certain national community or ethnic group only if they declare it themselves<sup>2)</sup>.

According to the Census of 2002, 108,913, or 1.44% of Serbian citizens declared that they were members of the Roma minority. Non-governmental organizations, as well as the government itself, assume that the number of Roma in Serbia is at least twice as big as the number listed. The estimates of the number of Roma are significantly different from the official data, but also depending on the source: from 250,000 to 500,000 Roma<sup>3)</sup>, 350,000<sup>4)</sup>, between 400,000 and 450,000<sup>5)</sup>. Some estimates are much higher: between 600,000 and 700,000 Roma (The Romani Matrix<sup>6)</sup>). The estimated number that was mostly agreed on was 450,000, and it is used in official documents.

The most detailed survey<sup>7)</sup> has listed 247,591 Roma living in Roma and other smaller settlements. According to the 2002 Census, the Roma are the third largest national community, and based on the estimated number of 450,000, they are the largest minority ethnic group and comprise about 6% of the total population.

Roma are the youngest ethnic group in Serbia, with the average age of 27.5 years (among the general population average age is 40.2 years). 41.2% of the Roma population in Serbia is under the age of 20, and 71.8% under the age of 40<sup>8)</sup>.

1 Available at [www.mp.gov.rs](http://www.mp.gov.rs)

2 Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2009

3 Open Society Institute, 2007

4 Child Rights Centre, 2006

5 Kočić, Rakočević & Miljević, 2003

6 Jakšić & Bašić, 2002

7 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2002

8 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2002

There is a significant difference between the Roma and the rest of population in the years of attending school. Low educational achievement is most pronounced with Roma population, and later it becomes one of the reasons that poverty is passed from generation to generation.

According to data from Census 2002, 61.9% of Roma did not complete primary school, 29% completed primary school, 7.8% completed secondary school, and only 0.3% acquired high or higher education.

The educational structure of the total Roma population is probably even lower, due to the fact that least registered are the residents of insanitary settlements.

The average length of schooling of Roma men/women is 5.5 years, whereas the rest of the population from their neighbourhood attends school for 11 years on average.<sup>9)</sup>

The educational structure of the Roma is significantly lower compared to the majority population, and most other minorities, except the Albanians, Vlachs and Muslims. Lower education of women compared to men is even more pronounced than in other communities.<sup>10)</sup>

Roma women are the least educated group of women with the highest percentage of illiteracy - about 80% of Roma women are officially illiterate with the upper limit of four grades of primary school, without any qualifications.<sup>11)</sup>

Given that the number of Roma population, the number of children and the young people who should be educated on the different educational levels is not known, it is calculated by applying the age structure from the 2002 Census to the estimated number of 450,000 Roma. Thus, the estimated total population at preschool age could be about 70,000, at primary school age about 74,000, at secondary about 41,000. There are other estimates, for example, the research by the Open Society Institute, based on secondary data sources, estimates that the number of Roma children under the age of 18 could be between 44,375 and 194,818.<sup>12)</sup>

It is difficult to estimate how many Roma children never enrol school, and how many of them leave school. According to data from different sources, it is evident that this number is pronouncedly large:

- Children who do not attend the compulsory preschool program (38%);<sup>13)</sup>
- Children who do not attend primary school (26%);<sup>14)</sup>
- Children who have left primary school (74% enter primary school, whereas 73% of that number drop out of school);<sup>15)</sup>
- Children who leave high school (38%).

Reasons for not enrolling and / or leaving school later are numerous and varied, and they include family financial situation, lack of adaptation of educational institutions and high level of discrimination in them, as well as the lack of help for children to master the school material. Exclusion from the educational system is only one of the indicators of the general marginalization of Roma community.

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9 Data from a questionnaire which included 1580 Roma, UNDP, 2005

10 World Bank, 2004

11 The challenges of the Decade of Roma, Bahtalo Drom, 2005

12 Open Society Institute, 2006

13 56 Leagues for the Decade of Roma, 2007

14 Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys – MICS 3

15 Roma children in special education in Serbia, Open Society Fund, 2010

## 1.2. The coverage at the preschool level

Pre-school education may include children from six months to the age of five and a half; it is not compulsory and parents pay for one part of costs, depending on their income. In the period between five and a half and six and a half years, children attend compulsory pre-school preparatory program that takes place in preschools institutions or in primary schools. Children are enrolled in first grade between the age of six and seven years.

According to data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 34% of children under the age of seven attended preschool in 2006.<sup>16)</sup> Total percentage of children included in all forms of institutional preschool education is increasing (32% in 2002/03, and 35.4% in 2007/08). The official data from the Statistical Office testify to the small number of children included in institutional preschool education: there were 178,389 children in 8,345 educational groups in 2007/08, or 35.4% compared to the official data on the number of children of the same age.

According to the Living Standards Measurement Survey AŽS/2007, preschool institutions were attended by 38.1% of children aged 3-5 years (39% were boys and 37% girls). There were also 83% of children aged 6-7 years attending preschools (81% were boys and 85% girls). Over 96% of children attend public institutions.<sup>17)</sup>

Roma children attend pre-school eight times less than the rest of population. According to data from MICS 3<sup>18)</sup>, in Serbia, every third child aged 3-5 attends some form of organized educational programs in early childhood.

Poor coverage at the national level is even lower among Roma - 3.9% of children from Roma settlements are included in preschool programs at the age of 36-59 months, as opposed to 33.4% of children from other communities. There are no data that even one Roma child under the age of 3 is covered by preschool education. When it comes to pre-school program one year before the first grade, the biggest difference in coverage compared to other populations is the coverage of Roma children and children from the poorest households: only 62% of Roma children and 77% of the poorest children have attended preschool programs for one year before the first grade.

When it comes to coverage of educational programs at preschool age, no significant differences related to the sex of the children, region and type of settlement have been determined in this study.

Since 2006-2007 school year, a *preparatory preschool program (PPP)*<sup>19)</sup> has been introduced; it is free and compulsory for all children from the age of five and a half to six and a half, for a minimum of four hours a day for six months. Since 2009, PPP has been extended to at least nine months. The program is carried out immediately before school and on the basis of attendance children receive a certificate as a prerequisite for entering the first grade of primary school.

In 2006 National Education Council adopted *The Regulation on the basic principles of preschool program*, which includes the PPP.

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16 Pešikan & Ivić, 2008

17 Study of Living Standards - Serbia 2002-2007

18 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey - MICS 3, implemented in Serbia by the Statistical Office of Serbia and Strategic Marketing, with support from UNICEF. The questionnaire was created for the MICS project and designed to collect data on the status of children and women in countries around the world

19 The Law on Basic Education, 2003

In *The report on the analysis of the influence of introducing PPP*<sup>20)</sup>, it has been stated that there are significant differences in data about the total number of children included in the PPP in 2007-2008, and depending on the source it ranges from 83% to 99.6%. The report lists data from the Living Standards Measurement Survey from 2008, that the coverage of Roma children in the sample was 45%, but also the preliminary data on evaluation of the effects and application of PPP (ZUOV, 2008), that only 20% of educational groups in the sample included Roma children. The authors conclude that: it is not known how many Roma children have been covered, i.e. have not been covered, nor what is the level of the dispersal of children; the duration of the PPP for Roma children is the legal minimum, and for a number of children it is even shorter; Roma parents are not highly motivated to send their children into the PPP, the status of Roma teaching assistants who, according to the implementers of PPP, contribute to better and easier work with Roma children is not regulated, the basics of preschool programs are not sufficiently developed or adapted to work with Roma children, and the effects of attending PPP on children's achievement in school still cannot be accurately determined.

In *The Report of the League for the Decade*<sup>21)</sup> it is said that in the school year 2006-2007, PPP covers 89% of children from general, and 62% of children from the Roma population. This percentage would be lower if there were no activities of Roma and other non-governmental organizations and projects in which cooperation between the preschool institutions and the Roma community has been established. There are examples of some preschool institutions issuing certificates even based on the shorter and irregular attendance, or at the request of local governments they organize short programs for children of Roma nationality during summer.

### 1.3. Primary education

According to the latest announcements of the Ministry of Education<sup>22)</sup> and other representatives of the Government of the Republic of Serbia<sup>23)</sup>, starting from this school year (2010/2011.) by applying the provisions of the Law on Basic Education System, the access to education for children from vulnerable groups has considerably been made easier: the number of for children with disabilities who entered first grade has increased by 6.57% compared to the previous school year, and the coverage of Roma children has increased by about 9.87%.

All the data on the coverage of Roma students are available on the basis of internal data of the Ministry of Education<sup>24)</sup> for school year 2002-2003 and they show that there were 14,232 students enrolled in regular schools at the time. According to the number of Roma in the 2002 Census, it would mean that about 90% of the students of relevant age were covered, but according to the total estimated population less than 20% of Roma children attend primary school.

According to MICS 3 data<sup>25)</sup>, 66% of Roma children and 94% of the total population of children enter first grade at the right age, 74% of Roma children, and 98% of children of the overall population, aged 7-14 years attend primary school; 28% of Roma children, and 98% of the total population of children, attend the eighth grade.<sup>26)</sup>

Similarly as in the case of the results concerning the enrolment rate, the only category in which this percentage is much lower is the category of Roma children. In primary school attendance rate is 74% with this population.

20 Pešikan & Ivić, 2008

21 Annual Report of the League for the Decade 2007

22 Implementation of the action plan for Roma integration in pre-university education, Dr Tinde Kovač-Cerović, 2010

23 Inclusive Education in Serbia, Tanja Ranković, 2010

24 World Bank, 2004

25 MICS provides the primary data, most of the other documents use secondary or tertiary data from other studies.

26 Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys – MICS 3.

On average, there are no significant differences between boys and girls in terms of primary school attendance, when it comes to the overall population. However, the exceptions are Roma households, where 76% of boys compared to 71% of girls attend primary school. Among Roma children, age of the child has a great influence on school attendance rate. Attendance rate is the lowest in the first grade. The maximum value is achieved at the age of 8 and 10, and thereafter a significant decline is observed with the eleven-year-old girls and twelve-year-old boys.

Almost all children who start the first grade reach the fifth grade. The only exceptions are children from Roma settlements. The data indicate that only 50% of Roma children, who enter first grade, reach the fifth grade. No other significant differences have been perceived. It has to be emphasized that this number includes children who repeat a year, but eventually manage to reach the fifth grade. At a time when the research was conducted<sup>27)</sup>, 91% of children who were supposed to have completed primary school (14 years) attended the last grade of primary school. Significantly lower percentage of Roma children (28%) attended the last grade of primary school.

This study has determined that most children, who successfully complete the last grade of primary school, continue their schooling and attend the first grade of secondary school. No significant impact on the continuation of education has been noticed in terms of gender, region or socio-economic conditions. When it comes to the ratio of girls to boys in terms of the total population, it has been determined that there was no difference in attending elementary school (this indicator raises to considerable values when it comes to high school). Inequalities between girls and boys are only expressed with the Roma in Roma settlements, where the GPI index<sup>28)</sup> for primary and secondary schools is 0.94 and 0.42.

The above listed problems in the education of Roma girls were also confirmed by the results of research conducted in 2009 by Novi Sad Humanitarian Center in partnership with CARE Serbia.

The research conducted in 2009<sup>29)</sup> shows that one part of the identified barriers in the education of Roma girls is referred to the general obstacles when it comes to the education of Roma, whether they are girls or boys. Specific barriers that affect only Roma girls are associated with the gender roles of girls and women in the Roma community: the traditional gender patterns that do not encourage women's education, lack of broader support for the continuation of education of girls, keeping their virginity and early marriage, as well as specific housework (babysitting younger children).

#### **1.4. Secondary education**

It is estimated that only 10% of Roma pupils from Roma settlements attend secondary (as opposed to 84% in the overall population).<sup>30)</sup> Here, with the students of Roma nationality there are significant differences between the sexes: the percentage of boys who attend secondary school is twice the percentage of girls (14% and 6%), which is completely opposite to the rest of the population, where the percentage of girls who attend secondary school is a bit higher .

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27 Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys – MICS 3, 2005

28 Gender Parity Index (GPI): indicator of differences in values obtained in women and men, the GPI of 1 indicates the existence of parity between the sexes, GPI, which is between 1 and 0 means a disparity in favor of boys, a GPI greater than 1 indicates a disparity in favor of girls

29 Research within the “Chances and Choices for Roma Girls” project in Serbia, funded by CARE USA - PCTFI Fund, implemented by CARE Serbia and the Novi Sad Humanitarian Centre.

30 Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys – MICS 3

Among the poorest strata of society, less than two thirds of children attend secondary school, and among children from Roma settlements, only 4.8% of girls and 12.2% of boys attend secondary school.<sup>31)</sup>

Roma, who continue their education mainly enrol in vocational schools for which it is not necessary to take the qualifying exam, which can last 2, 3 or 4 years. A very small number of Roma children enrol in high schools and secondary vocational schools that are more respectable, and provide better opportunities for further education and employment.<sup>32)</sup>

The motivation of Roma pupils to attend secondary education is not only low, but almost non-existent in vocational education, especially in professions that are most popular in the majority population (medical professions, food processing, design). The largest number of Roma students are in technical schools - traffic, machinery, technology, and in the schools for the processing and design of textiles, leather goods, hairdressing, administration. There are only a few of them in high schools, schools for nurses, chemical and pharmaceutical professions, or in agricultural and food processing professions.<sup>33)</sup>

According to REF data<sup>34)</sup>, 8.3% of young Roma enrolled in three-year and four-year secondary education in 2004. According to the research by the Child Rights Centre only 0.96% of the young from Roma communities complete secondary school (in the sample that was tested).

Data from the Ministry of Education (ME) indicate that only 16% of the Roma, as opposed to 95-96% of all graduated primary school students, enter secondary school.

According to data of ME, 551 boys and girls from the Roma community enrolled in secondary schools in 2004-2005 school years by using the measures of affirmative action conducted by the ME in cooperation with the National Council of the Roma minority, the Secretariat for Roma Strategy, and with the support of Roma NGOs in the field.

Within the survey *Measures of affirmative action for Roma in Serbia*<sup>35)</sup>, it is stated that about 500 Roma students enrolled in secondary schools through the application of these measures, of which 185 in 2008-2009 school year, which is a small number of students in relation to the estimated population of Roma. The manner in which these measures are now implemented prevents young Roma in attending prestigious high schools, because due to the low achievement in primary school, and 30 points added after, they cannot reach the number required for enrolment.

This study emphasizes the need to define procedures and mechanisms for implementation of the measures of affirmative action, to support students when entering schools and monitoring their achievement in school.

According to the data from the Secretariat for the Implementation of Strategies to Improve Roma Position<sup>36)</sup>, the number of Roma secondary school students who enrolled in secondary schools by means of affirmative measures has a growing trend in the last eight years: in 2003 the number of enrolled Roma students was only 30, while in 2010 that number was 250.

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31 Condition of children in Serbia, UNICEF, 2006

32 Roma Children in Special Education in Serbia, 2010

33 School of Equal Opportunities - Minimum educational interventions for the successful inclusion of students in secondary education, the Open Society Institute, 2010

34 The Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2007

35 Affirmative Action for Roma in Education in Serbia, 2010

36 The application of affirmative measures in enrolment of Roma students, Luan Koko, 2010

In addition to affirmative action, the second most important project / policy of systematic character, is the scholarship programme and mentoring support to high school Roma students in Vojvodina, which has increased the number of Roma students in four-year secondary schools by four (in 2006/2007 the number of Roma students was 158, in 2009/2010 the number is over 633). Dropping out of school was reduced from 7% to about 3% and students' academic achievement has been significantly increased.<sup>37)</sup>

Secondary vocational education is very important for the Roma, considering that most of them have to find a job as soon as possible. The importance of vocational education was highlighted in the Poverty Reduction Strategy in Serbia, because it has been determined that the poor and the unemployed are those people who have no education, no profession or occupation which is not required in the labour market. The Strategy of development of vocational education in the Republic of Serbia was adopted in 2006. In accordance with the vision and mission of the future of education, the following goals were set: education and training should provide the possibility of full social participation to each individual, improve the quality of life, personal choice, employment, the possibility of continuous professional development and the possibility of a higher quality of life in a healthy environment.

### **1. 5. Adult education for Roma**

REF-Data for 2004 show that only 0.9% of the young Roma are included in tertiary education.<sup>38)</sup>

The survey *Measures of Affirmative Action for Roma in Serbia*, states that less than 200 Roma students enrolled in state colleges. The application of these measures faced a number of difficulties, one of which is later enrolment of Roma students in comparison to other students after the beginning of school year.

Adult education has been totally neglected for many years in Serbia, almost nonexistent in the formal, and with a low offer in the informal education system. The idea of lifelong learning, as well as the need for additional training and retraining, has conditioned the adoption of adult education in the Republic of Serbia in 2006.<sup>39)</sup> This strategy under the education implies all formal and informal forms of education intended for persons over 18 who do not have the status of pupils i.e. students in formal or informal education.

Roma are significantly represented in schools for basic adult education. These schools are intended for people who have not attended or completed compulsory education and are older than 15, which is the legal limit for attending regular primary schools.

### **1.6. Academic achievement of children from Roma community**

Child Rights Centre conducted the research in 2006 on a sample of 76 schools. According to their data on the total number of students who repeated a grade, from 13% to 57% were Roma children.

According to the data from the Ministry of Education for 2002-2003 school year, the number of Roma students from the first to the eighth grade is reduced three times, from 3,206 in the first grade to 944 in the eighth grade. Although it is not known how many started the first grade in each generation of students, the trend of reducing the number of students is obvious.

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37 Marija Aleksandrovic, the project "Inclusion of Roma pupils in secondary schools in Vojvodina", 2010

38 The government of the Republic of Serbia, 2007

39 Strategy for Adult Education in the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Serbia, 2005 Available at <http://www.mps.sr.gov.rs>

The data from the national testing of pupils at the end of third grade in 2003-2004 school year, which was conducted by the Office of Evaluation of Quality Education, show that Roma students in comparison to the general population, are far less successful: general average mark (1 is the lowest, and 5 is the highest) of Roma students was 3.25 (4.36 of the other students); average mark of Roma students for Serbian language was 2.79 (other students 4.01), the average mark of Roma students in mathematics was 2.79 (other students 3.75). Nearly 60% of Roma pupils belonged to the category of 20% of students with the weakest result in Serbian language and mathematics tests. On the math test, only 4.1% of Roma pupils were among the top twenty percent of the students. In the Serbian language test 2.1% of Roma pupils were among the 20% of the students with the best result.

One possible indicator of success of Roma in compulsory education is the number of Roma students in individual classes of elementary school. The REF Report for Serbia, *Needs Assessment*, provides information on the number of Roma students in certain classes of elementary schools for in 2002-03 school years. These data indicate that a large number of Roma students who enrol in the first grade, do not pass the second and third grade, but the first two years about 40 % of Roma students drop out. Between 50 and 60% of those who enrol in the first grade actually pass in the third, fourth and fifth grade, whereas the sixth grade is attended by approximately 40% of Roma students who were initially enrolled. This number is reduced to only 30% of students who pass in the seventh and eighth grade. According to these data, it could be concluded that only about 30% of Roma students who enrol in the first grade, actually complete primary school.

Another possible indicator of school results of Roma students are school grades. On the basis of one-off tests on a representative sample of schools (National testing of the third grade pupils), the data on school grades of Roma students and non Roma population in the first three grades of elementary school were collected.<sup>40)</sup> These data indicate a significant difference in school achievement between Roma and non-Roma pupils in mathematics and Serbian. At the end of school year, the majority of Roma students (45-55%) have the lowest passing mark (2). Only between 5 and 10% of Roma pupils receive the highest mark (5), whereas over 40% of non-Roma pupils receive this mark in the first three grades, and in both subjects. The difference in school achievement is also visible in the number of students who, at the end of school year, got the bad mark (1). Among the pupils of Roma nationality it is between 7 and 11% for Serbian and between 10 and 14% for math, while among non-Roma pupils that number is less than 1%. Gender is an important factor in school achievement of Roma and non-Roma. Both Roma and non Roma girls have higher achievement than boys, although the improvement of Roma girls, as they approach the third grade, also coincides with the time when many of them quit the educational system.

Third possible indicator of academic achievement of Roma students are their results on standardized tests used in National testing. The average success of Roma students in the math test is 366 points, i.e. 134 points below the national average, whilst their average success in Serbian language is 346 points, i.e. 154 points below the national average. International studies (such as TIMSS and PISA) have come to the conclusion that one school year leads to the improvement of students for, approximately, 60 points on a scale that was used in the National tests. After three years of schooling about 50% of Roma students do not master the most basic knowledge and basic concepts, and are not able to apply mathematical knowledge in simple situations. The analysis of the achievements of Roma students in the National testing in Serbian language shows similarities with the testing of mathematical skills. Not even after three years of schooling, about 56% of Roma pupils do not acquire basic knowledge and skills in Serbian language (below the level E), whilst at the national level, it occurs in 14% of the cases.

40 Baucal, National Testing of Students

The fourth indicator of school achievement of Roma students is the number of students who repeat a year. Available data show that at the national level the repetition rate is 1%, while among Roma students in the first three grades of elementary school, this rate is 11%.<sup>41)</sup>

These four indicators suggest that there is a significantly lower achievement of Roma students in the first three grades of elementary school. It is likely that this gap is further widening in the higher grades. A possible explanation for the lower achievement is their social background: they are from poor families and have parents whose educational level is lower in comparison to other children's parents. However, the analysis of achievement in mathematics of Roma and non-Roma students with similar socio-economic origin suggests that differences in achievement exist, although about 60% of determined differences between Roma and non-Roma students cannot be explained by socio-economic factors. These results suggest that one part of the explanation of why Roma children achieve lower scores may be a lower quality of education provided to Roma children in primary schools.<sup>42)</sup>

## 1.7. Discrimination and segregation of Roma in education

### 1.7.1. Discrimination against Roma in education system

The results of the survey Public opinion on discrimination and inequality in Serbia show that the discrimination against Roma in Serbia is present and that the public is aware of that. Besides Roma, the most discriminated people in Serbia are the poor and persons with disabilities. Members of these groups feel discrimination in the field of employment, career, acquiring health, legal and social protection, political activity, education, and housing.<sup>43)</sup>

In *The Strategy for Improving Roma Education in Serbia*, it is stated that discrimination is one of the main obstacles to equal access to quality education for the Roma. The Roma are exposed to various forms of discrimination, such as unjustified referral to special schools, unequal treatment by teachers and school administration, and even harassment or abuse by other children and parents of non-Roma ethnicity.

Some forms of discrimination are visible and obvious (for example, referral of Roma children at the age of 8-9 in school for adult education), but there are those forms of discrimination that are not as evident (for example, when teachers do not encourage Roma children to learn and progress, mostly because of the negative stereotypes about Roma; teachers often have lower expectations from Roma in comparison to other students, which affects their results). In any case, there are indications that, in the educational system, discrimination against the Roma are expressed and that it is one of the main reasons why many Roma children are excluded from the educational system and why many of them leave school so early or finish school with low educational attainment. Although they are often described as "children's teasing", conflicts with peers, make the school environment hostile towards Roma students.

The survey conducted in families from 56 Roma settlements with 2737 children attending 78 schools,<sup>44)</sup> provides information on how many children complained to their parents about the insults because of their ethnicity. Parents estimated that the school took adequate measures in 226 from 345 reported cases of being offended by other children, and in 35 of 56 cases

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41 Baucal, National Testing of Students

42 Baucal, National Testing of Students

43 Public opinion survey on discrimination and inequality in Serbia carried out within the project Implementation support to anti discriminatory legislation and Mediation in Serbia, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and UNDP, 2009

44 Angelina Skarep, SA advisor in Valjevo and coordinator of Team MP for the implementation of the Action Plan for Education Strategy to improve the situation of Roma

of being offended by the teacher. 70% of parents believe that teachers treat Roma children equally, whereas 30% said that the teachers have a different attitude towards them than to the other children.

Focus groups with Roma in Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and FYR Macedonia<sup>45</sup> have also pointed out that the school system pays very little attention, if any at all, to the culture of Roma children. This institutional failure is a direct violation of Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which focuses public education on “development of respect for the parents of the child, the cultural identity of the child, their language and value system, according to the national values of the state in which the child lives ... toward the civilizations different from his own.”

The research in Serbia revealed some of the explanations for the fact that particularly Roma girls leave school prematurely. Poverty and the costs of education are still highly ranked, but there are also problems associated with traditional female roles. In households which can provide very little funds for the education of children, most chances are that it will be denied for girls, since women’s education has a low priority. Even higher requirements are being set for the girls, in terms of the quality of education, so they would remain at school. The lack of “decent clothing” is an extremely highly ranked reason for girls not to attend school, and this again points to a very low self-confidence that they have in school.

#### **Reasons for leaving school:**

- non-Roma children have treated her badly (50)
- she doesn’t speak Serbian (46)
- she doesn’t want to go to school (45)
- she got married (57)
- even if she finished school, she would never get a job (59)
- school is very far (33)
- she learned everything she needs at home (39)
- teacher at school have treated her badly (69)
- she has already learned everything she needs (30)
- she has to help in looking after the younger children (30)
- she has no decent clothing (61)

Focus groups conducted by the World Bank in 2005 have also pointed out that the violence which children are exposed to and a feeling of insecurity in school are substantial reasons for leaving school among Roma children. Because of social exclusion and because the basic social services are not available to Roma, they are forced to create and maintain their own safety and security structure. Protection they cannot get from the government they are trying to compensate for within their own communities. This affects the children directly, especially the girls, and sets the age to which the parents will let them go to school. Abuse of girls in schools is one of the problems that the focus groups encountered, in conversations with Roma women.

Discriminatory attitudes that teachers express towards Roma nationality students in practice are often reflected in the form of reduced expectations of Roma pupils, which then implies the provision of lower quality education. Such behaviour has far-reaching consequences, even when teachers believe that what they are doing is good or that a child will benefit from it. For example, as one of the main reasons for the lower success of Roma children in school, some teachers in Valjevo listed “lifestyle”, “habits” different “mental and physical

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45 Break the Chain of exclusion, UNICEF, 2007

abilities” and even “weaker memory compared to other children”. One psychologist from Nis presented the argument that Roma culture is marked by “domination of the right hemisphere of the brain.” It is oriented towards movement, rhythm and body, and not to symbolic verbal expression, so that, as he stated, it affects the academic achievement of Roma children.<sup>46)</sup>

There are claims that teachers sometimes express prejudice against Roma in an open manner, even in front of other students in the classroom, by saying that Roma children are “not intelligent enough,” that they “should do not need anything else but to learn to read and write,” that Roma girls should get married as soon as possible, “because Roma women were created to give birth,” and so on. Despite such a practice of open expression of prejudice, before the adoption of the Law on Basic Education System (2009) there were hardly any legal or administrative procedures for sanctioning discrimination in education in Serbia, and the existing anti-discrimination mechanisms are inefficient in opposing discrimination against Roma. Hiding the Roma origin therefore seems like a natural defence mechanism from the omnipresent placement under negative stereotypes.

Roma have been officially recognized as a national minority, and Romani language as a minority language. In practice, education in Romani language exists only as an optional subject in elementary school - and until recently only in the autonomous province of Vojvodina.

The curriculum in Serbia does not show much sensitivity to the values of multiculturalism and identity of national minorities, and planned changes in curriculum, which would include multiculturalism and the elements of Romani culture and language, in most cases have not yet been realized.

In school textbooks Roma are defined, at best, in the context of World War II and the Holocaust, but more often they are mentioned in a stereotypical and negative fashion.<sup>47)</sup>

### **1.7.2. Forms of segregation in education in Serbia**

In Serbia, the segregation is not the result of a strategic approach, but the effect of several factors such as: residential segregation of Roma; insufficient accessibility of the educational system; pronounced social distance and discrimination by the teachers, other children and their parents; choosing or transferring to schools that are more favourable towards the Roma; unjustified referral of children to special schools, transferring children from regular to special schools. Sometimes segregation is a consequence of a late enrolment of Roma children in school (late September), when all classes have already been formed.

There are no data on the number of students in various forms of segregated classes and schools in Serbia. Educational policy in Serbia is explicit in its request to form classes that respect the principle of non-segregation. If segregated classes have already been formed, than the introduction of desegregation program is needed.

There is justified fear among the creators and implementers of educational policies that greater coverage of Roma students in the future will contribute to the increase of various forms of segregation, unless of a range of necessary preparatory measures and activities are applied, both within the education system, as well as the Roma community.

Many studies point to the fact that Roma children are overrepresented in special schools throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Such a high representation of members of a national community in these institutions is alarming, because, statistically, it is unlikely that any group

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46 Equal access to quality education for Roma in Serbia, Open Society Institute, 2007

47 Equal access to quality education for Roma in Serbia, 2007

of people in such a large percentage is in need of special education. This fact indicates that the Roma children, in significant numbers, are mistakenly sent to special schools during enrolment and later redirected from ordinary schools, which should be detected and changed.

In literature, it is often stated that in schools for students with disabilities in the mental development, Roma children make up between 50% and 80%.<sup>48)</sup> The Ministry of Education has no official data on students based on their ethnicity, in regular or in special schools (it is expected that with the unique information system, which is still under development and reform, this kind of data will become available).

The study *“Roma Children in Special Education in Serbia”*<sup>49)</sup> has confirmed the assumption that there is overrepresentation of Roma pupils in special education. However it is not presented in the earlier estimates. Based on this study, the representation of Roma pupils in special schools is 32%, and in special classes in regular schools as much as 38%.

This study found that Roma boys attend special schools to a greater percentage than girls. This difference in the prevalence of boys to girls was observed at both primary and secondary school age. In elementary schools in 2007-2008 school year, 43% of all Roma pupils were girls and 57% boys. In the academic year 2008-2009, 38% of Roma pupils were girls and 50% boys, whereas for 12% of Roma pupils there is no data on their sex. The authors of the study present an assumption that a small number of girls may be conditioned by the fact that some Roma girls do not attend school due to early marriage, and they explain this by the lower percentage of girls at secondary level than at primary school, when Roma girls are already getting married (in secondary schools, in 2007-2008 school year, 30% of students from the Roma community were girls, 59% boys and for 11% of students there is no data. In the academic year 2008-2009, 28% of Roma pupils were girls, 52% boys, whereas for 20% of the students there is no data).

However, when you look at Data about schools and classes<sup>50)</sup> in the overall population of students attending special schools in Serbia, the number and percentage of boys from the total student population is in equal proportion higher than of girls, the same as in the population of Roma boys and girls. Also, in special classes in regular schools, in 2007-2008 the percentage of Roma girls was higher than of boys (52% - 48%), which is opposite to special schools.<sup>51)</sup>

A large number of the Roma are attending schools for adult education, and many of them are less than 15 years old, which means that they should be educated in regular schools. Adult education within the formal educational system is intended for adults who have not attended or completed the compulsory primary education, and are older than 15 (the age limit to which it is possible to study in regular primary schools). The program has been reduced to literacy and basic mathematical skills, and those who acquire this formally valid diploma, have no necessary skills needed for further education.

Official data show that the Roma make up 75% to 80% of students in schools for adult education,<sup>52)</sup> and UNICEF also highlights this problem.<sup>53)</sup> The survey of the Child Rights Centre and Save the Children shows that in three schools for adult education in the 2005-2006 school year, the Roma constituted 98% of the total number of participants. Based on this research, 66% of students who graduated from these schools in 2004-2005 school year were Roma.

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48 Roma educational Fund, 2007, UNICEF, 2001

49 Open Society Fund, 2010

50 Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2007

51 Open Society Fund, 2010

52 The Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2007

53 Break the Chain of Exclusion, UNICEF, 2007

## 2. Educational policy, programs and mechanisms for ensuring implementation of policies and improvement of Roma education

### 2.1. Legal framework, strategies, policies

Serbia has adopted a series of regulations and strategic documents (strategies and action plans) that represent a framework for the systematic solution of problems in approach to education of Roma girls, and that are related to improving the position of Roma, education, gender equality, child rights and the fight against discrimination.

The legislative and strategic framework of the educational system and the improvement of the position of Roma men and women in the educational system are largely determined by the following legislative acts and strategic documents:

1. *The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia;*<sup>54)</sup>
2. *Law on the Basic Education System*<sup>55)</sup> (for all levels of education, and for preschool it is the only valid law);
3. *Law on Primary Education;*<sup>56)</sup>
4. *Law on Secondary Education;*<sup>57)</sup>
5. *Law on Higher Education;*<sup>58)</sup>
6. *Anti-Discrimination Law;*<sup>59)</sup>
7. *Poverty Reduction Strategy;*
8. *National Plan of Action for Children;*
9. *Strategies for integration and empowerment of Roma;*
10. *Proposed strategy to improve Roma education in Serbia and a Unique Action plan for Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia;*
11. *National strategies for improving the situation of Roma and the accompanying action plans;*
12. *The strategy of the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Serbia 2005-2010;*
13. *Development Strategy for Vocational Education;*
14. *Development Strategy for Adult Education;*
15. *National strategies for improving the situation of women and improving gender equality.*

These documents are fully or partially aimed at improving the educational status of the Roma and improving their living standards. Most of these strategies which are related to the improvement of Roma education are also related to Roma education in general, while specific education of Roma women in left in the background or almost does not exists at all.<sup>60)</sup>

Regulations, strategies and action plans, international and domestic, that are intrinsically related to the improvement of accessibility of education for Roma women, are also related to the protection of child rights, gender equality and the prohibition of discrimination.

54 Official Gazette RS 96/06

55 [http://www.parlament.gov.rs/content/cir/akta/akta\\_detalji.asp?id=382&t=Z#](http://www.parlament.gov.rs/content/cir/akta/akta_detalji.asp?id=382&t=Z#)

56 [http://www.parlament.gov.rs/content/cir/akta/akta\\_detalji.asp?id=382&t=Z](http://www.parlament.gov.rs/content/cir/akta/akta_detalji.asp?id=382&t=Z)

57 Official Gazette RS 22/02

58 Official Gazette RS 23/2002,62/2003,64/2003

59 Official Gazette RS 2009

60 In addition to the National strategy to improve the position of Roma, there is only one more document - Unique Action Plan for improvement of Roma education, and its revision which was done in 2008/2009 – that anticipated and planned special activities for Roma girls

The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia in 2006, in Article 71 states: “Everyone has the right to education. Primary education is compulsory and free, and secondary education is free. Citizens of the Republic of Serbia are equal in exercising their right to education, regardless of gender, race, nationality, religious and linguistic background, age, physical and mental constitution, social and cultural origin, property status, political orientation or other personal property. “

Long-term priorities of educational policy in Serbia, which are the base of all previous and upcoming reform steps, are: equality, fairness and social justice, especially in terms of access to education, quality and competitiveness in the European framework and the efficiency of the educational system. <sup>61)</sup>

Education of children, pupils and students from vulnerable groups, as part of the overall educational system, is regulated by the Law on Basic Education System (2009), which is based on the principles of access to education, quality education for all and the prohibition of discrimination.

In the process of drafting and enactment of these laws and subordinate legislation, the provisions of international declarations, conventions and charters that have been signed and ratified by our country and which are legally binding, are being respected and concretized. International documents that constitute the framework for laws and subordinate legislation in our country are:

- the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,
- the Convention on the Rights of the Child,
- the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, changed in accordance with the protocols,
- the Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties,
- the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities,
- the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages,
- the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,
- the Convention on the Fight against Discrimination in Education,
- the Convention on the Recognition of qualifications in the field of higher education in the European region,
- the Bologna Declaration on European Space for Higher Education,
- The United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

In the framework of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which our country signed as a member, there are two objectives that have to do with the right to quality education for Roma girls: 1. Achieving universal primary education and 2. Promoting gender equality i.e. eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015. <sup>62)</sup>

In accordance with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, *The National Millennium Development Goals and tasks*<sup>63)</sup> of education in the Republic of Serbia are for all boys and girls to complete primary education by 2015. In this context, the following tasks are defined:

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61 Education Strategy in the Republic of Serbia 2005-2010, available at [www.mp.gov.rs](http://www.mp.gov.rs)

62 United Nations Millennium Declaration, 2000. available at [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

63 Available at [www.nps.gov.rs](http://www.nps.gov.rs)

*1st Task:* To increase the coverage of children in basic education

- 100% of boys and girls to enrol primary education
- 98% of boys and girls to complete primary education,
- to reduce attrition of children when they move to the fifth grade to less than 1%
- that 70% of children (3-7 years) are included in preschool education by 2015, with special emphasis on children from vulnerable groups (children in rural areas, Roma children, children with disabilities),
- to double the number of preschool institutions, with their equal geographical distribution.

*2nd Task:* Getting jobs, promoting the concept of lifelong learning and accessibility of higher education

- 95% of boys and girls to complete some form of secondary education,
- 100% of the young aged 15-24 years to be literate by 2015,

*3rd Task:* Improving the quality of education that children receive in elementary school.

*4th Task:* Establishing additional database for monitoring and evaluation of implementation of national goals and objectives.

As a signatory to *The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, which defines what constitutes discrimination against women and prescribes what should be done at the national level in order to end this discrimination, our country has committed itself to respect the provisions of this Convention. Based on reports on the implementation of the Convention, which our country has submitted, as well as the reports of women's NGOs on the state of women's rights in Serbia, the United Nations Committee issued in 2007 the guidelines for the advancement of women in various fields. Some of these requirements are directly related to improving the situation of Roma women in education: The Committee requests the State Party to start the process of collecting data necessary to establish a clear basis for monitoring the actual exercise of the rights of women and girls to education without discrimination. The Committee recommends taking urgent measures aimed at ensuring equal access to education for both sexes, at all levels of education. The Committee requires that special attention is directed toward the achievement of equal access to education for marginalized groups of women and girls, especially members of the Roma minority communities, with special emphasis on primary education. The Committee also recommends providing literacy programs and vocational training for Roma women, especially elderly and illiterate, as well as other marginalized groups of women who are in a similar situation.<sup>64)</sup>

*Poverty Reduction Strategy, National Plan of Action for Children* and other relevant documents dealing with the education of Roma in terms of child rights, increase employability and reduce poverty.

Beginning from 2003, in the Republic of Serbia many activities aimed at improving the situation of Roma in Serbia have been conducted through the cooperation of governmental and nongovernmental sectors.

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64 Final comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: The Republic of Serbia, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women – 38th session, 14 May - 1 June 2007, p. 6-7

Draft Strategy for Integration and Empowerment of Roma was made in 2002 on the initiative of the former Ministry for Minorities and Ethnic Groups of the FRY, but it has not been officially adopted.

The proposed *Strategy for Improvement of Roma education in the Republic of Serbia*, in the part that deals with providing quality education, also suggests activities for the provision of educational programs to accompany the needs of Roma children and young people within which different types of programs and work with groups with specific needs, such as Roma girls who leave school early because of marriage are also being developed.

Serbia is a member of an international initiative called the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, along with Montenegro, Croatia, Macedonia, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and participates in this international program aimed at improving the position of the Roma population. During preparations for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, in 2004 the Action Plans for Education (*Common Action Plan for Advancement of Roma Education in Serbia - JAP*), health, housing and employment were made and the Government of the Republic of Serbia has adopted them as part of the mentioned strategy.

Since the beginning of 2005, when the Government adopted an Action Plan for Improvement of Roma education, the Ministry of Education has started with its implementation, which requires greater participation of Roma in the educational system and ensuring the continuity and quality of their education. Action plan revision was carried out in 2008-2009 and it was based on analysis of planned and realized activities, achieved results and the current state of the educational system, within the framework of set goals and measures. The Action Plan is an integral part of the National Strategy for Improving the Situation of Roma, adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in April 2009. The Strategy for Integration and Empowerment of Roma was amended and adopted at a session of the Serbian Government in 2009, under the new name National Strategy for Improving the Situation of Roma.

This strategic document specifically deals with the issue of Roma women, and within its framework, there is an action plan for women that provides a variety of affirmative measures and actions for improving the status of Roma women. They include education, health, and housing, employment, combating discrimination against Roma women, participation in public and political life, the fight against violence against women, juvenile arranged marriages, selling the brides and women trafficking, and systemic solutions to the problems of street children.

The action plan for implementation of the Strategy contains 13 action plans, including *The Action Plan for Education*, which is supplemented by *The Common Action Plan for Advancement of Roma Education in Serbia*.

*Action Plan for Education* presents the measures within the four aims:

1. Inclusion of Roma in the educational system and providing continuity of education;
2. Providing quality education;
3. Developing tolerance and respect for diversity;
4. Fostering cultural identity

The project of implementation of the Action Plan is aimed at several target groups. The first group are the children of Roma nationality, which will get better education through activities focused on interaction with peers, better cooperation with educators, teachers and educational assistants.

The second group consists of educational institutions which will, by being included in the project, participate in planning and implementing activities to promote education of Roma children. The third group consists of teachers and educators who will improve their competence in working with children from vulnerable groups through trainings and seminars, and have the opportunity to participate in the implementation of other projects that rely on the Action Plan. Finally, parents have the opportunity to participate in the work of educational institutions and to represent the interests of the Roma community and the needs of their children.

Ministry of Education has established a professional team to implement the Action Plan for Education that includes representatives of all departments of the Ministry, and brings together a wider team of representatives from nongovernmental and international organizations. Besides the development of a series of measures and activities aimed at preventing unjustified enrolment of Roma children in special schools, it has also been planned to change the process of recategorization of children and their referral from special to regular schools. Also, an updated Action Plan for Education (2009) in its priorities, such as activities to increase coverage and access to primary and secondary level education, recognizes that in securing funds for Roma students scholarships, special attention should be paid to the Roma girls.

From the strategic point of view, the main courses of action in improving the educational system are:

1. Providing access to education - the increase of coverage of children / students at all educational levels;
2. Preventing discrimination in Education;
3. Providing quality education for all children (including Roma children, children who are marginalized, children affected by adverse circumstances and children with disabilities);
4. Developing vocational education in accordance with the needs of the economy;
5. Provision of acquiring titles and creating conditions for continuous learning and access to higher education;
6. Development of higher education;
7. Establishing a contemporary system of finance;
8. Establishing a system for providing quality, monitoring and evaluation.<sup>65)</sup>

One of the priorities of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Ministry of Education is to increase access to education to every child in the Republic of Serbia, and at the same time to create conditions for quality education in accordance with their needs and abilities. The goal of inclusive education is to eliminate all forms of barriers and discrimination, which are related to gender, ethnicity, religious and socio-economic background, ability, health status or any other property of individuals, as well as enabling social cohesion. It is expected that the changes in the system of education aimed at increasing the inclusiveness considerably increase the availability and quality of education for children from socially non-stimulating communities - Roma, poor, rural, displaced, children and adults with developmental disorders and disabilities, children with learning disabilities, primarily within the regular education system.

Inclusive practice in educational system of the Republic of Serbia was slightly developed until the adoption of the Law on Basic Education System<sup>66)</sup> in August 2009, considering that there were no systemic solutions in this area. Law on Basic Education System introduces many novelties related to the promotion of justice in education, increase in the level of inclusion of marginalized groups, equitable admission policy, suppression of discrimination, etc.

65 Unesco report on the inclusion, 2008

66 Official Gazette RS 72/09

The most important principles and solutions that this law provides in this regard are the following:

- Equality and access to education;
- Quality and balanced education;
- Deep respect for the rights of a child, student and adult;
- The education that meets the diverse needs of students;
- Equal opportunities for education in accordance with the needs and interests;
- Access to all levels of education for children, students and adults with developmental disorders and disabilities;
- For students who need it, due to social deprivation, developmental disorders, disability or other reasons, specific standards of achievement can be adapted to each individual;
- Schools may determine the need for issuing individual educational plan or additional support for education;
- Children may enrol in schools for the education of students with disabilities based on recommendations from their doctor from the Medical Centre which is in charge, and based on the assessment of needs to provide additional educational, medical and social support to the student, only with parental consent.

The essence of the changes is to open regular schools to all children and not to, as up to now, be closed for children from marginalized groups. At the same time, special schools should be closed down for these children, and opened for children with multiple disabilities for who this is the only option for education.

Every child who is at least six and a half or maximum seven and a half years old before the beginning of the school year may be enrolled in the first grade. Testing of children enrolled in school is conducted by school psychologist and educator in the mother tongue of the child, by using standard procedures and instruments recommended by the Institute i.e. authorized professional organizations. If there is no possibility to test the child in his mother tongue, the school hires an interpreter at the proposal of the National Council of National Minorities (Article 98).

The law does not mention the possibility of setting up special classes in regular schools, so they were abolished in this way, and thus prevented the segregation of Roma students. As an alternative, with students who need additional support, there is an individual or group work. The support for children during their education is provided in regular schools in accordance with the needs assessment and inter-departmental committee and school's inclusive team. This team, which is founded by the school principal, when it is necessary, deals with the development of individual education plan in cooperation with parents and other experts.

*Regulations on additional education, health and social support to a child and student and Regulation on detailed instructions for determining the rights of the individual education plan, its implementation and evaluation*<sup>67)</sup> provide further guidance and elaborate this issue defined by law.

The prohibition of discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect are explicitly and more detailed elaborated in the Law (Articles 44 and 45). Regulation on the treatment protocol at the institution in response to violence, abuse and neglect<sup>68)</sup> further specifies mandatory

67 Official Gazette RS, 63/2010

68 Official Gazette RS, May 2010

treatment procedures, as well as the responsibilities of employees in the educational institutions, and the Ordinance on the prohibition of discrimination in education is in construction.

Primary schools and preschool institutions can engage a pedagogical assistant, which allows employment of “Roma” assistants. Pedagogical Assistant provides assistance to teachers, educators and expert associates in teaching and extracurricular activities as a form of additional support to children and students, in accordance with their needs, Article 117.

Law from 2009 provides persons from the sensitive social groups, under the age of 17, the possibility of acquiring secondary education or training as part-time students, if they justify their inability of regular attendance. Also, a student may be exempted from tuition fees and thereby achieve full equality in obtaining education, Article 91.

At a moment, a Draft Law on Preschool Education is under construction and the adjustment of the Law on Elementary Education and the Law on Secondary Education to the Law on Basic Education from 2009. A series of subordinate regulations have been prepared, that will define many novelties in the Provisions of the Law on Basic Education System and provide mechanisms for the implementation of legislative solutions.

Finally, the document Education in Serbia: how to achieve better results,<sup>69)</sup> made by the National Education Council at the end of 2010, which represents a draft strategy for the development of education by 2020 in the Republic of Serbia and whose adoption is planned by the end of 2011, states the activities for further promotion of educational justice, suggests the need for activities to increase coverage at all levels of education, as well as the need to increase availability and reduce the gap between the availability of secondary education to girls and boys, and the children from the sensitive social groups, including Roma children, are being singled out.

## **2.2. Anti-discrimination measures and ensuring equity and quality education for Roma children**

Discrimination against Roma in the educational system is recognized as an important problem and there is no agreement between NGOs and policy makers with regard to the fact that the Roma are being discriminated in the educational process.<sup>70)</sup>

Relevant strategic documents are dealing with discrimination: *The National Strategy for Improving the Situation of Roma* from 2009, and *Action Plan for Education*. Within this strategy the problems of discrimination and segregation have been taken into consideration within the third goal: Respect for diversity and development of multicultural values. There are no separate, specific measures and mechanisms for Roma women when it comes to anti discriminatory measures and mechanisms in ensuring greater equity and quality education, but they are covered by the provided, general measures and mechanisms that are equally applied to both Roma boys and girls.

The Assembly of Serbia in 2009 adopted the *Anti-Discrimination Law*, which regulates the general prohibition of discrimination, forms and cases of discrimination and procedures for the

69 Available at [www.nps.gov.rs](http://www.nps.gov.rs)

70 Indicators of equal access to quality education for Roma, 2010.

protection from discrimination (Article 1). In Article 2, there is a detailed description of personal characteristics on the basis of which one must not behave in a discriminatory manner. According to Article 19, entitled *Discrimination in education and vocational training*, it is stated that:

- Everyone has the right to pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education and vocational training under the same conditions, and in accordance with the law.
- It is prohibited to hinder or prevent entry into the educational institutions to the person or group of persons based on their personal characteristics, or to exclude them from these institutions, impede or deny the possibility of being present in class and participate in other educational activities, organize the students according to their personal property, mistreating them and in any other way make the unjustifiable difference or treat them unequally.
- Discrimination in educational institutions that perform activities in accordance with the law and other regulations is prohibited, as well as for the persons who use or have used the services of these institutions in accordance with the law.

The Law on Basic Education System which is compliant with the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination brought significant changes and new elements of anti-discrimination legislation in the field of education:

- Within an institution the prohibited actions are those which threaten, disparage, discriminate against, or single out persons, i.e. group of persons, on the basis of: race, nationality, ethnic, linguistic, religious or sexual orientation, physical and psychological characteristics, developmental disorders and disabilities, health, age, social and cultural background, economic status or political affiliation, and encouraging or failing to prevent such activities, as well as on other grounds specified by law which stipulates the prohibition of discrimination.
- Any direct or indirect, open or covert exclusion or limitation of rights and freedoms, unequal treatment or omission of facts, or unjustifiable differentiating by connivance or preference, is considered to be the discrimination against a person or a group of persons, Article 44.
- Special measures used to achieve full equality, protection and advancement of persons or groups of persons who are in an unequal position are not considered as discrimination.
- Physical, psychological and social violence, abuse and neglect of children and students, physical abuse and personal insults, and sexual abuse of children and students, or employees, are prohibited in an institution, Article 45. Excluding a child or a student from a group of peers or various forms of social activities in the institution, is considered to be social violence.

It is expected that the prepared *Ordinance on Prohibiting Discrimination in Education* will further regulate this matter and anticipate and specify mechanisms that would ensure the creation of anti discriminatory culture in the educational institutions.

As a support to inclusive education, four types of measures have been generated: measures and means of support for school development, measures and means of support for the protection of child rights in education, measures and means of support for pupils' standards in education, social protection measures in education and other.

Law on Basic Education System provides several mechanisms that act to prevent dispersal of children - leaving school and / or unjustified relocation into special schools (as it was the practice earlier, when it comes to Roma pupils):

- Pedagogical assistants monitor schooling of the students from marginalized groups and act preventively;
- Teachers' workload changes, class teachers and subject teachers have mandatory 24 hours of work a week, in direct work with children in regular, additional and supplementary classes, as well as individual work;
- Discrimination against students is explicitly prohibited, and the Ministry of Education is planning a series of activities that will solve this problem;
- The school i.e. the principle are becoming responsible for students' achievement;
- In schools where members of ethnic minorities and students with disabilities are educated, in parents' council there will be a proportionate number of representatives from their parents.

Furthermore, in cases of solving the problem of discrimination and harassment of the Roma by peers and teachers on the basis of national identity, the following measures are provided:

- Regulation on the treatment protocol at the institution in response to violence, abuse and neglect, Special protocol for the protection of children / students from violence, abuse and neglect in the educational institutions, (as well as the Guide for the application of a special protocol that ME has published in cooperation with UNICEF, British Council and Citizens' initiatives) oblige schools to apply preventive activities and established procedures for solving the problem of violence in schools in their daily work, and all pre-schools, primary and secondary schools are required to develop Programs for protecting children from violence and form school teams to protect children from violence. School teams have an obligation to regularly inform the school administration about the situation and implemented activities in this field.
- Guide to provide support to the development of anti-discrimination culture in the educational institutions contains indicators and descriptors (i.e. indicators of discrimination - desirable situations without discrimination), their descriptions, and procedures for promoting and maintaining the culture of anti discriminatory behaviour. The guidebook contains the described roles of certain participators in school life and work, which provides guidelines to protect students from violence.

The guide was created within the project Protection of Roma Children from Discrimination, which was implemented by ME and Minority Rights Centre, with the support of REF.

The guide supplements the description of the level of the quality of work in schools given in the Guidebook for the self-assessment and evaluation of school work. Handbook for Parents –Support for the development of anti-discrimination culture and resolving cases of discrimination has also been created and distributed to schools.

- The Ordinance on professional pedagogical supervision from 2007 regulates the manner of carrying out professional pedagogical supervision and criteria for evaluating the quality of work in educational institutions. Educational advisors within the professional pedagogical supervision are required to evaluate the quality of work and determine the degree of development of anti-discrimination culture in the educational institutions.

The Ministry of Education has announced plans for further engagement in systematic dealing with the problem of equity and quality, with particular attention to anti-discrimination approach to all students in achieving the quality of the teaching process.

Administrative, professional and educational supervision of the institutions is conducted by the Ministry of Education. School administration are organizational units outside the ministry headquarters engaged in professional and educational supervision, that help around the school development planning and monitor the achievement of quality work. The activities of professional pedagogical supervision are carried out by educational advisors, and the Minister of Education prescribes the manner of performing professional pedagogical supervision, criteria for evaluating the quality of institutions, and ways of evaluating educational consultant.

Law on Basic Education System from 2009, additionally regulates the work of educational advisors, who “... advises and provides technical assistance to the institution in providing protection for the children, students and employees from discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect in the institution” (Article 151) .

School administrators monitor the enrolment of children, the records kept by the institution and diplomas issued. The Ministry of Education and Provincial Educational Inspection, perform an immediate inspection if it is not conducted by municipal or city inspection, and resolve complaints to first instance decisions of municipal or city government, made in the course of performing the inspection.

In December 2010, the National Educational Council adopted Standards for evaluating the quality of schools in the Republic of Serbia, whose full implementation is scheduled for 2012-2013 school year. Within the predicted domains of quality of work in schools, the standards and quality indicators have been defined. Indicators that are related to protection against discrimination and the child rights, particularly children from vulnerable groups, are within School programs and Annual Work program, Support to Students and Ethos. Therefore, evaluation of the quality of work in schools will be significantly determined and conditioned by the activities in the area of support that the school provides for students from marginalized groups and the level of success in developing anti discriminatory culture within their own ethos.

### **2.3. Affirmative action in education, initiatives and programs to improve education for Roma**

The Ministry of Education has so far, in cooperation with governmental, international and non-governmental organizations, within the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, realized a number of activities, programs and initiatives, primarily the following: Affirmative action for admission to secondary schools and colleges, *The program Functional basic education of adult Roma*, the project *Protection of Roma children against discrimination in education*, training and appointment of advisors who are responsible for the improvement of Roma education, implementation of local action plans for improvement of Roma education, increased enrolment of Roma children in preschool, a model of the introduction of Roma assistants in schools is designed, and other systemic measures to improve the educational opportunities of the Roma population.

Activities which have been implemented in educational institutions were aimed at increasing coverage of children in regular education, improving the quality of education they receive and providing support to students for successful and continuous education.

Since 2003, in accordance with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, together with the Ministry of Education has taken the Affirmative actions to increase the enrolment rate of Roma children in secondary schools. In cases where Roma children passed the qualifying examination, but without a sufficient number of points for the desired educational profile, then the total number of points on the exam is increased by 30 points and thus allowing the student to gain the necessary points for the desired educational profile. Additional criteria allow the possibility of setting one Roma student (who was enrolled in this way) in one class of every educational profile. Number of candidates enrolled in the 2007-2008 school year (512) was two and a half times higher than the number of candidates who entered school in 2005-2006 (196). The number of Roma high school students who are enrolled in secondary schools through affirmative measures has been increased over the past eight years: in 2003 the number was only 30, while in 2010 the number reached 250.

Affirmative action related to registration of Roma children in primary education were proposed in March 2007, and they include the following: recommendations to school administrations for registration of Roma children in schools even when they have no relevant documents (school should inform parents about the necessary documents and to mediate in establishing contacts with relevant municipal authorities, especially in cases of deportation from Western Europe in accordance with the Agreement on Readmission).

#### ***Roma assistants in primary schools***

In 2006, Ministry of Education began a project of introducing Roma assistants in primary schools, in cooperation with the OSCE and with the expert support of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy. At the very beginning, 54 assistants were educated, and due to financial constraints only 28 of them were working in schools in the period March-June 2007. In 2008, out of the aforementioned 28, ME re-hired 24 assistant. Training of the assistants (first generation) continued in 2008 and 2009 in seminars in which they participated together with representatives of schools in which they work. In 2009, 26 new assistants (second generation) started training, which is partly mutual with the teaching staff. The OSCE provided funds for teaching assistants' fees, equipping schools and training. In 2009, the training for the third generation of assistants had started, and in October 2010 in 128 institutions (80 schools and 48 institutions) a total of 128 Roma assistants were engaged as part of IPA Project 08 - Education for All. It is anticipated that by February 2011 the salaries of the assistants are going to be funded from the budget

of the Republic of Serbia. In December 2010 a publication was prepared on the work of assistants, in cooperation of the OSCE, CIP and ME, whose goal is to promote the role of assistants, to motivate schools and local authorities to employ them in order to improve access and quality education for children from Roma community.

In 2009, the training started for the third generation of assistants who are supposed to work in Belgrade elementary schools. These assistants will provide support in education to children who were displaced from unhygienic settlements under the bridge Gazela, and their work will be financed by the City Assembly of Belgrade. The preparation of publications on the work of assistants in collaboration of OSCE, CIP and ME is in progress, whose goal is to promote the role of assistants, and to motivate schools and local authorities to employ them in order to improve the availability and quality of education for children from the Roma community.<sup>71)</sup>

### ***Functional basic education of adult Roma***

This program was piloted in the seventh and eighth grade in 2006-2007 school year. The main goal was to create the systemic conditions for the primary education of Roma, and later other adult citizens with a similar problem. The developed strategic, program and educational framework for creating and continuously adjusting the functional primary education of adults, mostly Roma. The program was implemented by the Institute of Pedagogy and Andragogy, Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Education, Office of Human Rights - Department of Roma issues, the National Council of the Roma minority and the Team for the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The program included 275 Roma, aged 15-35 years, of whom 212 completed their primary education; 168 completed vocational training, 53 of which have been employed. The following have been developed and officially approved: functional basic education programs for the seventh and eighth grade, training for teachers and assistants, and the program of professional improvement. Total of 390 participants completed the 7th and 8th grade of primary school and 276 students attended vocational training.

### ***Second Chance - Development of functional adult education in Serbia***

The project aims at establishing a system of functional primary education of adults who left school before acquiring the first qualification and / or functional literacy. In other words, the project will provide system solutions for inclusion of adults into the process of basic education, giving them a chance to complete their primary education and to continue schooling in secondary education, either through a system of continuous training for the requirements of labour market or through a system of secondary education programs according to programs that are appropriate to the needs of adults. Participants will, at the end of the first and second cycle, receive certificates of primary education, and those who enter the third cycle (7th and 8th grade) will attend vocational training and acquire the certificate of professional training. Obtaining testimonies and certificates will increase the level of employability of students and thus open the possibility to exit poverty and abandonment of the social margins. Preparation and implementation of pilot programs will be performed in regular primary schools in cooperation with secondary schools, local governments and the National Employment Service.

Implementation of measures aimed at increasing availability and strengthening the inclusive education has started in all schools in Serbia since the beginning of 2010-11 school year, i.e. from 1 September 2010. The most important preparatory activities for the successful implementation of these measures were: October 2009 - May 2010: the development and implementation of

71 Romani pedagogical assistants and assistants as champions of change 2010: the importance and the meaning of role, areas of activity and influence on changes in school and Roma communities, Nikola Duvnjak et al., OSCE Mission to Serbia, 2010

effective model of inclusive education in pilot schools in Serbia; February 2010 - May 2010: Enrolment of every child in school on the basis of the Law on Basic Education System, March 2010: the adoption of inter-departmental Rules on the procedure of the Commission for assessing the need for the provision of additional educational, medical and social support to children. The first data from the Ministry of Education shows that by applying these measures, the number of Roma children in school increased for 10% in the school year 2010/2011.<sup>72)</sup>

Project Creation of conditions for the realization of equal enrolment policy in the first grade of primary school was intended for the reduction of discrimination in education, by reducing of the number of Roma children in special schools and creating conditions for the realization of equal enrolment policy in the first grade. Project objectives included: analysis of existing practices that are applied during the examination / testing of children when starting school (testing methodology, content of the applied tests, the conditions in which preparation for the test takes place), from the perspective of expert associates and the Roma community; formulation of recommendations based on the conducted analysis and their assignment to the preschools and primary schools, the Roma community and professionals. Financial funds for implementation of the project were provided through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA 2008).

Roma National Council and ME have implemented the project Increasing Accessibility of Preschool Education for Roma children, with the support of REF. Roma coordinators have been introduced as a measure of a liaison between parents, teachers and local authorities. The project was conducted in three phases.

- January-August 2006, when 632 children were covered by preschool programs, of which 473 enrolled in the first grade in September;
- January-July 2007 when 767 children enrolled in preschool programs;
- September 2008 - June 2009 when about 450 attended preschool.

Inclusion of Roma in education and support for continuous education by connecting institutions and NGOs at the local level - Developmental Education Centres in 10 municipalities in Southern Serbia: the activities have been taking place since 2005, and they are supported by municipality funds and UNICEF. They are implemented in Roma settlements, primary schools, in RNGO facilities, or places provided by the local government. About 3,000 children are included in the program, and activities include educational work with preschool children, remedial classes, working with parents, educational institutions and local governments.

*Together to equality* – Project is realized by ME with the support of the Government of Norway in 2006, and it supports the making of two documentaries about the education of Roma, the establishment and equipping of six clubs in schools and RNGOs. There were 318 direct beneficiaries and 1600 indirect.

The module for teacher training program *Active teaching / learning in working with students from ethnic and marginalized communities*: the activities have been implemented since 2005, with support from UNICEF. Results: The developed module that is applied in schools.

Project *Equal Chances in Secondary Education* is being implemented in cooperation between the Open Society Fund, CIP - Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, Citizens Association of Serbian-

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72 Inclusive Education in Serbia, Tanja Rankovic, coordinator of education and human capital development, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Team, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for the EU, the Government of the RS

Roma friendship “Tree” and the Association of Roma students, with financial support of the Open Society Foundation and the Pestalozzi Children Foundation (1st cycle 2005-2007 cycle, 2nd cycle of 2008-2010, and 3rd cycle 2011-2013). Project objectives are to develop a model of secondary education which suits young people from Roma communities and contributes to the development of inclusive education policies. It examines the ways of inclusion of Roma students in secondary vocational schools and opening education system for systemic change. Philosophy of simultaneous realization of equal access and quality of school success is expressed through the change in the educational experiences of Roma students. The aim is to achieve better conditions in education, by increasing the availability and quality of education, using modern methods of work, respecting the values of social justice and establishing cooperation between the Roma and majority communities. This includes teaching practice focused on children, creating a climate of social justice in secondary schools and cooperation between Roma and the majority community.

Project *Roma Children Returnees* - from language barriers to social capital, which was conducted by the Roma IDP Forum, in cooperation with the MP and with the support of REF (2007-2008), dealt with these issues. The results of the project include defining procedures and proposed legislation in cooperation with the MP, the development of standards and models for teaching Serbian as a second language to Roma children returnees.

Like other minorities, the Roma have the right to attend the elective *Roma language with elements of national culture*. The program has been applied with more or less success over the past years, depending on the environment. In 2007-2008, the Roma Information Centre, with support from MP, worked on developing the curriculum of this course from first to fourth grade, and its introduction in the older grades.

MP has provided scholarships to successful students of Roma: 117 high school students and 182 students in 2008-2009 school year. The Government program *1000 Scholarships for poor high school students*, within the implementation of the *Poverty Reduction Strategy*, the education of students from socially disadvantaged families in 2007-2008 school year was supported. Belonging to the Roma community is defined as one of the criteria for scoring the reported students.

Three hundred high school students from Belgrade and Nis have received scholarships through the project *Creating conditions to increase the coverage and effectiveness of Roma students in high school*, led by Roma Education Centre and Children Roma Centre in 2007-2008 school year, with the support of REF. The same organizations have implemented the project *Creation of conditions for expanding the access to state scholarships and increasing the success of Roma children in secondary schools, 2008-2009*, which included 330 Roma students and 400 parents.

The project *Inclusion of Roma pupils in secondary schools in Voivodina*, which was led by the Provincial Secretariat for Education and Culture in cooperation with the Council for Roma Integration in Voivodina and the Association of Roma students, has provided financial and mentoring support for 353 students, members of Roma community who were enrolled in 2007-2008 school year, or have already been high school students, until the completion of their schooling.

In addition to the project *Education for All: Improving the availability and quality of education for children from marginalized groups*, another initiative at the national level, important for inclusive education, is the project *Providing Advanced Services at the Local Level DILS*. DILS is being prepared and will be implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, Ministry

of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Activities are supported by a loan from the World Bank / International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2009-2012). The main objective of the project refers to the increasing the capacity of institutions in the sectors of health, education and social protection at the local level to provide more effective and accessible services to users of equal quality, financed by the principle “money follows the user” in a decentralized environment that takes into account the needs of vulnerable groups of users. The improvement of education of Roma is one of the priorities of DILS project, within which training for policy-makers and teachers, and financial assistance to schools for implementation of small projects, will be implemented.

*Chances and Choices for Roma Girls* project implemented by CARE Serbia and the Novi Sad Humanitarian Centre in 2009/2010

The project aims to contribute to the availability and quality of education of Roma girls, by improving the support of institutions involved in education and their accessibility, and by increasing awareness and knowledge about the importance of education of Roma girls in the Roma community. The project is multifaceted and includes various activities: participatory research of the main reasons for which the Roma girls are leaving school, and making policy proposals to improve access to quality primary education for Roma girls, within which is an analysis of laws, strategies and conventions that regulate this area. The project initiating forming of a lobby group that represents and promotes the right to education of Roma girls. The group consists of representatives of institutions, NGOs, and the Roma community. Also, 12 Roma girls, high school students, were strengthened to talk about obstacles in education through participation in the Forum Theatre workshops.

As seen from the above, only the last project essentially deals with Roma girls, seeing them as a particularly vulnerable group with all the specifics of their vulnerable position within the Roma ethnic group. Chances are that many of the above programs and measures, as well as researches, have data on participation of girls; however, these are not visible in the available reports and documents.

## **2.4. Participation and Inclusion**

Inclusive schools involves direct participation of all stakeholders - students, teachers and parents. Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the right of participation, ie. the child's right to be listened to and consulted on all matters and decisions related to him/her directly. The right to participate is also supported by the right to information, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, privacy, education, promoting the values of human rights and democracy, the right to freedom of opinion and religion. Without the participation, none of the methods of implementation, protection and realization of child rights is complete, because only personal insight into these possibilities provides quality and achieves full development.

Participation of students in school is a process in which the student has the right to express his/her opinion, the opinion will be heard, that he/she will be given due attention, and to take action in all matters and procedures relating to it. Indicator of student participation would be the existence of organized forms of engagement to involve students in school life, and the fact that students carry some extra-curricular activities (peer education, etc.). Affirmative programs in the school environment allow students involvement in the process of their own growing up, and the ability to continuously work on their own growth and development.

Law on Primary Education provides student participation - in the category of children's rights and students' rights (Article 103) and in terms of organization of Students' Parliament (Article 105). The school is obliged to provide the student timely and complete information about the issues important to his/her education, information about their rights and obligations, participation in the work of school, freedom of association in different groups, clubs, and organization of students' parliament.<sup>73)</sup>

Programs such as the *School of Equal Opportunities*<sup>74)</sup> which support participation of Roma students, and in general, empower youth to participate in various areas of school life, bring greater motivation and participation of students in all fields. Also, these programs provide positive results towards reducing discrimination and increasing inclusion and participation in class. However, the role of pupils' parliament should be further strengthened, as in the opinion of most students, these parliaments tend to have a decorative function and are not real representatives of the students.<sup>75)</sup>

Responsibility for education of children from Roma communities is usually only put on parents, especially when they are not attending school and achieve less than other students. Behind these assessments often are hidden prejudices that Roma are not interested in education and that they do not like to work. Since significant number of Roma parents are illiterate or have lower education, teachers do not see them as appropriate collaborators in children's education. Lack of understanding of Roma culture and Roma issues prevent them from finding adequate approaches to motivate and involve Roma parents.

On the other hand, because of their socio-economic status Roma valued education less, and their motivation for children's education is lower due to the fact that education requires long-term, uncertain investments, and that families have to solve existential problems. However, in contrast to overall prejudice that Roma are not fundamentally interested in education, qualitative studies have shown that most of them consider education as very important for their children, but they face insurmountable obstacles caused by poverty and discrimination. Roma parents are often highly critical of the quality of education that their children acquire and believe that both within the school and wider society, a major cause of poor progress in education of their children is discrimination.

However, schools can arrange support to families at risk, and create support programs in line with the estimated demands and needs of families. The most effective are those programs that the school plans jointly with the parents. The aim of the program is to overcome and alleviate the major problems in education and upbringing of children from marginalized groups, but also to empower families to deal with the problems. One of the preconditions for these programs to work and produce results is collaboration between families and schools that must be bidirectional. Successful inclusive schools achieve understanding at all levels of cooperation and communication with parents: they understand what is a family culture of a child, with whom they socialize, how they spend their free time. Such a school is searching for the most effective forms of communication, especially with families who are at high risk and marginalized families. The initiative to mobilize families at risk should be started by the schools.

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73 Students' Parliament is organized in the last two years of primary school and in secondary school and has the following powers: to give opinions and proposals to schools staff, parents and the director on the code of conduct, security measures, annual work plan, the school development plan, the school program, free and extracurricular activities and the like. Parliament considers the relationship and cooperation of students and teachers and the atmosphere in the school, informs students on issues of particular importance to their education, and so on. Parliament consists of two students of each class that are elected by all students each year.

74 Fund for Open Society and Pestalozzi Children's Foundation, 2010

75 Dr. Jelena Vranješević, Availability of quality education from the perspective of teachers, parents, students and activists of local NGOs, the Equal Opportunities Project, 2010

The school and the teachers should find and develop different possibilities of engagement and participation of parents. The school creates conditions for participation by establishing a climate of cooperation and participation of both students and parents, improvement of planning, involvement of parents in making the annual work plan, protecting students from violence, organizing professional training programs, performing school development planning (introducing procedures which provide participation of parents). One of the effective ways is so-called indirect participation of parents that is achieved by activating the parents to come to school more often on different grounds and with different opportunities: workshops on parenting skills, sports tournaments of parents / teachers / students, a club for parents, presentations, and the like.

Participation of parents can be supported through cooperation with other agencies and introducing mechanisms to support the family. When a Roma family is in question, the mechanisms that exist in Serbia are:

- Educational assistant in primary schools;
- Roma health mediator;
- Centres for Social Work and Social Worker - Case Manager;
- Roma coordinator within the local governments;
- Local NGOs which have support programs.

Both practice and research confirms that, despite the prejudices, the Roma families are capable of high-quality cooperation and participation in school. Minority and marginalized populations want their voice to be heard, and they are ready for the highest level of cooperation with the school attended by their children, when a relationship of trust, understanding and acceptance of differences is created. The task of the school is to represent the needs of their students and families and their right to support and participation. Participation is a process and it develops gradually. When a parent is ready for engagement, he/she should be included in the higher levels of participation as in decision-making and policy-making processes.

A good way of participation, it is recommended that minority and disadvantaged families get a representative to the Council of parents. If you are in selecting the departmental community is not involved in the electoral procedure, it is recommended that the Director of the School Board provide additional seat in these bodies in proportion to the number.

In this way it creates a balance of power and satisfy the right of all to participate in decision-making.

The Law from 2009 introduces novelties which promote the participation of parents. Parents of children from minority communities, as well as children with disabilities, are proportionally represented in the parents' council;<sup>76)</sup> parents' council participates in the selection of textbooks, considers the school plans and evaluates their implementation (Article 58).

Participation of parents of Roma children in the parents' council has always been challenging, and they are rarely involved in their work. Roma Education Project: The solution for the future, which was aimed to involve Roma parents in school boards and parent councils, was successfully implemented in five primary schools in Valjevo. The project was led by Roma Centre for Democracy in cooperation with schools, School Administration in Valjevo and local government, with the supported of REF.

<sup>76)</sup> Parents Council brings together one representative from each class. Parents' Council sends its suggestions, questions and opinions to the school board, the director, and the professional staff. Parents Council delegates parents to the school board, ensures the quality and improvement of educational work, and suggests elective subjects. In addition, the council of parents considers the use of extra income, the working conditions and safety of students, and gives approval for excursions, and so on

Within the project, Roma parents have been involved in parents' councils and school boards by the use of measures of affirmative action. Parents were trained to participate in the work of these bodies, and the Forum of Roma parents has also been formed. Schools in which the project was implemented, analyzed the needs of the Roma community, and, in accordance with them, supplemented their school development plans. The expansion of the activities of this project in schools in other communities has also been planned.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Since the beginning of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, Roma education is one of the priorities of the Ministry of Education and other governmental institutions. Problems of Roma have become part of the mainstream state policy, the Roma issue has entered the strategic documents related to education, as well as general and sectoral strategies and action plans relating to the development of Serbia and the European Union accession process.

However, by 2009 and adoption of the Law on Basic Education, the gap between the goals and their implementation in practice was evident and indisputable: while promising initiatives have been designed, a number of obstacles which are not approached adequately have been identified. All documents of the national policy in this area indicate that the main obstacles for Roma are access to education, high dropout rates, poor quality education, too much enrolment in special schools and schools for adult education, discrimination and segregation; disrespect of Roma identity.

As in most other countries, there are no reliable data on Roma in the education system. Existing estimate on which the Government and NGOs generally agree is that there are about 500,000 Roma in Serbia. Earlier studies have suggested that in the previous period, only about 2% of Roma children of given age have been in the system of preschool education, less than 40% were enrolled in primary education, and that as many as 70 to 90% of Roma children who enroll in elementary school, at some point drop out. Recent data indicate an increase in the coverage - according to recent announcements of the Ministry of Education and government representatives, starting from the academic year 2010/2011, applying the provisions of the Law on Basic Education has greatly facilitated access to education, compared to the previous school year – there was a 10% increase in the coverage of Roma children in kindergartens and primary schools.

However, serious limitations to Roma access to education still remain. First, the physical capacity of existing pre-schools is not sufficient to meet the needs of preschool children in general, and it particularly affects Roma children, who make a large percentage of this age group. Administrative and legal barriers, as well as the hidden costs of education, remain a major obstacle for Roma access to primary education. Minimum quality of education, low academic achievement, and discrimination, in school and in the wider environment, are the main reasons why Roma children drop out of school. Most of them give up before they reach the secondary level. Adults do not sufficiently use “second chance” possibilities for primary, secondary, vocational and professional education in the formal system, because their organization, content and working methodology is insufficiently adapted to adults.

Discrimination against the Roma continues despite anti-discrimination measures. At all levels of education Roma are systematically exposed to a lower quality of education. Many Roma live in poor neighborhoods, where there is no proper infrastructure and no local budgetary investments. Many sources indicate that the quality of school buildings to which Roma children gravitate

is worse than average. Teachers in schools with predominantly Roma children are formally qualified equally as others, but there is the phenomenon of “white migration” from these schools and it affects both students and teachers. All this leads to lowered expectations and a lower quality of teaching, as well as the poor achievements of Roma children, as shown by the results of standardized tests. Half of Roma children tested in one study have not mastered basic math skills after the third grade, and the percentage is even higher when the basic grammar of the Serbian language is in question.

Prejudices of teachers play a significant role in lowering the quality of education for Roma pupils. Teachers, as stated by some of the researches, ignore the racist bullying and harassment against Roma by their non-Roma peers and their parents; they often show discriminatory attitudes towards Roma, expressing prejudices that are deeply rooted in the local community and society at large. Cooperation between schools and Roma parents, if any, is superficial and certainly low.

Although there are no data on the extent of segregation of Roma children in education in Serbia, there is evidence pointing to its existence. The most common forms of segregation are the following: segregation of children in special classes in regular schools, segregation of children in special schools for mentally challenged children - often as a result of inappropriate categorization procedure, segregation through the inclusion of Roma children under 15 in the system for adult education with shortened curriculum.

Unlike the total population in which there is no significant difference between boys and girls in terms of attendance at primary school, when Roma children are concerned, there are significantly more boys than girls attending primary school. Among Roma children, age of the child has a great influence on the rate of school attendance and it is the lowest in the first grade, the maximum value is achieved among children aged 8 to 10 years, and thereafter a significant decline is noted among girls aged 11 and boys aged 12.

A significant number of youth do not finish high school, which significantly narrows the opportunities for their employment. The Roma population is still the most vulnerable, particularly girls who in a significantly smaller percentage enroll in secondary schools. The percentage of boys who go to high school is twice the percentage of girls (14% and 6%), which is contrary to the rest of the population, in which the percentage of girls who go to high school is slightly higher than of the boys.

Research and studies show that some of the identified barriers to education of Roma girls refer to general obstacles when the education of Roma children in question. Specific barriers that affect only the Roma girls are associated with gender role of girls and women in the Roma community: the traditional gender patterns by which women’s education is not encouraged, lack of wider support for further education of girls, preserving the virginity and early marriage, and specific jobs at home, taking care of younger children and so on. Double discrimination of female students increases the risk of peer violence against them, but also of the violence by the school staff. Abuse or risk of abuse of girls in school is another reason for early drop out at primary school level.

Serbia has started to create institutional mechanisms to implement policies that provide equal access to quality education for all and ensure equity in education, which is shown by the large number and intensity of activities of the Ministry of Education and other governmental institutions in the field of inclusive education and education of Roma in the past year.

Adoption of the new Law on Basic Education created the conditions for systematic action. When it comes to education of Roma, it especially relates to regulations concerning inclusive admission policies in the first grade, the introduction of educational assistants, affirmative measures, sanctioning discrimination and funding of education per student. The law makes changes when the right of students and parents to participate is in question, by defining the role and importance of the Students' Parliament, and the Parents' Council.

Financing of inclusive education and especially the education of Roma through DILS project of the World Bank and the IPA funds (EU pre-accession funds) also contributes to the overall goals. It can be concluded that the system's institutions take responsibility for ensuring the conditions for exercising the right to equal access to quality education for all.

However, programs that recognize specific difficulties faced by Roma girls and include activities in support of this marginalized and discriminated population, are still weak and certainly insufficient.

The obligation is on the side of the state to provide quality education for all children, particularly for vulnerable and excluded children. Governments at all levels (national, regional and local) should implement laws and policies which are adopted, and ensure broader public support to education of Roma girls, including gender sensitization of the Roma community, of the faculty and staff of schools, students, local governments, and so on.

Existing authorities need to find mechanisms to ensure adequate financial resources to implement the laws, strategies and action plans that would provide better position of Roma girls, and generally of Roma children in education.

It is extremely important for the formal education system to develop and establish a complete mechanism to allow optimum coverage of children at preschool and primary level, to prevent dropout of children from school and allow their return to the regular school system.

It is necessary to expand the capacities of pre-school institutions and provide free attendance at all-day programs for Roma children in the earlier ages, not just during the compulsory curriculum. This is certainly considered one of the most important measures when it comes to improving the educational status of Roma, as early involvement in the educational programs can overcome the negative aspects of the influence of social deprivation, including poor knowledge of the language of the environment. In this way, children are better prepared for school and attending classes. For girls who attend primary school this would be particularly useful, because they would not have to miss school because of taking care of younger brothers and sisters. Local, provincial and central governments should provide funds for implementation of these measures, from their budgets, or with the help of donor funds.

Affirmative action should be developed that would, with appropriate assistance, enhance education of Roma girls and women in primary and secondary education, whether it comes to those who dropped out due to marriage or pregnancy, or women in literacy classes. Local, provincial and national government should provide scholarships for elementary and secondary school education of Roma girls and boys, in which the special quota should be provided for the education of Roma girls, and reduce differences in educational level of Romani women, as compared to men of Roma nationality, and women from the majority population.

It is necessary to monitor the implementation of antidiscrimination policies planned by the Action Plan for Education of the Strategy of Improving the Situation of Roma. Working group that monitors implementation of this plan should examine the status of various activities planned for the realization of anti-discrimination policies and practices, and initiate further activities.

The school should adequately and timely respond to any occurrence of discrimination and through various activities encourage the development of tolerance among all students (both Roma and non-Roma): through peer education about tolerance, prejudice, stereotypes and gender equality, by providing conditions and motivation of Roma girls and boys to participate in extracurricular school activities, and so on.

It is necessary to inform, educate and sensitize teachers on specific problems that the Roma children, especially girls, face during their education and upbringing, discrimination and gender equality, and respond to educational and psychological needs of Roma girls. It is particularly important to put emphasis on adequate psychological support to Roma girls to overcome adolescent and other crises, and to reduce the dropout of Roma girls in primary and secondary education.

Ministry of Education should recommend and provide teacher training programs against prejudice. The school and the teachers should be enabled for intercultural understanding, and inclusive and gender-sensitive teaching. These programs should become an integral part of professional teachers' education and compulsory part of training of counselors in the school administration so they would know how to recognize prejudice and take appropriate steps when they are spotted.

Failure to observe regulations must entail clearly defined sanctions which will be consistently applied. By-laws must precisely clarify the new terms and thus prevent the avoidance of their use.

Counselors from school administrations and educational inspectors, local governments, NGOs and parents should pay particular attention to the dropout and discrimination of Roma pupils, in particular anti-discrimination policies and practices of schools. It is necessary to strengthen vocational and educational counselors to work in this area.

A quality control system could be set up by improving student and parental participation.

Voice of Roma children should be listened to in the development of education initiatives at the local and national levels, and educational systems must be inclusive, recognizing the reality and the conditions in which each child lives. Parents should be asked for their opinion about the services they receive, and anti-discrimination issues should also be dealt with by the school boards and parent councils. Parents and representatives of local school boards should be more active in monitoring cases of discrimination and initiation of preventive measures.

Finally, in order to define appropriate measures to improve education of Roma and ensure monitoring and evaluation of their implementation, it is necessary to provide reliable data on Roma in the education system. In this sense, the school would have to constantly update their systems, monitoring all children in their territory, with particular emphasis on children from high risk groups.

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## II) ATTITUDES, KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE OF THE TEACHING AND PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN RELATION TO GENDER ISSUES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE EDUCATION OF ROMA GIRLS

*Prof. Dr. Vladimir Mihić*

### INTRODUCTION

The survey presented in this report was conducted in order to gain insight into the attitudes, knowledge and practice of teaching and professional staff from 9 primary schools in the area of Novi Sad, Kraljevo and Nis, in the context of gender issues and their influence on the education of Roma children.

The study involved teachers, class teachers and expert associates (mainly psychologists and pedagogues) from the target schools, which were selected because of the high number of pupils of Roma ethnic origin. The teachers of the third and fourth grade entered the sample, as well as the homeroom teachers of the seventh and eighth grade students from each school, under the assumption that they are the people who are in the most direct and intense contact with students, and therefore their views are the most interesting to researchers.

The questionnaire we used in the study consists of three parts. The first part aims at determining the practices and knowledge in schools about gender-specific education and programs that deal with topics of gender tolerance and gender politics in general. The second part of the questionnaire deals with the problems and specificities in education of Roma children, but also problems of inclusive education which has been introduced in schools in Serbia starting from this year. The third and the last part of the questionnaire deals with determining the prejudice of teachers, class teachers and expert associates towards Roma people and Roma girls through the scale of attitudes, which has already been successfully used in research within the territory of Serbia.

The results are, for clarity, presented in two parts. The first part includes an overview of the results related to the employed in the administrative professional services, whilst the second part includes an overview of the results related to teachers and class teachers, and to determine differences in attitudes, opinions and educational work among these groups and their expert associates.

### ADMINISTRATIVE AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

There were 22 expert associates (psychologists, pedagogues and social workers) from nine schools in Serbia that participated in our survey. Six of the associates are employed in schools on the territory of Nis and Novi Sad, and ten in schools on the territory of Kraljevo. The gender structure is expectedly disproportionate, so that only 3 male associates (13.6%) and 19 female associates (86.4%) entered the sample.

The average number of years of service of the associates was 20 (the shortest service was 2 years, and the longest 37 years). When considering only the years of service in schools where we conducted the survey, the average length of service was 16 years, whilst the shortest and longest service in these schools, were 1 and 34 years. The average age of our examinees was 48.7 years. The youngest tested associate was 31 and the oldest 60 years of age.

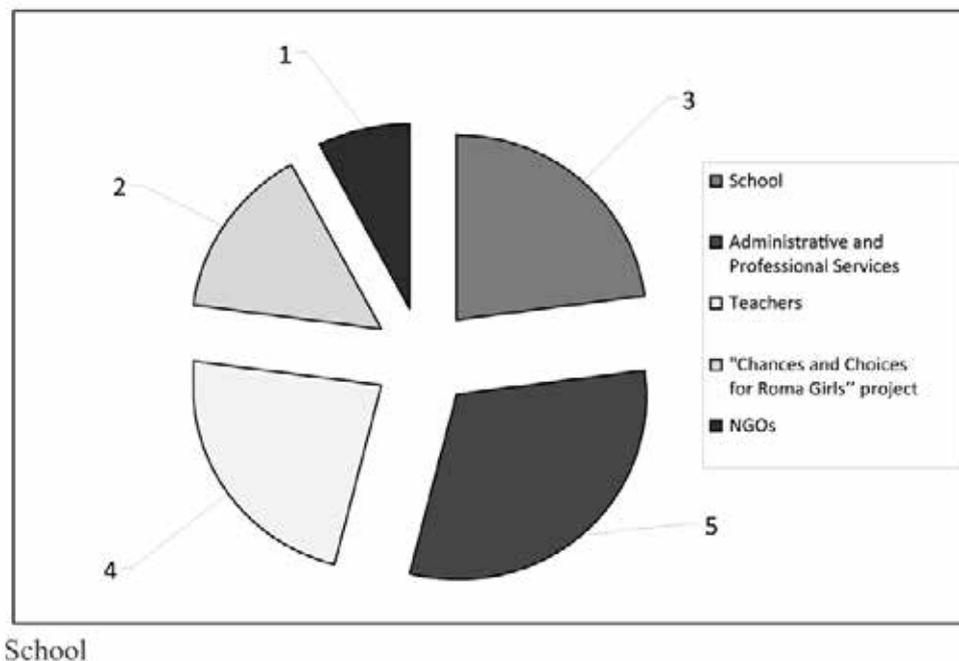
## GENDER ISSUES AND GENDER EQUALITY

The first part of the questionnaire concerned the level of familiarity of the expert associates with the difference between the terms “gender” and “sex”, but more importantly, we tried to observe regularities in addressing gender issues in targeted schools.

The first thing we noticed is that almost two thirds of the associates do not fully understand the difference between gender and sex, defining gender as the biological characteristic of individuals (almost 54.5% of them), or sex as the variable category in the course of life (31.8%). Only three of the examinees correctly identified gender as the social characteristics of a person, not always in accordance with their sexual affiliations.

Nevertheless, in almost all these schools (except one), at least one of the programs that are focused on gender-sensitive issues were organized in the past, although it is interesting that in each of the schools at least one of the expert associates had never heard of these programs. Some associates within the same school talk about one of the organized programs, whereas others claim that there were no such programs. It is noticeable that none of the programs were organized by the Ministry of Education, whereas the number of those organized by the school, professional administrative service and teachers themselves was fairly equal, even though, in some schools, there were a few of them involved in organization. These data were presented in chart 1. Due to the small number of answers, the chart presents the replies of those associates who reported the existence of these types of programs.

Chart 1: Who organized the programs that are focused on gender-sensitive issues?



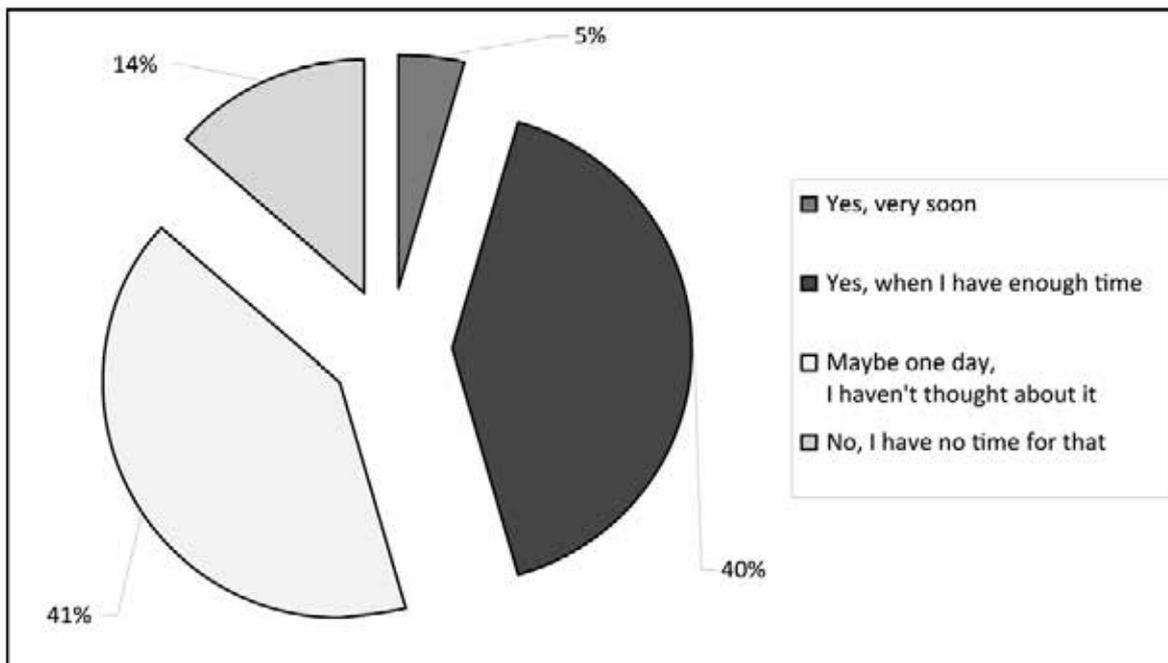
However, the information that in only one school the program focused on gender-sensitive issues and politics is presently being conducted shows that this topic is not relevant in our schools. It is evident that in two schools, one of the associates believes that these programs are currently organized in their schools, also that they are organized by teachers themselves or that the professional service is involved in their organization, while other associates from the same school claim that there are no such programs at the moment. In one school both associates agree that a program focused on gender sensitivity is being conducted at the moment, but they do not name the program (“Chances and Choices for Roma Girls”), or the organizers.

The associates often state educational films, tolerance training and changes in puberty as the contents of gender-sensitive programs, and, in one case, the specific work with Roma girls who leave school early, with emphasis on the importance of education as a chance for obtaining social status.

All of the above regarding the organization of the program points to the fact that the expert associates are not entirely certain whether the programs that have been or currently are conducted in their schools, actually deal with gender-sensitive issues. Different replies of the associates from the same school are especially puzzling, even when it comes to the present conduct of these programs. We assume that in some cases, the associates provide socially desirable answers and say that programs were conducted even when they were not gender-sensitive, whereas in other cases; the associates declare the contents that teachers themselves transfer to their pupils as programs related to gender issues.

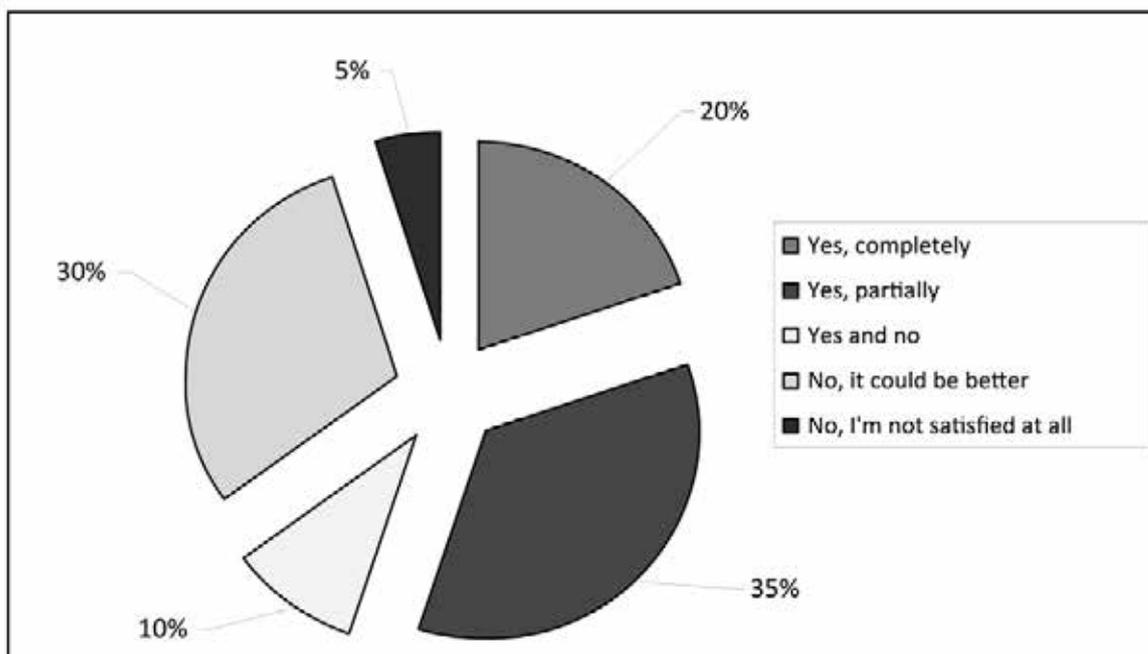
Personal experiences of Expert associates on programs of this type are more than modest. Only three examinees (of which, two are from the same school) have gone through some education on gender issues and were quite satisfied with them. On the other hand, 19 out of 22 expert associates have never passed training on gender issues, so this builds on previous data, based on which we concluded that the associates are not sure what the programs related to gender sensitivity and gender politics look like in general. They stated that the main reason for not attending these trainings, and the lack of plans for attending them, was lack of time. Only one associate is planning to attend some kind of training about these issues in the near future (Chart 2).

Chart 2. Are you planning to go through some kind of training related to gender issues?



When talking about the relationship between professional services and school teachers, it is noticeable that more than half of the associates are partially or completely satisfied with how much attention is being paid to the topic of gender-sensitive issues by the teachers in their schools. At the same time, however, more than a third of professional associates are not satisfied with the attention paid to this subject by the teachers. Detailed data are given in chart 3.

Chart 3. Are you, as an expert, satisfied with how much attention is being paid to this issue by teachers in your school?



None of the interviewed associates considers education and its results with the pupils in their schools different in regard to the gender of students, although one of the expert associates, at this point, indicated that parents of Roma girls do not allow the girls to go to school, which was not even a part of this question, but it could be subsumed under the differences in education arising from gender identity.

According to the associates, cases of harassment of their colleagues do not take place in schools in which we conducted the research. Only in one case, an associate admitted that there have been such complaints, whereas none of the other associates complained. It seems unlikely that this result is true and it is, more likely, the result of their wish to keep problems within the school, but also, the insufficient awareness of the teachers and the staff about what can be classified as harassment of a person of the other sex.

In the end, when asked to add something themselves on the issue of gender equality. Some of the associates (true, only a number of them) observed that the contents of textbooks do not respect gender equality, but also that the basic gender issue in their schools was the inability of Roma girls and female students of Islamic religion to complete their education, even the elementary, whereas this problem did not appear with the male students within these groups.

## MARGINALIZED GROUPS

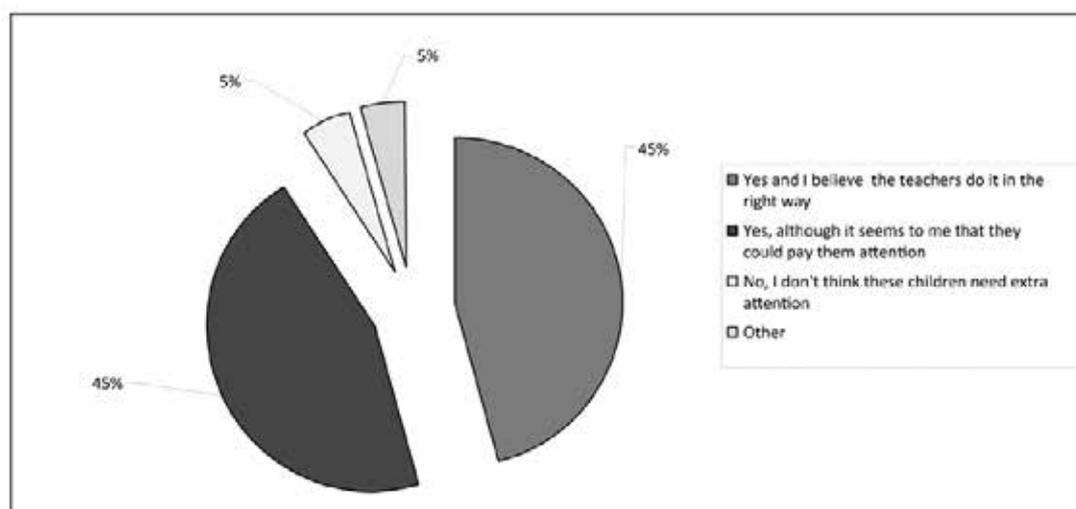
The decision of the Ministry of Education to introduce a program of inclusive education in all schools in 2009/2010 school year has also been confirmed in our study by the fact that this program works in all schools. Children who are part of inclusive education in these schools have very heterogeneous problems or special needs - from problems with hearing and vision, problems with speech, to mental disabilities. A detailed overview of these responses is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Children who are part of inclusive education

PROBLEM / SPECIAL NEEDS	FREQUENCY OF RESPONSE
Children with intellectual problems	6
Autistic children	5
Roma children	4
Children with problems in speech	4
Children with ADHD syndrome and hyperactive children	3
Mixed developmental disabilities	3
Problems with vision	3
Children who are hospitalized	2
Educational neglect	2
Learning problems	2
Behavior problems	2
Physical disability	2
Hearing problems	1
Communication difficulties (language, emotional and social)	1
Problems related to the behaviour patterns they adopt in the family	1
Cerebral palsy	1
Speech problems	1
Dyslexia	1

When asked whether the teachers in the school, in the opinion of professional services, pay more attention to Roma students, almost all respondents believe that they need extra attention and that the teachers in their schools provide the extra attention in an appropriate manner. Only one associate believes that these children do not need additional attention, as it can be seen in chart 4.

Chart 4. When it comes to Roma students in your school, does it seem to you that these children need extra attention of their teachers?



Professional and administrative services are certainly the most qualified to evaluate the potential problems that the children from the marginalized groups are faced with, that is why we asked our respondents to name the most common problems that Roma girls and boys encounter in their school. The results of the analysis are given in Table 1.

Table 1. What do you think are the biggest problems specifically related to the Roma pupils in your school?\*

PROBLEM	BOYS	GIRLS
Insufficient knowledge of the language of the area	54,5	45,5
Insufficient interest of the parents in their child's education	86,4	90,9
Early Marriage	0	59,1
Bad financial situation	59,1	45,5
Insufficient attention paid to them in school	27,3	22,7
Discrimination and disdain by other children	13,6	4,5

\* -- The associates had the opportunity to choose three issues. The percentages of associates who consider the problem important are given in the table.

As it were expected, we can notice that the biggest problem of boys and girls of Roma nationality is the insufficient interest of their parents in their schooling, whereas the problems related to the relationship between the environment (school and other children) towards them are considered to be the least important. The disproportion between the problems of early marriage of the boys and early marriage of the girls is also evident. It is a big problem with girls (right after the disinterest of parents); whereas this problem does not show with the boys (none of the associates mentioned this as the boys' problem). Perhaps it is interesting that about half of the staff considers the lack of knowledge of the environment language, with the girls (less), as well as the boys (more), a major problem that hinders the success in education. This problem is especially noticeable in schools in the territory of Novi Sad in which only one associate said that this was not a problem (only for girls), whereas all the others listed this as one of the three biggest problems of Roma girl students, but especially boy students.

At this point we should emphasize that in our survey we have also interviewed Roma and pedagogic assistants from all schools and that their responses are largely consistent with the responses of professional and administrative service, at least as the fundamental problems in education of Roma children are concerned. The associates also consider poor financial situation of Roma families and early marriage of girls the biggest problems, but also the negative attitude of other children and even teachers to Roma children. It is also observed that a big problem is leaving school early by Roma nationality girls, who are expected to help with the housework and looking after the younger children, whilst this is not the case with boys. The result of this is that girls, even though they have better academic achievement than boys, rarely finish primary school.

One of the most important questions when it comes to the influence on success of the education of Roma children is when we asked the associates to rank institutions and individuals who can contribute to solving this problem. It is interesting that none of the participants had put themselves in first place by the importance, and that, as the most responsible for solving of the issue, they see the government and the Roma community itself (Table 2).

Table 2. The importance of individuals and institutions that could affect a better chance for success in the education of Roma children \*

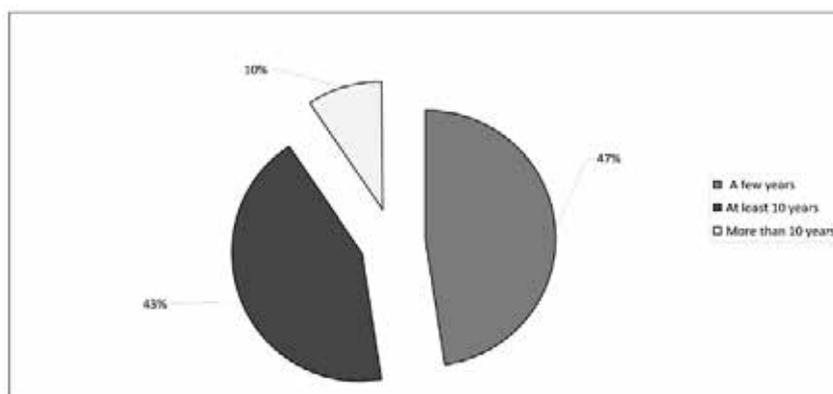
	Maximum importance	Minimum importance	Average rating
Country	1	4	1,50
Roma	1	4	1,91
School	1	4	2,86
You	2	4	3,73

\*-Rank ranged from 1 (most important institution / person) to 4 (least important institution / person)

On the question of what these people and institutions can do for better results in education of Roma children, the associates generally listed financial assistance, as the capability of the state, either through employment, through direct financial assistance or by providing housing and free education. Roma associates, who believe that the socioeconomic status of Roma families is the biggest problem we should work on in order to enhance education of Roma children, agree with this. As for the school in which the employees work, the adoption of individual and specific plans for this population, as well as additional classes are often seen as a potential solution. None of the associates mentioned as one of the possibilities of schools to increase the number of pedagogical assistants, whereas already employed Roma and pedagogical assistants mentioned this as a good way to help children and teachers. It is interesting that most associates believe that they themselves are doing everything in their power, but rarely admit that they could work more individually with these children. And in the end, the associates presented most ideas when they were asked about what Roma population itself could do for this problem. Regular school attendance, better cooperation with schools, better language skills and the development of working culture were most frequently listed.

Finally, when they were asked about a realistic time frame in which substantial differences in the educational status of Roma pupils could be seen, the vast majority of the associates believes that it is the time frame of up to ten years, which means that they are aware of the difficulties that Roma pupils are faced with and they estimate that the education of these children is a problem that could be solved, but only by a joint action of several institutions, which would take a lot of time (Chart 5).

Chart 5. What do you think would be a realistic timeframe in which a substantial difference in the educational status of Roma boys and girls could be seen?



In the end, we tried to determine whether there are prejudices among the expert associates towards the Roma in general, and especially towards Roma girls.

The results presented in table 3 show that level of the prejudice of expert associates towards Roma in general, as well as towards Roma girls, is relatively low.

Table 3. Expert associates' prejudice against Roma and Roma girls

	Min.	Max.	AS	Number of items
TOTAL PREJUDICE	29	59	42,95	21
PREJUDICE AGAINST ROMA GIRLS	3	9	5,14	3

By comparison, the research conducted in 2009 in the territory of Voivodina, within a doctoral dissertation pleaded at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, the average score of prejudice against the Roma was about 53, this means that, as expected, professional associates who have direct contact with Roma children have a less pronounced bias. The strength of these prejudices does not change substantially even because of the overall number of the years of service of the associates ( $r = 0.13$  for total score and only 0009 for the prejudice against Roma girls;  $p > .05$ ), nor because of the years of service in schools where the survey was conducted ( $r = 0.08$  for total score and 0.01 for the prejudice against Roma girls;  $p > .05$ ). The situation is the same when male and female associates are compared (for a total score  $t = -0.30$ , and the prejudice against Roma girls  $t = -0.13$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

However, because of the small sample this result must be taken with caution; When it comes to the place in which the school is located, we found a statistically significant difference in total score on the prejudice against the Roma ( $F = 4.07$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This result shows that the strongest prejudices against Roma are notified with the expert associates from Novi Sad (47.33), slightly lower in Kraljevo (44.30), whereas they are the least present with the associates from Nis (36.33). At this point it should be emphasized that the contact between the associates from Nis and Roma students is a bit more intense since one of the schools from the territory of this city that participated in this survey is only attended by Roma children. Also, the theories and research related to the so-called. "Contact hypothesis" confirm the importance of everyday contact to reduce prejudice, but only when that contact is saturated with common interaction, not only with the mutual presence in the same school or classroom.

Even though, we have not explicitly examined the number of contacts between the associates and Roma students, given that the percentage of Roma children in these schools was relatively high, we assume that all associates who participated in the survey have frequent contacts with Roma students both girls and boys.

## TEACHERS

The total number of teachers and class teachers who were a part of the study was 146, from nine schools in the territory of Kraljevo (43 or 29.5%), Nis (42 or 28.8%) and Novi Sad (61 or 41.8%). Significantly larger number of associates was female teachers (82.7%); whereas the number of male teachers was much lower (17.3%).

The average age of teachers was 43 years (the youngest one was 24 and the oldest 63 years old). The average length of service was less than 18 years, and the average length of service in the school where the research was conducted about 14 years.

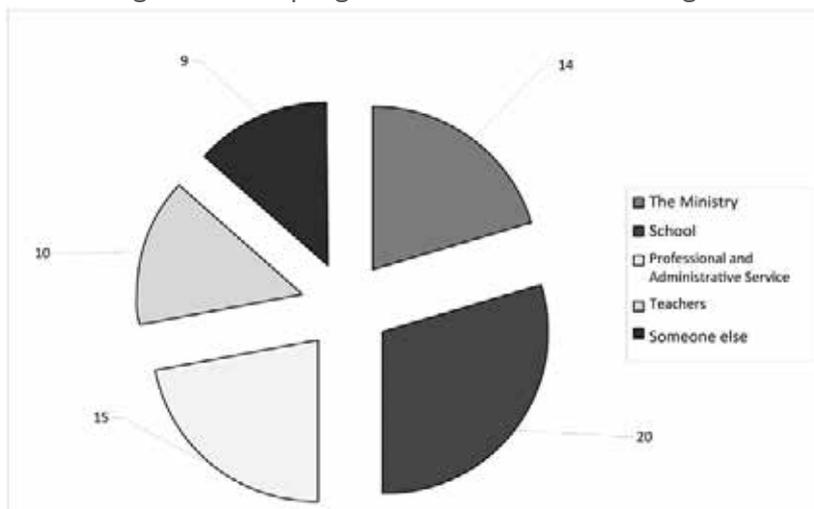
## GENDER ISSUES AND GENDER EQUALITY

Similar to the case with expert associates, the teachers were not entirely sure about what the difference between the terms gender and sex is. Almost 70% (68.8%) of teachers believe that the term gender means the biological difference between men and women, 18.8% think that sex roles are changeable over time, and only 11.6% correctly identified gender as the social difference between men and women. This distribution of responses does not deviate significantly from the responses of the expert associates ( $\chi^2 = 2.18, p > .05$ ) indicating that there are no significant differences in knowledge about the meaning of these concepts among teachers and school associates.

Interestingly, the teachers claim that in the past in all the schools in which the survey was conducted, there has been, at least, one seminar held on gender issues, although the associates from one school said that there were no such seminars in their school. But again, it is evident that within the same school teachers and class teachers do not agree whether there were any of these programs, confirming our hypothesis that employees in our schools are not sure what these programs that deal with gender issues look like, except in cases where it is obvious from the organization of the programs.

As far as the organizers, they are mostly schools (20.1% of teachers mentioned the school as the organizer) and professional and administrative services (15.1%), whereas the least frequently mentioned are the teachers themselves (9.4%) and other organizations (mostly NGOs, school's medical service and inclusive programs). Detailed results are presented in chart 6.

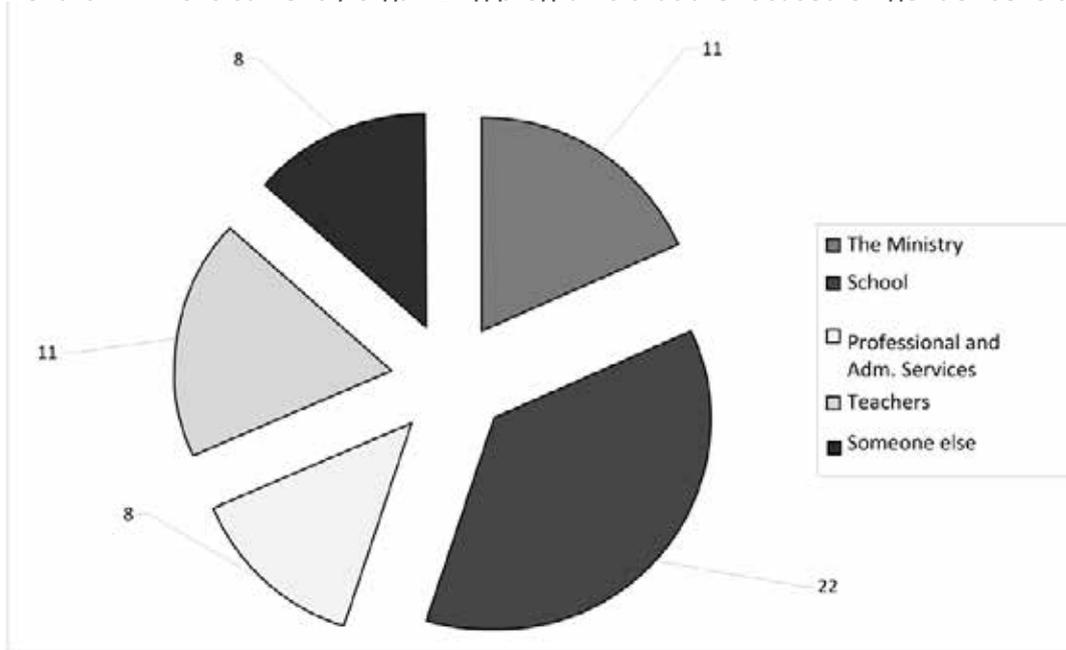
Chart 6. Who organized the programs that are focused on gender-sensitive issues?



When we talk about the current organization of these programs, 53.4% of teachers say that these programs are currently implemented in their schools, even though those employed in vocational schools claim the opposite (only in one school, programs focused on gender-sensitive issues are being conducted). We assume that teachers and experts do not have the same understanding of what are the contents of the programs currently implemented in schools. In addition, teachers and class teachers sometimes, from programs which are focused on other issues, draw the contents which are only indirectly related to gender issues.

As organizers of the program, once again, school is frequently mentioned, but the teachers and the Ministry as well. It is striking that the percentage of teachers who claim that their school is currently implementing programs organized by professional services, is almost twice lower than with the previous question, pointing out that professional service is not currently engaged in the organization of these programs, so this is perhaps why the expert colleagues almost unanimously responded that, in their school, there are no programs focused on gender-sensitive issues being implemented at the moment (Chart 7).

Chart 7. Who is currently organizing programs that are focused on gender-sensitive issues?

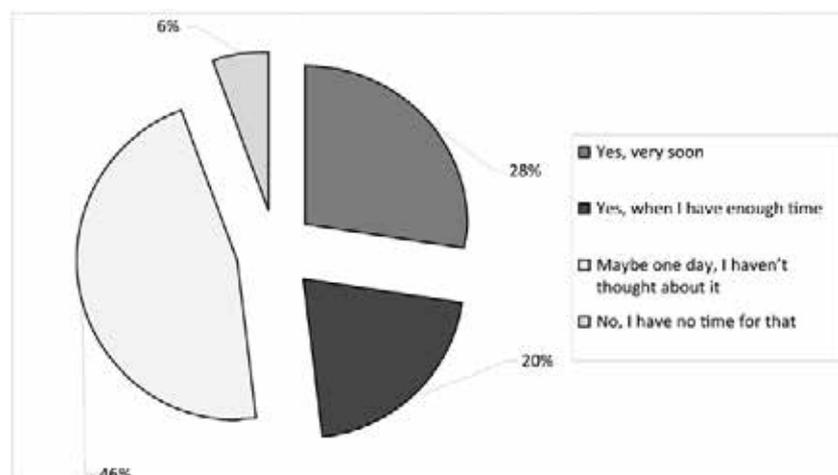


As the content of these programs, teachers often mention education about the changes at puberty, as well as issues of gender bias in literary works. What is surprising is that the vast majority of answers to this question, in fact, listed the activities related to the physical health of children (exercises for posture and prevention of deformity of the spine), as programs aimed at gender-sensitive policies, but also at issues of inclusion and the status of Roma children. This confirms the assumption that teachers do not fully understand what the field of gender issues implies, but they put current issues of inclusion and marginalized groups into focus.

The explanation of the poor knowledge about these programs can be found in the answer to the question whether the teachers themselves have gone through some of the trainings on gender issues, according to which only 16 of them (11.2%) have once passed some of these programs. Programs that are most frequently mentioned are “Neither black nor white,” eco-feminism, etc. The average evaluation of these programs by teachers who attended them was 3.81.

Nearly half of the teachers surveyed, plan to attend one of these trainings, among which 27% will do it soon. As the main reason for not attending these trainings, but also for not planning to attend, the examinees stated lack of time (Chart 8).

Chart 8. Are you planning to go through some training related to gender issues?



Only 8 teachers (5.9%) believe that education and educational results in their schools differ with regard to the gender of students, and as the reasons for this they list different interests, needs, and respect for traditional values, but the greater inclination of parental attention to children as well.

Finally, as with the associates, a small number of teachers added their observations concerning gender issues, mainly focused on the greater maturity of girls, but also on the lack of gender equality on higher levels (municipal, state, etc.). Some of the teachers to almost all open-ended questions expressed open hostility to the questionnaires of this type, calling them “demeaning” and “unnecessary nonsense.”

## MARGINALIZED GROUPS

The second part of the questionnaire, as with the professional services, is dedicated to the issues of inclusion and the status of marginalized groups in classes whose homeroom teachers participated in our study.

More than two thirds of the teachers (69.3%) have no students in their class who are a part of inclusive education. As children who are part of this program, teachers mention children with attention deficit disorders, autism, speech problems and problems with vision, and only in one case, a child who is part of inclusive education, they mention a Roma child who is intellectually neglected, therefore a child whose ethnicity does not seem to automatically make him a part of inclusion program. It is interesting that some of the teachers take this opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with the program of inclusion, arguing that the children “are not learning anything at home” and that the books they received they only “tear and smear.” That the dissatisfaction of teachers for inclusive programs is great, is confirmed by Roma and educational assistants who are faced with great opposition to the program of inclusion, and even open prejudice against children who are part of inclusion.

When asked if the teachers themselves pay more attention to Roma students, almost all of the examinees feel that additional attention is needed and that teachers in their school provide this extra attention in an appropriate way (Chart 9). There are no statistically significant differences between the teachers and the associates even in this matter ( $\chi^2 = 3.21$ ,  $p > .05$ ), which indicates that both teachers and associates are equally pleased with the extra attention Roma pupils receive in their schools.

Chart 9. When it comes to Roma students in your school, does it seem to you that these children need extra attention of the teachers?

	<b>Enrolled students</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>
<b>Novi Sad</b>	777	391	386
<b>Nis</b>	717	345	372
<b>Kraljevo</b>	241	128	113
<b>Total</b>	1.735	864	871

When it comes to problems that, according to teachers, Roma students face, most commonly they list poor financial situation of the family, and the detailed results of this analysis are given in Table 4.

Table 4. What do you think are the biggest problems specifically related to the Roma pupils in your school? \*

PROBLEM	BOYS	GIRLS
Insufficient knowledge of the language of environment	39,9	39,9
Insufficient interest of parents in their child's education	86	84,6
Early marriage	18,2	32,2
Bad financial situation	64,3	62,2
Insufficient attention paid to them in school	6,3	7,7
Discrimination and disdain by other children	7,7	7

\*- Teachers had the opportunity to choose three issues. In the table are listed the percentages of teachers who are considered the essential problem.

As it was expected and very conspicuous, the same as with the expert associates, the biggest problem of boys and girls of Roma nationality is insufficient interest of their parents for their education, whereas the least visible, and almost negligible, are problems of the attitude of the environment (school and other children) towards them. Unlike professional associates, all problems are almost equally listed for boys and girls, with little difference in problems of early marriage. This difference was the only statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 6.02$ ,  $p > .05$  for early marriage of girls, and  $\chi^2 = 4.74$ ,  $p > .05$  for the early marriage of boys; it should be specified that no associate mentioned a problem of early marriage of the boys from their school). This indicates that for the associates, early marriage of the girls from their schools a lot bigger problem than for the teachers, and on the other hand, teachers more often than professional associates perceive early marriage as a problem which is specifically associated with the boys from their class.

Not knowing the language of the environment as a major problem that does not help the success in education is somewhat less stated by the teachers than by professional associates. As with the associates, the employees in schools in Novi Sad, referred to this issue more often than their counterparts from Nis and Kraljevo, although it is statistically significant that this problem is frequently listed only with the girls ( $\chi^2 = 10.43$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

We asked both the teachers and professional associates to rank institutions and individuals who can contribute to solving the problem in the education of Roma children. Similar to the associates, a very small number of teachers put themselves in the first place in importance for solving these problems (only four respondents, or 2.9%), and as the most responsible for finding the solution they named the state and Roma community (Table 5 ). No significant statistical differences have been noticed here in any rank for the person or institution, although it is evident that the associates put the state in the first place, and teachers put Roma themselves.

Table 5. The importance of individuals and institutions that could affect a better chance for success in the education of Roma children \*

	Maximum importance	Minimum importance	Average rank
Roma	1	4	1,61
State	1	4	1,92
School	1	4	2,88
You	1	4	3,55

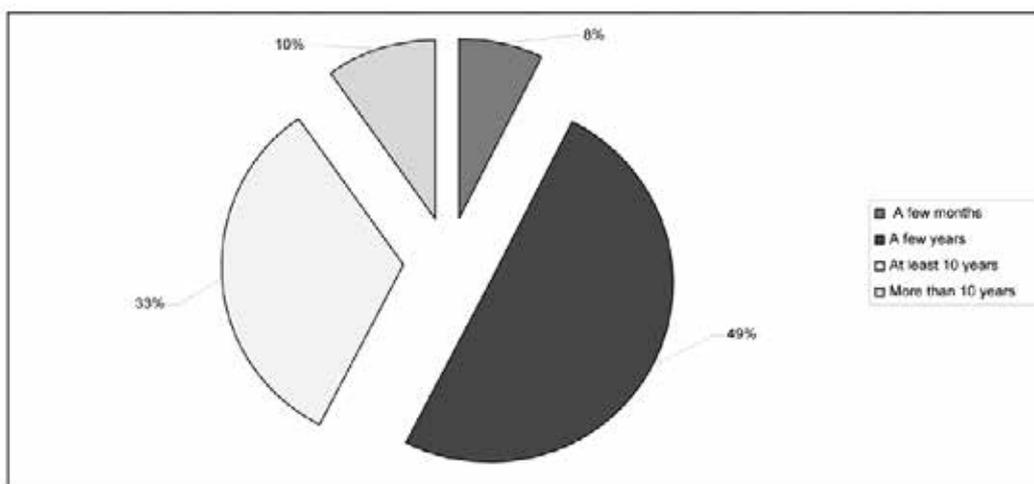
\*- ranks ranged from 1 (most important institution / person) to 4 (least important institution / person)

On the question of what these people and institutions can do for better results in education of Roma children, both experts and teachers as the possibility of the state mostly listed financial assistance (free textbooks, recruitment, financing programs and greater number of assistants, etc.). As for the school in which the employees work the involvement of Roma assistants and paying more attention to their work, additional lessons, support to the teachers, but also creating special department for Roma, are most often seen as a potential support, which would be a huge step backwards in the socialization of Roma students.

Teachers, similar to the experts, believe that they themselves are doing everything in their power, and as an improvement they state additional classes, better contact with parents, a greater seriousness in dealing with these children, etc. Ideas that teachers gave for Roma population itself and their additional engagement on the issue of education were mainly related to school attendance, better cooperation between parents and schools, development of working culture, but the number of respondents who listed the attitudes that express direct hostility toward Roma was not insignificant (“aggressive, arrogant, have no work habits, nor the will to change something in something life,” “Great attention is paid to Roma, and they are still dissatisfied. Because of the Roma children, we, the teachers, do not have enough time for good children “etc.), but to the researchers themselves (“ I think that either ‘you’ or ‘we’ do not live the same life with our Roma, because your questions are fascist – it’s a shame, “it is manipulation, and against the state which you live in and which feeds you!!!”).

Finally, the estimated timeframe in which they can feel important differences in the educational status of Roma pupils do not differ too much from the associates’ assessment. Most of the associate believe that the time frame is up to ten years, although there are some teachers who think that this period is much shorter. (Chart 10).

Chart 10. What do you think would be a realistic timeframe in which a substantial difference in the educational status of Roma boys and girls could be seen?



After all these questions, again we tried to determine the possible existence of prejudice, this time of the teachers towards Roma population and the Roma girls as well. The results presented in Table 6 show that the biases of teachers are somewhat stronger than prejudice of the associates, but as for them, relatively low.

Table 6. The prejudice of teachers towards Roma and Roma girls

	Min.	Max.	AS	Number of items
TOTAL PREJUDICE	22	74	50,66	21
PREJUDICE AGAINST ROMA GIRLS	3	11	5,95	3

Differences between the staff and teachers have been shown to be statistically significant for the total score on the scale of prejudice ( $t = 3.39, p > .01$ ), confirming that professors and teachers have a slightly more pronounced prejudice against the Roma from the associates from the same school. This is not an unexpected result, since the associates have a specific type of contact with the children of Roma ethnicity, and on the other hand, the type of education of the expert associates is much more focused on the development of tolerance and understanding of others, whereas the teachers and class teacher have gone through education that usually did not emphasize the issues of marginalized groups and work with them.<sup>1)</sup>

Differences in the expression of prejudice of teachers and class teachers do not differ significantly depending on the years of service of the staff (the correlation is  $r = -0.06$  for the total score and  $0.02$  for the prejudice against Roma women,  $p > .05$ ), or from the years of service in the school where testing was done ( $r = -0.03$  for the total score and  $0.02$  for the prejudice against Romani women,  $p > .05$ ). However, when comparing male and female teachers, it is obvious that women have more pronounced prejudice against the Roma in general, and towards Roma women as a separate group, although the latter difference is not statistically significant. These results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Teachers' prejudice against Roma and Roma girls – difference according to sex

	SEX	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	
TOTAL PREJUDICE	M	24	46.54	8.87	$t = -2.40$
	F	110	51.81	9.93	$p < .05$
PREJUDICE AGAINST ROMA GIRLS	M	23	5.83	2.52	$t = -0.30$
	F	106	5.98	2.20	$p > .05$

On the other hand, unlike the associates, teachers from different places have equally expressed prejudices, so here no significant differences in total score have been found ( $F = 0.13, p > .05$ ), nor in the power of prejudice against Roma girls ( $F = 0.85, p > .05$ ).

1 The survey was conducted in schools with a large percentage of Roma children, which had an effect on the results

## CONCLUSIONS

- Most teachers, class teachers and expert associates have been open for cooperation with researchers and they participated in our research with high motivation;
- The area of gender issues and programs dealing with this subject are still not very popular in our schools. Very often, the respondents were not sure what these programs should be dealing with or by the gender-specific education they listed programs aimed at maintaining health and preventing disease;
- The main problem of non-attendance of this kind is their small number, but also the lack of time that teachers, class teachers and professional services refer to as a chronic condition;
- On the other hand, the issue of education of marginalized groups, especially Roma children, is a question which obviously attracts more attention and causes many more reactions, sometimes very violent and we would say inappropriate for educators;
- Most of the expert associates and teachers in schools are satisfied with the care provided for Roma students and they considered it adequate, whereas only a small number of respondents believes that these children do not need any extra attention;
- The financial situation of the families and the lack of interest in education of the children are distinguished as the basic problems, and in some parts the problem of insufficient knowledge of the language of the environment as well;
- The state and the Roma themselves are usually referred to as individuals and institutions that could help solve the problems of education of Roma children, whereas personal responsibility, in our opinion, underestimated and virtually non-existent;
- A large number of our respondents had specific suggestions to help solve this problem (usually related to the improvement of financial situation), but almost everyone agrees that to solve this complex problem it takes to ten years;
- Finally, the prejudice against the Roma population by our teachers and professional services are not overly powerful, although it is evident that there are differences between these two groups, but also between the cities where the research was conducted (with the expert associates), or between male and female teachers.

### III) SURVEY OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE OF ROMA STUDENTS IN NOVI SAD, NIS AND KRALJEVO

*Zlatica Jovic*

#### INTRODUCTION

An insight into school attendance of boys and girls of Roma nationality as well as the overview of their school achievement has been made on the basis of the insight into the registers of these schools. The results are derived on the basis of systematic analysis of data on Roma children gathered from the registers.

Teams of volunteers have been trained for the purposes of research, i.e. gathering data from the registries. The training consisted of introducing them to the practice of keeping registers as permanent school documentation regulated by the Ordinance on the content and manner of school documentation, access to the same source of data required for collecting and making the database, introducing them to the equitable way of recording the data for further processing and analysis.

#### THE RESULTS

In nine target schools, during this period, there were 1735 boy and girl students of Roma nationality in total (hereinafter referred to as students), 777 in Novi Sad, 717 in Nis and 241 in Kraljevo. The arrangement of students in schools is not consistent. In all three cities there are schools with much larger number of Roma students than in other schools, which is probably related to the geographical distribution of settlements inhabited by Roma people.

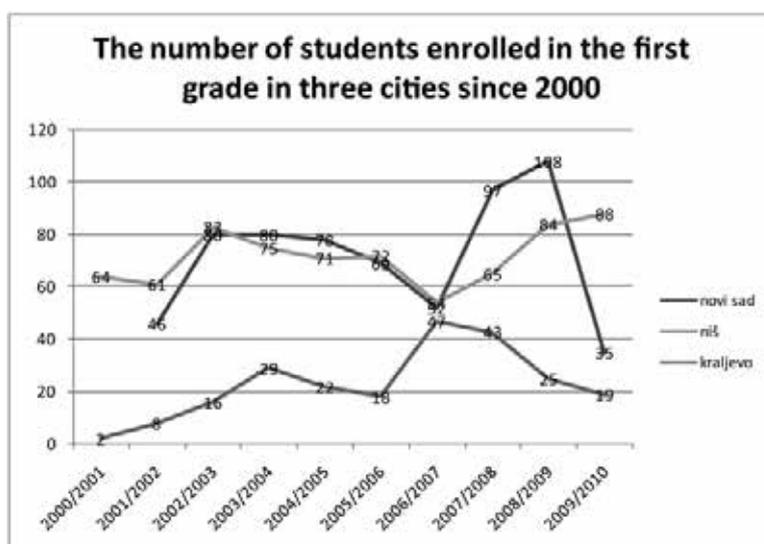
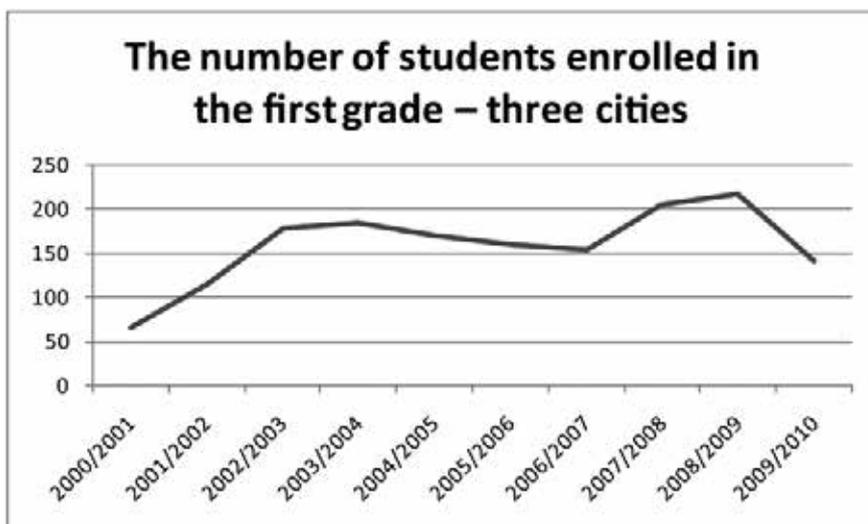
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<b>Kraljevo</b>	241	128	113
<b>Total</b>	1.735	864	871

The arrangement of students by sex is almost equal. On average, 50.52% of girls and 49.48% of boys attend school. In Novi Sad and Kraljevo there were more girls, while in Nis there were slightly more boys than girls.

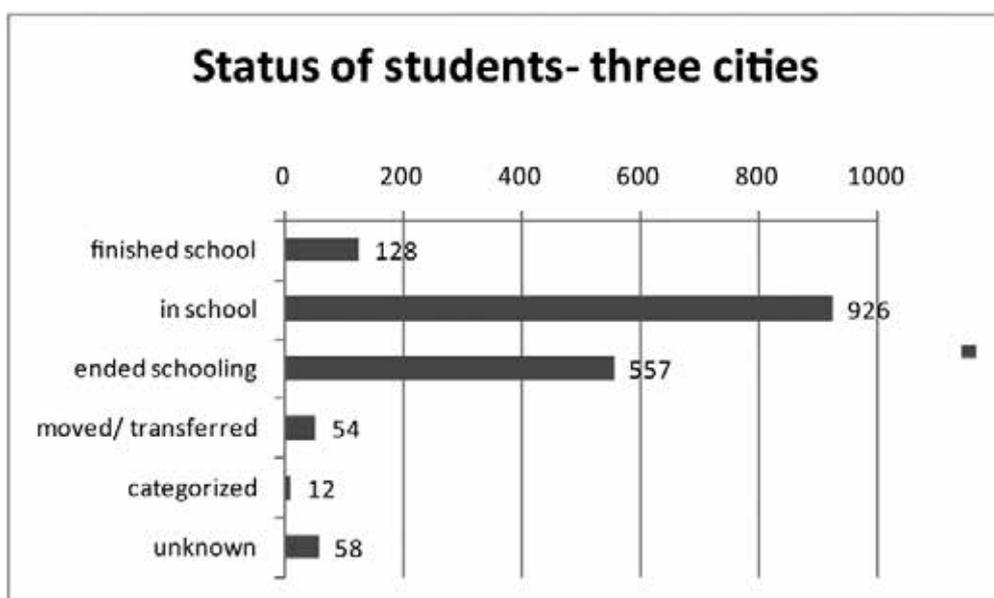
The number of students enrolled in first grade has been compared only for the the year 2000, given that for that period there are data for all schools.

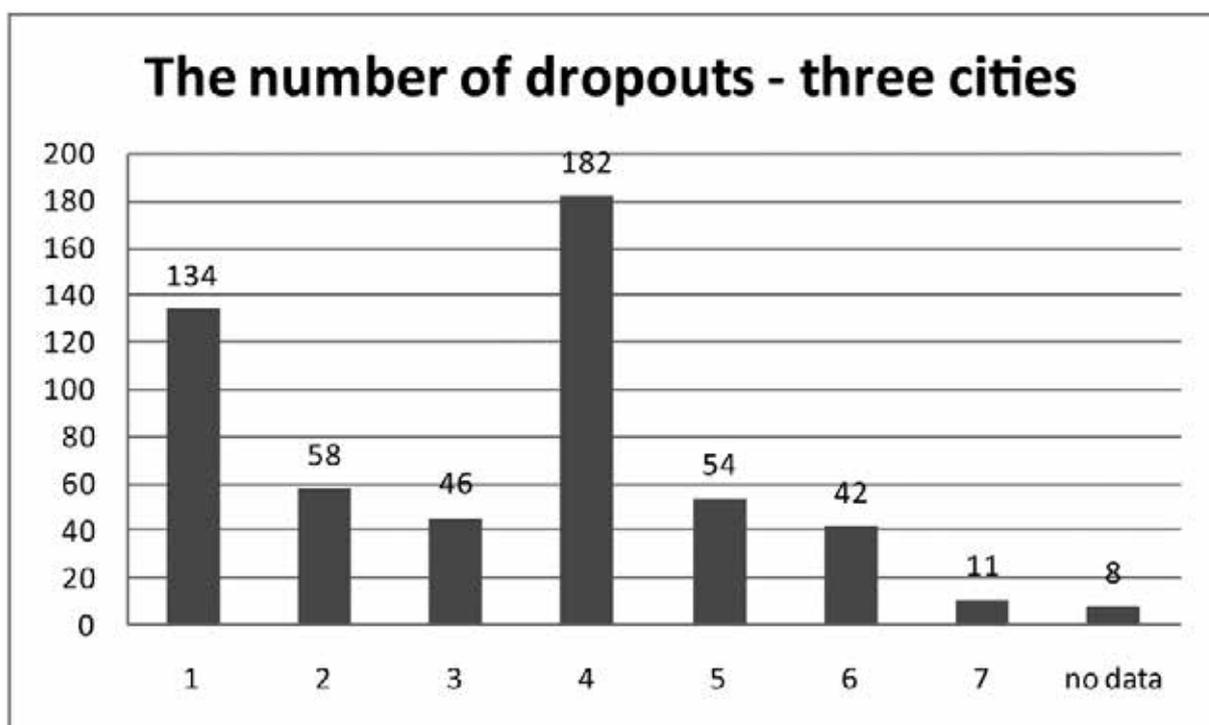
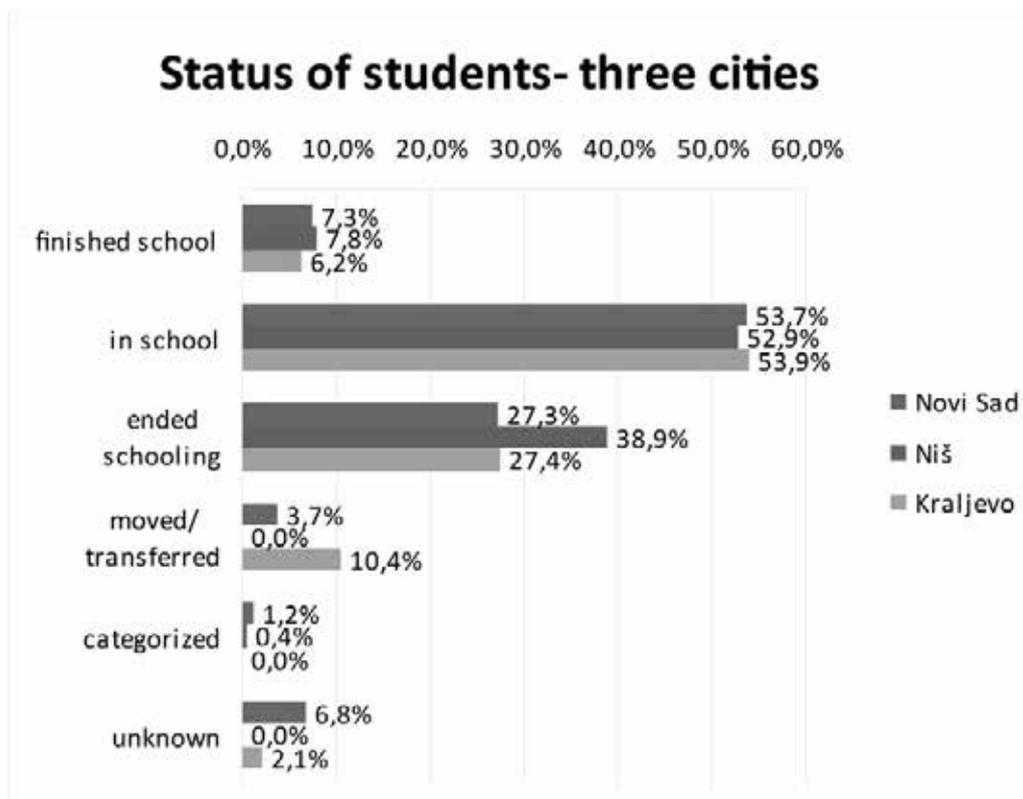
Since 2000, there has been a trend of increasing a number of students enrolled, which is visible only in the overall calculation. However, this tendency is not linear. In every city there are, occasionally, fewer students enrolled per year, and then the following year the number increases again. "Critical" years differ from city to city. For example, in Novi Sad and Nis in the academic year of 2006/07 there was a significantly lower number of first grade students enrolled, whereas in Kraljevo in the same year the largest number of students enrolled.

When all three cities are compared, most first graders were enrolled in 2008/09 academic year, while in 2009/10 the number of entries fell.

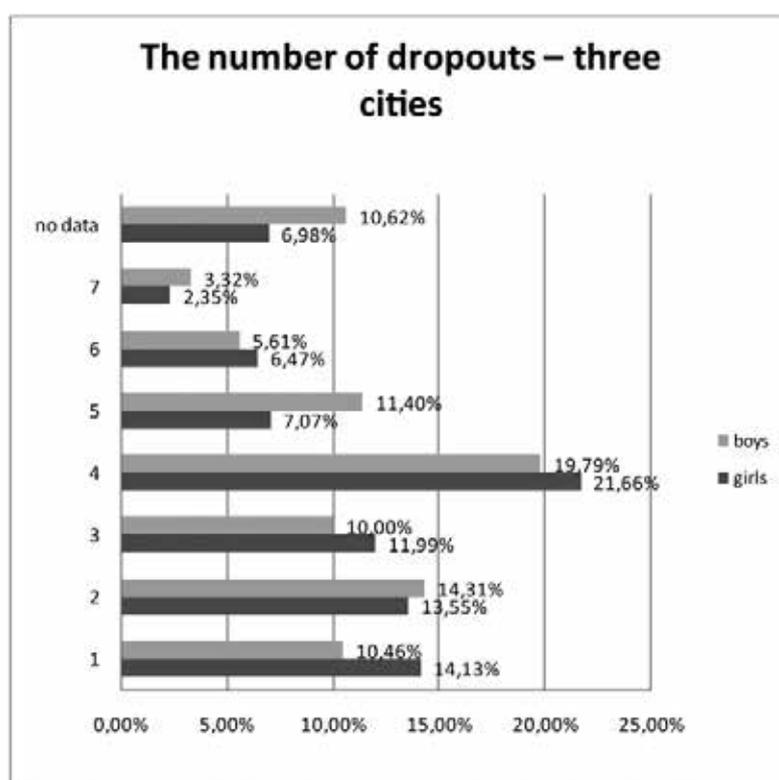
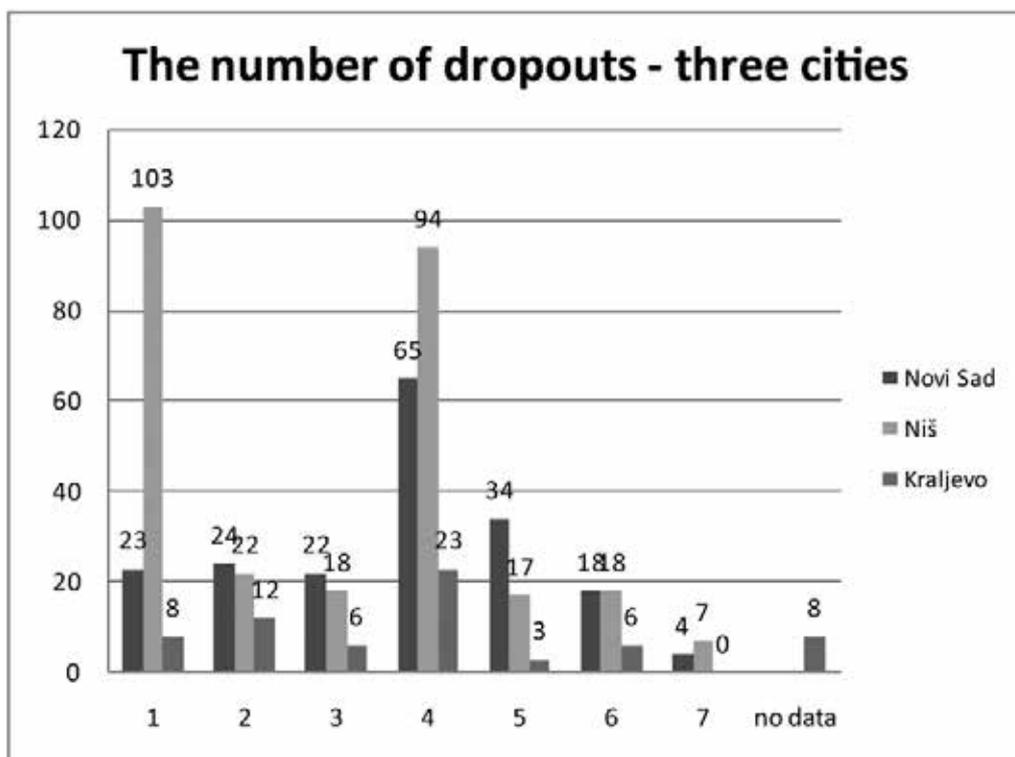


Out of 1735 registered Roma students, 926 currently attend school, whereas 128 completed primary school. A number of students, actually 54 of them, has been transferred to other schools or have moved, so that the fate of their further education is unknown. Drop-out rate is 32%. 557 students have left school in different periods of schooling. Percentage-wise, the largest number of dropouts is in Nis, whereas Novi Sad and Kraljevo have similar drop-out rates.





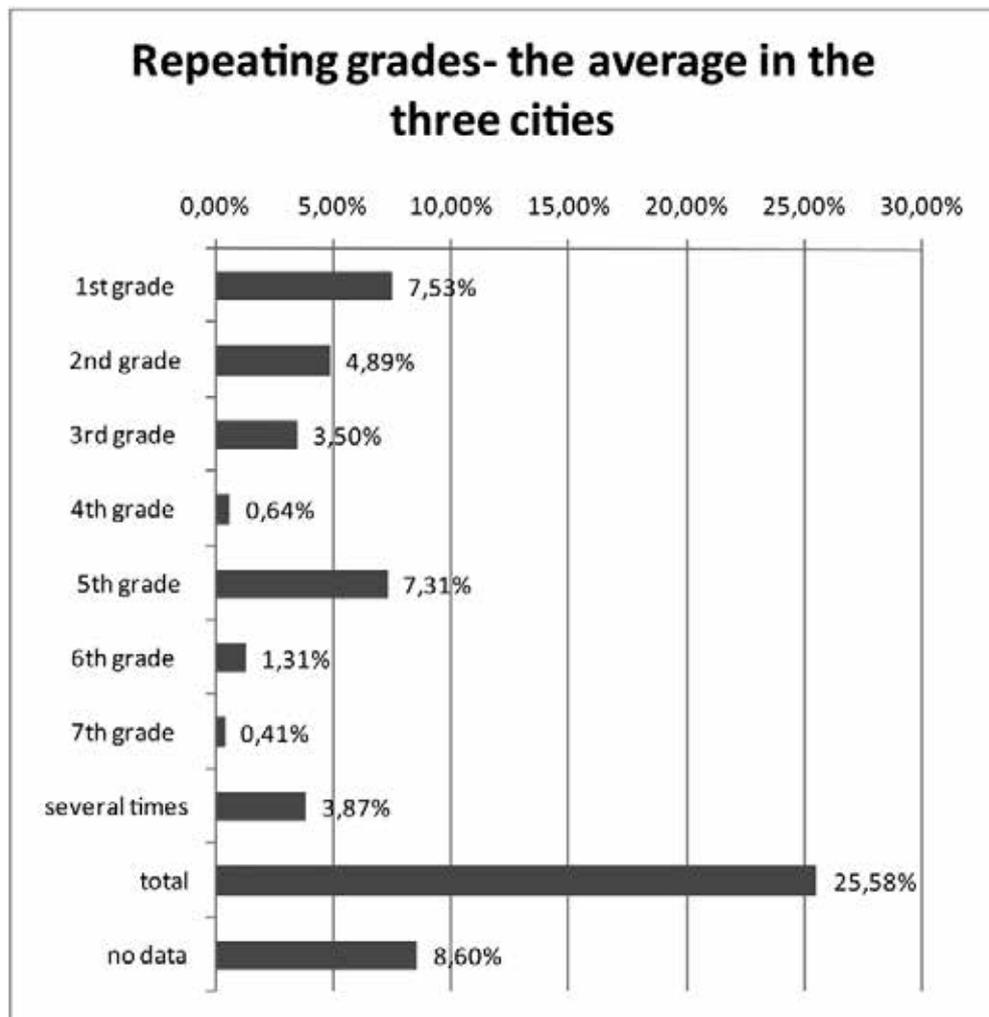
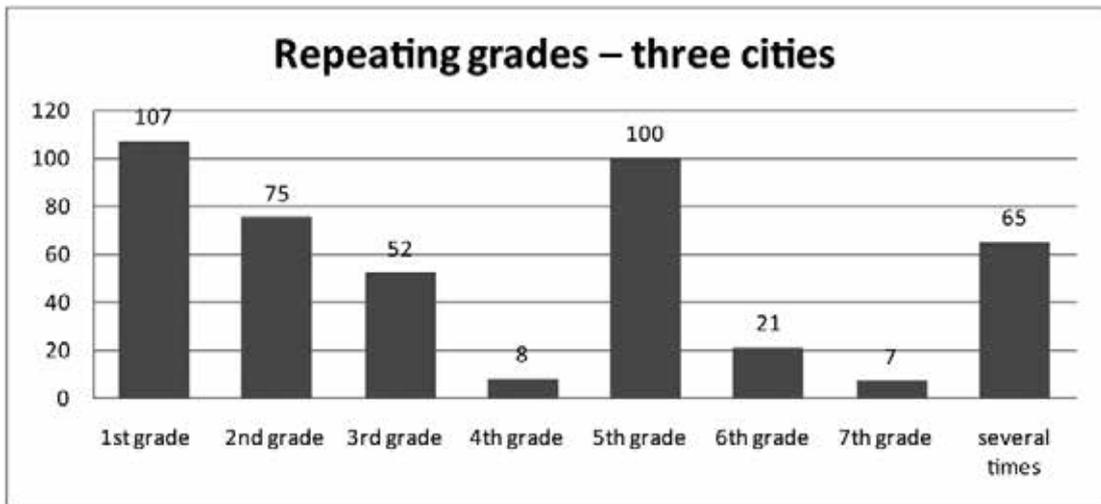
The age at which pupils of Roma nationality usually end their education is at the end of fourth grade, which is indicated by the data of the last completed grade (upper table shows the frequency of the last completed class). At the time, 182 students, or 10.49% drop out of school. However, many students give up at the beginning of schooling. During and after the first grade, 7.72% of students leave school.



After the second, third, fifth and sixth grade, drop-out rate is significantly lower, ranging from 2.42% to 3.34%, and in the last two grades leaving school is quite rare.

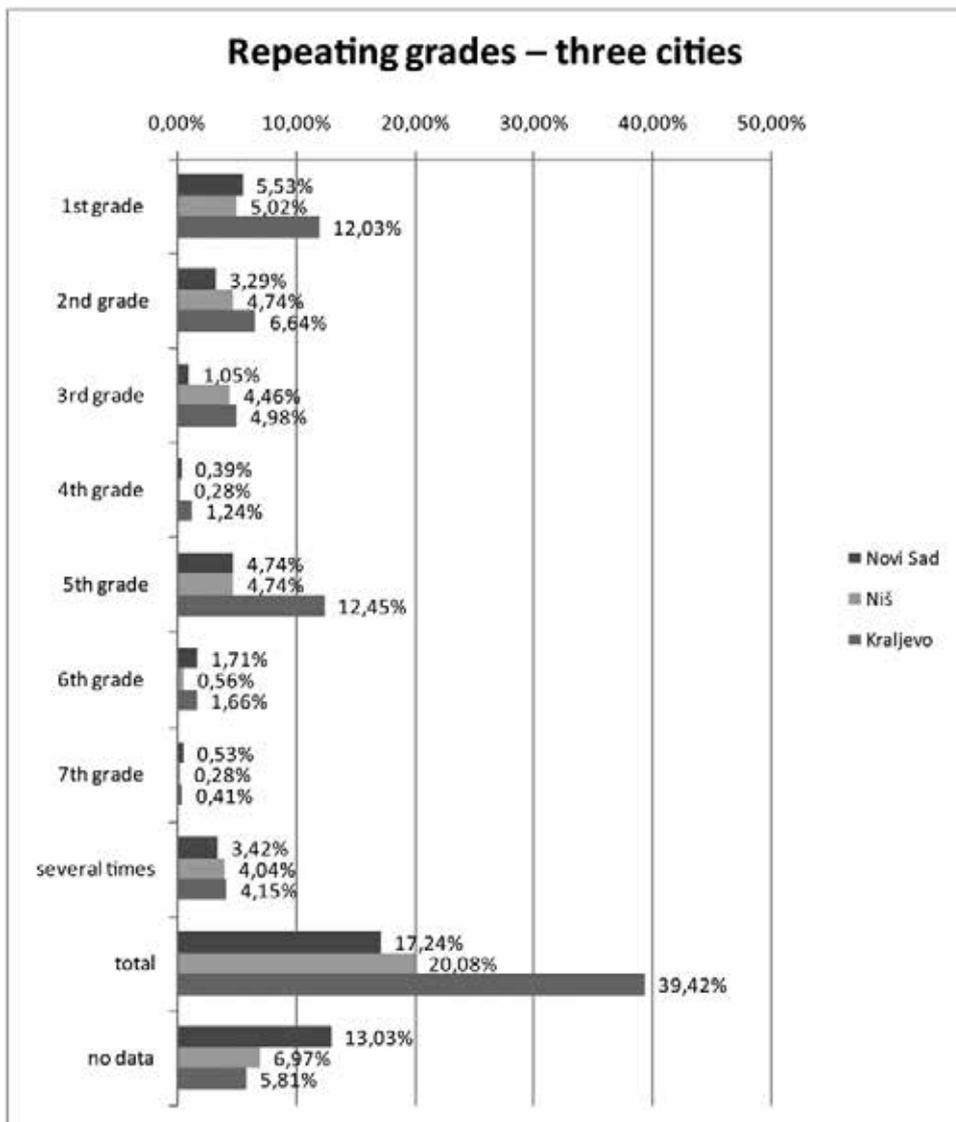
A significant number of dropouts in the first grade was recorded, firstly in Nis, where 74 students have been registered to be enrolled, but they have actually never attended school (out of 103 students from Nis whose last completed grade is first grade). Significant attrition at this age has been registered in Novi Sad, while the attrition during and after the first grade is not typical for schools in Kraljevo.

Girls were more likely to quit school after the first and fourth grade than boys, whereas boys were more likely to give up school after the second and fifth grade.

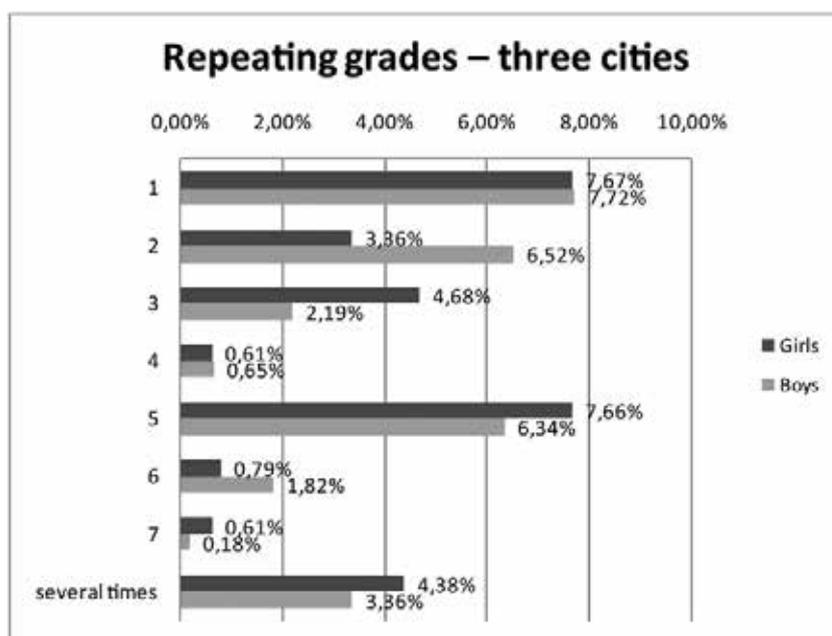


About a quarter of Roma students have repeated a grade at least once during school, and almost 4% among these have repeated a class more than once.

Repeating grades is the most frequent in the first and the fifth grade, and rate of each of these classes is more than 7%. The rate of repeating after these classes is decreasing, especially in the fourth and seventh grade, when it falls below 1%.

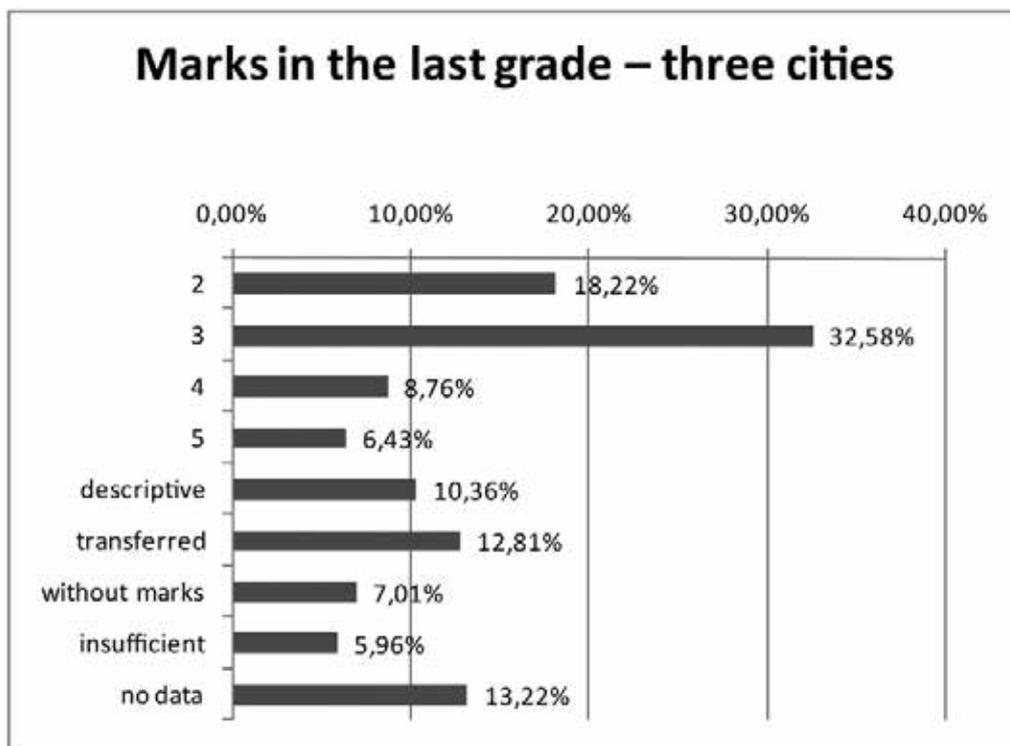


When it comes to repeating grades, big differences have been recorded between the cities. In Kraljevo repeating grades is significantly more frequent, 39.42%, whereas it is the least frequent in Novi Sad, 17.24%, and 20.08% in Niš. Also, in Kraljevo students repeat the first and fifth grade significantly more often than in the remaining two cities.



Boys and girls repeat first grade equally, whilst in the second and third grade some changes have been registered: more boys repeated second grade, and more girls repeated third grade. In other grades the differences are negligible.

There were more girls than boys who repeated grade several times, but this difference was not statistically significant.



The most common success of Roma students in all three cities was sufficient and good. Almost a third was good, 18.22% sufficient and, therefore, more than half of Roma children have lower achievement.

Also, there is a large number of transferred students (12.81%), suggesting that allowing them to pass is a measure which sometimes simply “solves the problem” and that might testify about the different or lower assessment criteria or the lower expectations of teachers towards Roma nationality students.

There are only around 15% of very good and excellent students, which is significantly lower percentage than the proportion of very good and excellent students in the general population.<sup>2)</sup>

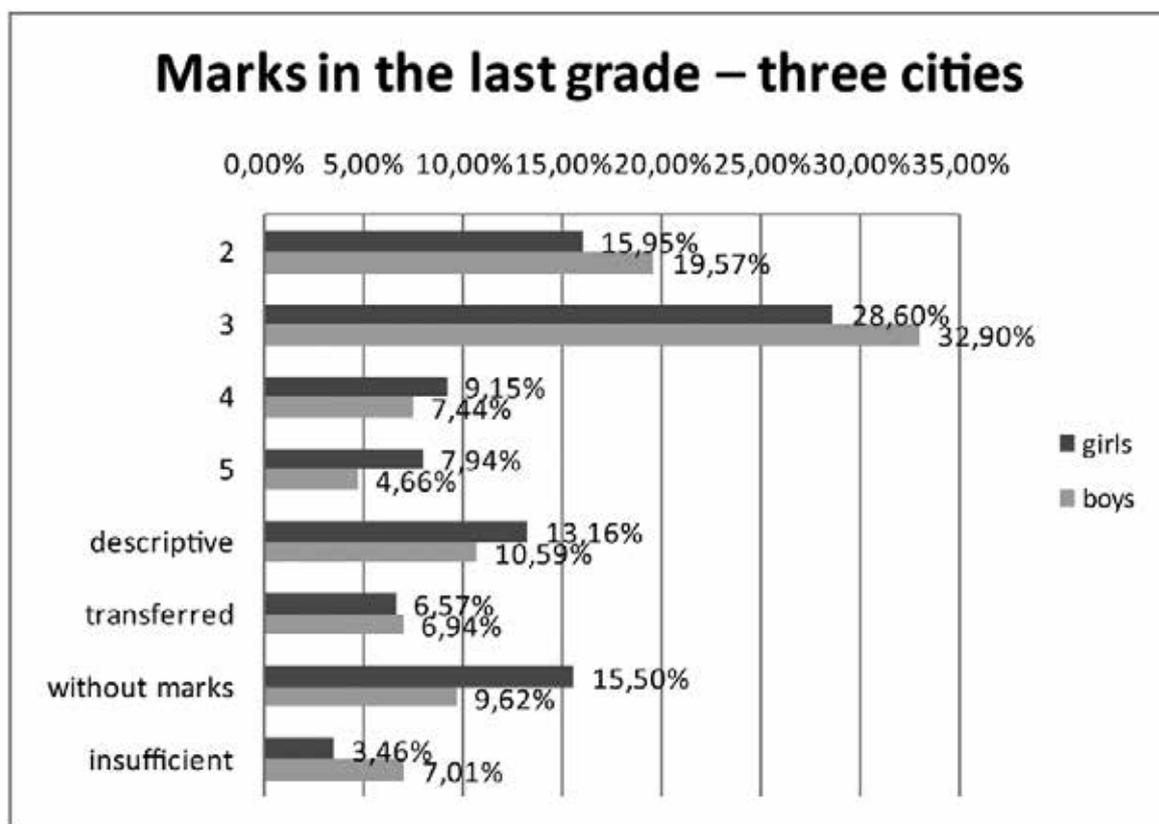
In Novi Sad there were fewer students who have achieved sufficient success, and much more of those who have achieved good success in comparison with the other two cities. A large number of students with insufficient success are also noticeable in this city. However, it is likely that this difference occurred only due to different ways of recording students in the cities. Namely, the category of transferred students was not shown in Novi Sad, and in Kraljevo the category of students with insufficient marks. It is probably about the same groups of students.

In Nis, the number of Roma students who achieved excellent success is significantly higher. The difference in relation to the other two cities is over 10%.

The possibility of transferring students has been applied in Kraljevo more than in other two towns. Even students with 7 bad marks have moved on to higher grade.

2 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia

In all three cities it can be noticed that boys are more often found in a group of students with low achievement, whereas girls are more frequently in the group with higher achievement. However, there are significantly more girls among the students who were transferred, whilst among the students with insufficient marks there are more boys. As previously noted, the cities presented data concerning transferred and insufficient students in a different way, so it is possible that gender differences do not even exist here.



At the level of all three cities it can be seen that boys are more often found in a group of students with low achievement, while girls more frequently in those with higher achievement. Among the students who were transferred there is significantly more girls, while there are more boys among those with inadequate academic achievement. This can be explained with the girls' learned obedience stemming from their roles in a patriarchal society and family.<sup>3)</sup> Also, some studies point to different forms of peer violence and discrimination that exist in schools with regard to gender.<sup>4)</sup>

3 Roma Women - biographies of old women in Vojvodina, Svenka Savić et al., Futura Publications, 2001

4 Violence in schools, Dragan Popadic, Institute of Psychology, 2010

## CONCLUSIONS

- The trend of including Roma children in primary schools where the survey was conducted is positive in the last 8-9 academic years. The number of Roma children who entered primary school in recent years has increased considerably - since 2000 there has been an increased tendency of involvement of Roma students in compulsory education, although non-linear;
- 1735 students of Roma nationality have been registered in 9 schools in 3 cities, an equal number of boys and girls;
- A significant number of students, 557 of them, over the past 10 academic years have ceased to attend primary school and on the basis of records in the registers they ended their further education. Drop-out rate is 32%, and schooling is usually ended after the fourth grade. Other “critical” grade during and after which students usually drop out is the first class. Students who were enrolled but did not attend school or they attended it very shortly were also recorded as first graders. Girls are more likely to drop out after the first and fourth grade than boys, whereas boys were more likely to give up school after the second and fifth grade;
- About a quarter of students repeats a grade at least once, and most often repeated are the first and fifth grade. The rate of repeating is somewhat bigger in Kraljevo than in Novi Sad and Nis. In terms of repeating, significant differences by gender were not observed.
- The most common success of Roma nationality students in all three cities is good. More than half of Roma children have the lowest achievement (sufficient and good). Female students have excellent or very good marks; they have better academic achievement than male students. In relation to male students they are more frequently rated excellent and very good success. This could indicate that girls manage to adapt better and use forms of support that exist in schools, but also that school environment is less discriminatory towards Roma girls than to Roma boys.
- By reviewing school registries in nine target schools in three cities, it has been found that for most students who left school there are no data at the designated place in the registers or the note says “advised to repeat” “moved elsewhere”, “ceased to attend school”, etc. Such a way of keeping the registers in case of leaving school with no data related to other registers and / or issued transfer papers, prevents further monitoring of students’ education. In this sense, there is considerable scope for improving the management of school records, which would help better implementation of legal provisions and the inclusion of Roma nationality students.

## IV) THE ACCESSIBILITY OF EDUCATION AND INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY LIFE: FOCUS GROUPS IN ROMA COMMUNITIES

*Danijela Korac-Mandic*

*»I say to my daughter: “If you want to finish school, don’t look at the boys, but study, don’t laugh around the streets when you’re walking home from school - raise your head and walk straight home, so that boys wouldn’t think things... »  
(A mother of a Roma girl)*

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this part of the survey was to obtain qualitative data, from the perspective of the Roma population, about how accessible the education is to Roma girls and boys, to what extent they are involved in the community life, the way they see the main obstacles to acquiring education and what solutions they propose to overcome these obstacles.

12 focus groups were organized (6 in Novi Sad, 3 in Nis, and 3 in the Kraljevo) with a total of 157 participants - Roma boys and girls who go to school, those who do not attend school, parents of Roma children who attend school, and those whose children do not attend school, as well as boys, girls and parents from non-Roma population.

The main topics that were discussed were the following:

- How accessible the primary education is to girls and boys,
- How involved the girls and boys are in the social trends of the community they live in, and
- What are the obstacles, risks and vulnerabilities that Roma children are faced by on the way to achieving their goals, and the solutions they propose to eliminate these obstacles?

The impression is that the participants, who responded to the invitation to participate in focus groups, are more interested in education and more motivated to deal with this subject, compared with the rest of the Roma population. It is also noticeable that older girls or boys usually dominated in discussions, and that the statements of the younger ones were influenced by the attitudes and statements of older participants.

### ACCESSIBILITY OF EDUCATION TO ROMA GIRLS

The accessibility of primary and higher education to Roma children, especially girls, in the Roma community is most affected by poverty, low educational level of parents, traditional gender roles and exposure to discrimination.

Decisions concerning the education of children are made by parents, and the father has the most influence on whether a child will go to school, or continue the education. Uneducated parents often do not have heightened awareness of the importance of education, nor can they help their children in mastering the curriculum or encourage them to persist in learning and to move on after primary school.

Even though the parents claimed that education is important and they would like their children to finish school (in most cases it meant learning a craft), they do not really believe that the education will actually change something in their children's lives. They said that "...even if you've finished school it is now difficult to find a job, "and that "... there are no jobs even for the Serbs, let alone us Roma." It takes years of investment and effort to obtain education, so it appears that Roma parents consider education important only in principle, but in everyday life they do not make long term plans in this regard.

Because of this attitude of parents, as well as other numerous obstacles, among which poverty and a sense that they are not accepted by non-Roma communities often dominate, it happens that children of primary school age decide on their own to drop out, and that their parents do not prevent them ("*I couldn't study*", "*I didn't have any books*"). Often, the reasons why Roma children do not attend school are alcoholism of the parents, their negligence in connection with the education of children, as well as lack of motivation of children to learn and poor achievement at school. Families which often move because of work usually withdraw children from school and they do not continue to attend classes.

Specific problems regarding education of girls are present in all Roma communities, because early marriage and looking after the children and household are planned for them, in accordance with the traditional division of gender roles. Consequently, their education is of secondary importance or of no importance at all. One of the girls from a focus group never attended school, nor her sisters, whereas her brothers were educated – their parents decided that way "*...because they are girls, and they should be at home.*"

Gender roles have an impact on the attitude of the family and environment towards girls since the day they are born, thus they grow up with a number of prohibitions related to their freedom of movement and socializing. The girls rarely come out of the community (settlement) in which they live, they are accustomed to obedience towards the elder, especially male family members. The girls we spoke to in focus groups are passive, insecure, and accept the role that their environment imposes quite peacefully.

*«It's harder for girls because they have innate embarrassment and shame. »*

Even before the beginning of puberty, families take measures that the girl does not "embarrass the family" (by losing virginity), and therefore they resort to disrupting their education and marrying them at a very young age from 13-14 years. These are unofficial marriages between minors, but in the Roma community they are considered a permissible relationship in which, soon after, children are being born.

Families from Kosovo have brought with them their tradition and customs. In these communities, life is more closed, its members often do not speak Serbian language, especially women (who have little contact with the world outside their community), and gender divisions are clear and rigid.

Due to the material benefits that the girl's family usually receives by marriage (dowry), marriage is often considered a kind of sale. During an engagement in arranged marriages, negotiations take place with the father of the bride to agree on the amount of dowry as compensation for future bride. The value of the bride is calculated on the basis of her health, strength, disposition, behavior and skills in the household, the reputation of her family and their position in the community. The costs of raising the bride from birth is also taken into account.<sup>5</sup> Girls have no right or possibilities to make decisions about their education, marriage, or other parts of their life. Even educated girls would not be allowed to work by their husbands, and there are no jobs anyway, so why waste time and money on education.

*«It's enough for girls to learn to sign their names, they don't need more. »*

5 Jeff Timmerman, "When Her Feet Touch the Ground: Conflict between the Roma Familistic Custom of Arranged Juvenile Marriage and Enforcement of International Human Rights Treaties", *Journal of Transnational Law & Policy*, The Florida State University

Preschool education within state institutions is attended by only a small number of Roma children. The first reason for this, which mothers from the village Veliki Rit in Novi Sad stated, was that children do not have any papers, whether it is because they were displaced, or because they had “returned from abroad.” A significant obstacle is the fact that, as a pre-requisite for admission to kindergarten, both parents should be employed, but Roma parents are usually not.

In other cities, however, Roma children of primary school age that we talked to in focus groups, have been, to a large extent, involved in preschool education, mostly through mandatory pre-school “class”, although they went in nursery even before the introduction of compulsory preschool education. However, participants stated that those were nurseries founded by various organizations as part of humanitarian programs, and to a lesser extent, they mentioned state kindergartens. All these children now attend school, so there is a clear connection between early involvement in the educational programs and the subsequent successful continuation of education.

In focus groups with non-Roma girls and boys, obvious differences in attitudes towards education and its value were observed in relation to Roma children. All the girls we spoke to have attended the preschool program, and now regularly attend primary school and, with no doubt, they are planning to continue their education. Non-Roma girls and boys were very active in the focus groups and had lots of ideas. All their brothers and sisters go to preschool or school, like most children they know. They know only one boy who was expelled from school, and also plenty of children who withdrew- all of which are Roma children. They believe that these children do not attend school because of their parents or the financial situation, and that they did not want to go to school themselves.

When asked what they wanted to become when they grow up, most Roma girls said they wanted to become: a hairdresser, model, TV show host, cleaner, nurse, singer, doctor, waitress, teacher, kindergarten teacher, fashion designer. Boys usually claimed they wanted to become chefs, dancers, bikers, athletes, traffic officers, auto-mechanics and police officers.

In choosing the desired occupations when they grow up, non-Roma girls are more ambitious, and listed the following: author, plastic surgeon, travel guide, construction technician, manager of a company, a detective ... Almost all non-Roma boys have a clear intention to enrol in high school, and when they grow up want to be: a water polo player, restaurateur, waiter, salesman, basketball player, driver, police officer, tattoo master, IT technician, singer...

Most Roma parents whose children attend school do not participate in school activities through Parents’ Councils or other forms of cooperation between school and parents. Only in Nis we came upon a practice that students, parents and community all participate in school work.

This school is located in a part of town near Roma settlement, and nearly all children in that school are Roma, and therefore Roma parents are included in the Parents’ Council. It should be emphasized that this Roma community is an exception, because the parents are educated above average compared with the general Roma population, and their families are well integrated into the community.

However, most parents we spoke to do not believe that the Parents’ Council is of a great significance and meaning to the issue of education of their children, but rather a formality. Non-Roma parents have also shared this belief. Participation of students in school work of any form is completely unknown to all the participants in the focus groups.

The involvement of Roma parents in school work comes down to coming to Parent-Teacher meetings. Parents find it difficult to include Roma in school work, other than through the Roma assistants. Mothers say they regularly go to parent-teacher meetings, but have not heard of the Parents’ Council, and they do not participate in school work in any other way, let alone have any impact on school work. The only information that parents receive about the work in schools, they get from Roma assistants or through day

care, and nobody asks parents about anything. Still, when we asked them whether any of them would want to go to the meetings of the Parents' Council, we did not get a direct answer that they do not want to, but they showed insecurity:

*"Well, I do not know ... we are all illiterate and semi-literate ... and the school doesn't really care ... There is Zorica (educational assistant) and she arranges everything"*

*"The Council has no power, so why should I be included?"*

*"All the doors are closed for us."*

## INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY LIFE

Roma children, regardless of whether they are girls or boys, spend a day in a similar way. Most of their time is spent on fun activities, watching television, listening to music, playing computer games, socializing with peers, walking around the settlement (girls) or going out into the town (the boys). Children who attend school, unlike others, spend a significant part of the day at school.

However, these children (both sexes) spend relatively little time studying or doing other similar activities at home; mostly it comes down to a half an hour to an hour for doing homework. Girls who do not go to school spend most of the day having fun and doing nothing, they get up later and spend more time doing housework, but this also comes down to two to three hours during the day. Daily schedule of the boys is hardly any different than of the girls. The boys also reported that they help at home, and also help their parents in a variety of work - the collection of raw materials, sales, etc. The impression is that Roma children we have spoken to have a lot of free time they generally spend doing nothing.

Some focus groups showed that Roma day care and similar activities organized by associations in their communities represent a significant part in the daily activities of the Roma children. There they spend more time on creative activities and learning, than it is the case with children who study alone at home. For many of them, this is a far greater motivation for schooling, they are confident that the day care is helping them, and it has become a compulsory part of their daily schedule. Children, who do not attend school, are mostly on the street and are a bad influence on those who go to school because they are persuading them to stop going to school. There is also drug dealing, theft, etc.

Girls generally do not participate in extracurricular activities, or have possibilities for that, since all such activities are now being paid. In addition, they are not allowed to attend any extracurricular activities outside their settlement. The vast majority of girls are not allowed to leave the village, except when they go to school. All of their fun comes down to socializing with their Roma girlfriends and going for a walk around the village (but not all girls are allowed to do this either), watching TV, listening to music with friends at home. One participant wanted to go to ballet classes, but she was "too embarrassed" to ask.

Boys, on the other hand, can go into town and they want to train sports, but not many of them can afford to, because they have to pay for everything. Bullying by non-Roma children is what is putting Roma children off from certain clubs and activities outside the schools attended by non-Roma. The boys noticed that the non-Roma, when they notice that in some activities there are more and more Roma children, they start withdrawing their children from such activities. In general, Roma children believe that non-Roma communities are avoiding them and that the boundaries between these two worlds are clearly established. These divisions make them even more marginal and enclose them in a narrow framework of Roma settlements and Roma community. At school all the children socialize, both Roma and Serbian, girls and boys. At home, however, Roma children only socialize with Roma children. Unlike Roma, non-Roma girls and boys, to a much higher degree, spend their spare time studying, attending private lessons (foreign languages, dance, etc.) and sports training. Also, part of the time they spend on "Facebook", listening to music and television programs. In the evenings, they mostly go out for a walk with their peers.

## ROLE MODELS

In life of Roma girls that attend school, we were interested to find out who has the greatest impact on creating their image about the world and their position in society. We got the answers that, at school, the most important are considered to be their teacher or a class teacher with whom they are often close, as well as their peers. At home, parents have the greatest authority, mostly they listen to their dad, then their older brother, and they are the closest to their sisters and brothers. In their community they recognize parents as the most influential, but also neighbours and relatives. Many have listed friends as a person of the utmost importance to them. A significant number said the Roma organizations and Roma assistants in schools are important to them. Parents and teachers have a positive impact on their education, while friends and relatives from the village, and children who do not attend school have the negative impact.

Similarly, boys identified the most important person in their environment - the class teacher at school, parents at home, especially the father, and community friends. For boys, parents have the most positive impact on their education, and certain teachers in schools that ... "hate Roma" have the most negative impact. Depending on the behaviour, teachers can also have a positive impact. They stated that, in the community, neighbours often persuade parents to withdraw children from school, because - "what will they do with it."

Roma girls generally have no role models, or have never ever thought about it. They only mentioned teachers from school and the informal "Day care" in the settlement as positive examples in their lives. Media stars, athletes, rappers and break dancers are also listed as role models for children, mostly boys. Parents believe that there are no big differences between Serbian and Roma children, because they "... all admire rich people."

## HARMFUL PRACTICES AND WAYS OF CHANGING THEM

The participants recognized early marriage and leaving school as harmful practices in Roma communities, even though this practice remains widespread. Children and young people have no mechanisms to resist such influence and settled practices in Roma communities. Some see the way out in studying hard and achieving success, and thus their parents would "not sell them", and would allow them to finish school.

Both girls and boys, who participated in focus groups, and even their parents, consider this tradition harmful, and they think it should be changed in the future, and they also claim that these practices have significantly changed compared to the former times. Nevertheless, parents and girls have not shown willingness to personally oppose these customs. One gets the impression that the new generations are repeating old patterns, in order to be accepted and to survive in the only community they belong to. Bad influence of other parents whose children do not attend school has already been mentioned. They put pressure on others not send their children to school, "what do they need it for". Going abroad with the whole family is often an obstacle to continue the education, since it implies a break in education.

Boys have much more freedom in decision making, having fun, going outside the village, etc. Unlike girls, boys and young men we spoke to, openly rebel against traditional expectations that young people should marry early and they do not accept it. They are convinced that early marriage is wrong, and the young guys who got married young they state as a negative example - "They are imprisoned", "They've achieved nothing in life ..."

As the main barriers to education, Roma girls listed lack of money and conditions for education, "falling in love" and early marriage, loss of will, sale of female children, poor grades and failure in school (which is why parents decide that a child is no longer going to school), bad company, moving abroad, and the impact of relatives that the girls are not allowed to go to school.

Girls see help from the centres for social work, help from mothers and fathers, their parents' employment and higher salaries, but also lending the money, which is always missing, as a way to overcome these obstacles. The importance of "strong will" to continue the education no matter what, support from the environment in solving family problems, studying well and achieving good success, as well as legal protection from the sale of children, were also mentioned.

*"My brother wants me to get married as soon as possible, so he makes up excuses for me not to go to school."*

*"My older sister cannot marry until I'm at school because someone has to work at home."*

*"Others lie that I have a boyfriend, and then my parents won't let me go to school."*

To the question on how to overcome obstacles and persevere in education, girls reported to us:

*"The strong will and desire to continue education. Decisiveness."*

*"To borrow money ..."*

*"To buy medicine for mom to get better."*

*"To make my own decisions about life; that I am not sold ..."*

*"If I study hard my parents won't sell (marry) me, they will see that I'm good at school."*

*"To move somewhere where there is no mud and garbage."*

*"My parents to change their minds and that I don't get married."*

*"My parents and my brother not to listen to lies about me."*

As possible solutions, in addition to money and better conditions for studying, Roma and boys reported that they would rebel against parents' decision not to allow them to continue their education. The same is valid for early marriage. The boys say that it is also important to study well, and to be strong in going through the various challenges of Roma education.

What is necessary to overcome obstacles in order to complete education successfully:

*"The room where we can go to study."*

*"Money, books, computer ..."*

*"I need to be smart and make my own decisions about life."*

*"A guy and a girl should be together if they love each other. They get married early on because they are forbidden to be together. If they weren't forbidden, they wouldn't get married. "*

*"Parents should advise children not to get married early."*

*"We need to be strong of heart."*

Non-Roma children see a loss of motivation for learning, lack of support and difficult curriculum, as the main barriers to further education. The boys from non-Roma population also consider bad school records as the biggest potential obstacle.

Barriers to education are not part of their experience, but it is something to think about as that could happen, but probably will not, because until now it did not. Lack of money is also mentioned as a possible obstacle in the future.

To overcome these obstacles they count on their own perseverance, support from the environment, persistence, commitment and direction to the goal.

Bigger confidence in their own abilities and strength is evident here.

*"You should not let anything pull you down."*

*"To fight against all obstacles and prove that you can better."*

*"I need to keep away from bad company."*

## EDUCATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PARENTS

Roma parents stated that, on average, they have 3 - 4 children attending school. Most parents in our focus groups attended school and usually finished 4 or 8 grades of primary school. Participants had a lot to say about their children, the encountered problems, and discrimination by non-Roma. During the focus groups, they put the emphasis on poverty and discrimination, and complained about the society that does not give them enough support.

Parents of Roma children said that they would consider it a success if their children finished school, but a good part of the answer to the question on the success in life was vague, as it is probable that the question itself was not sufficiently clear. Thus, as a success in life they listed happiness, values, wisdom and knowledge. In many of the expressed attitudes, training and education of children dominate as something difficult, inaccessible, valuable, but essentially without a clear connection to a better life. Completion of primary school is considered a success. Some parents do not even hope that their children will live (so good) as they do now because the new era is coming.

*“It’s not a success if they only finish eight grades of primary school. But nowadays, it is so difficult, and it is considered success.”*

*“For me, success is that I can put my children through school.”*

*“The success is not only to send children to school, the success is that one works, that one can take a loan if he needs it...”*

*“Our children have no chance. We had better chances, because we lived in better conditions, better country. And today we struggle to provide food, but what about the other things.”*

*“No one can be successful today, because all companies are sold, and it is difficult for the Serbs to get a job, let alone the Roma.”*

As items needed for education of children, Roma parents often listed money for school supplies, basic things, clothes... In addition, they stated they had no time to deal with the children. As a barrier for children to get involved in extracurricular activities, two reasons were mentioned: discrimination and money. Some parents feel that children are not motivated because *“they just want to sit in front of computers.”*

Some teachers have a negative impact when they protest because the children do not have books and school supplies. Some put Roma children to sit alone in the back. Other teachers, again, do not expect a lot from Roma children, so they do not try hard then. Bad company, children who have left school, have the greatest negative impact, and also non-Roma children who are teasing and insulting.

*“The teachers discriminate against children, when photographed, Roma children are always on the side ...”*

*What can be done to improve conditions for education of Roma children:*

*“Parents can commit themselves more, they can complain to the assistant.”*

*“The municipality has to finance work in places where the Roma would gather, and also the education of parents about the importance of education.”*

*“There must be a system of measures for parents who do not let the kids go to school – the Centre for Social Services must react.”*

*“The fine is not worth it, why should we punish them when they live on 5,000 dinars ...”*

*“The class teacher always asks who wants to be in the Council, but Roma are not responding because they do not have time, they have a lot of children, and do not respond.”*

*When asked what we could do to help the girls to finish school, one of the answers was:*

*“I say to my daughter: “If you want to finish school, don’t look at the boys, but study, don’t laugh around the streets when you’re walking home from school - raise your head and walk straight home, so that boys wouldn’t think things... “*

Parents from non-Roma population had different perspective of the goals they set in front of their children and their education. These parents (mothers) consider the acquisition of working habits and good education a success for their children, but also satisfaction with their own life, good relationship with other people, independence.

*“The basic thing is the school. It depends on his capabilities. What I did not achieve in life, of course I want it for my child. To take a child onto the right track, as much as it is possible, to avoid vices. “*

*“First, that she is healthy, to have good communication with children - not to be selfish, not to separate from other children. It is not so important to finish college or a good job - not at any price. More - personal satisfaction, that she is satisfied with herself. It is important to be a supportive to them and push them a bit, now when they are little ...”*

*“As for the school, it is important to me. It is essential that she acquires working habits through school, not only for school, but for life in general. I’d like her to finish college, because it is difficult to find a job with no college, but also with the university degree. Of course, not at the cost that she does not want it, I wouldn’t push her against her will, it is important that she figures out what she wants, and we, as parents, need to direct her. “*

*“Primarily, I put the focus on the independence, so that one of these days she is capable to continue on her own ...”*

*“For me success is not just school marks, but also good conduct and behaviour towards other children.”*

Mothers emphasize the lack of opportunities for extracurricular activities as a problem, because today everything is being paid, unlike the old times when there were sections. All participants agreed that they should be introduced again (folklore, sports, corrective gymnastics...). Still, the mothers we spoke to, without exception and regardless of financial difficulties, set money aside for at least one additional activity of their children. Except money, the problem is a lack of time, given that the school requires a lot of time. All participants know what the Parents’ Council is, and some of them are even members of the Council - one mother at the school level, and three mothers at the class level. Participants concluded that the Council meets “pro forma”, that the school Principle makes the decisions, and members of the Council sign that they have adopted them. Not even the decisions they made are always carried out to the end.

Participants believe that possibilities to influence the school through the Council are very low.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS DERIVED FROM THE WORK OF THE RESPONDENTS:**

**1)** The Roma children are crucially influenced by their parents’ lack of education, poverty, and the lack of incentives during growth. As with non-Roma population, the parents are the ones who make the key decisions about the care and upbringing of their children, but Roma parents themselves grew up in poverty and illiteracy. These parents were not able to gain insight and experience in the importance of education for a better life of their children. While most Roma parents think that education is important, they fundamentally do not believe it will provide their children with a better life, because of other barriers - general unemployment, discrimination in employment, and the like. On the other hand, state institutions that could help Roma parents in upbringing of their children, especially pre-school institutions, do not recognize the specific needs of Roma population. Very small number of Roma children attend public preschools. In communities where informal “schools” for Roma children work, positive changes in children’s readiness for school and subsequent attendance are obvious. This is the kind of response to the shortcomings and lack of capacity of the education system, which is not yet fully open for children from marginalized groups, despite the official policy of inclusion for all children.

- It is necessary to support all forms of educational work with Roma children and parents (e.g. “schools” and additional classes in Roma settlements, schools for pregnant women, parenting skills trainings, etc.) that give visible results in educational outcomes of Roma children. This is important in order not to lose precious time (the critical early years of growth and development) while waiting for the reform of the education system to be completed.

- The objective reasons why Romani parents do not provide enough support for their children in the early stages of growth and development should be understood, and programs that would support overcoming of these barriers and obstacles should be supported, including greater availability of formal and non-formal support programs and incentives for Roma children.

**2)** In the upbringing of their children non-Roma parents aim at building children’s self-esteem and feelings of self-value, and their ambitions are for the children to be happy and fulfilled in their future life.

Non-Roma parents are committed to support their children in all their choices.

Roma mothers and fathers usually have their children at very early age, and lack experience, knowledge and support in their upbringing. Their ambitions are small and they are often pessimistic in their views, so the messages sent to their children are often discouraging: from being a “great success” to finish primary school, to the opinion that their children will not be able to live even as good as their parents do now.

Roma parents are not ambitious and they lack self-confidence, therefore they are often unmotivated to participate in the school work. There is also a lack of awareness of personal responsibility and participation, and a lack of faith in the possibility that they are able to change anything. Roma parents need support to articulate their observations and ideas, and to engage in school work to influence the position of their children in school.

- For young Roma parents, especially mothers, specific support programs in raising and educating children are needed (training, counseling, support in child care) and support in continuing their education.

- Schools should adequately establish dialogue and cooperation with Roma parents, and find the best way to include them in the work of the Parents’ Councils, as well as to provide support to express their opinions, ask questions, and acknowledge their role in the process education of Roma children.

**3)** Roma children, growing up in poverty without support and encouragement, gain ideas about the world around them, will inevitably have low self-esteem and self-confidence, motivation and faith in the future.

As barriers to education, in addition to poverty, they recognize their parents (I hope that they will not sell me, that they will let me go to school, that they will become employed). Non-Roma children are significantly more self-confident, and they do not perceive possible barriers to education as something that will actually stop them from finishing school. Roma children are less ambitious in thinking about their future, they are more likely to plan how to complete a vocational training, and rarely see themselves as experts in particular areas. Roma children lack adequate role models since there are almost none of the successful and educated Roma in their settlements. They shape picture of their future on the basis of what they see every day - men are engaged in collecting recyclable materials, and women are housewives and mothers.

- Roma children, especially girls, need support in developing self-confidence and self-esteem, self-awareness and social skills. The importance of education needs to be constantly emphasized and Roma children should be supported to form positive attitudes towards themselves, their future and their potentials.

**4)** Gender inequality has a strong influence on all decisions that parents make for their female children.

Traditional patterns such as early marriage, although recognized as harmful by both the children and parents, are however repeated, especially in more closed communities (eg Roma from Kosovo). Early marriage is a way to control adolescent sexuality and the community supports this practice, although it leads to the obvious poor social outcomes, deepening poverty and the creation of new poor and socially deprived generations. Gender divisions impose limitations to girls from the very childhood, in terms of freedom of movement, freedom of thought and freedom in general. In this environment, Roma girls became frightened, uncertain, non-ambitious, obedient, ashamed (to express their views, wishes, questions), with no clear idea about their future and their role in it. As such, they rarely rebel against their position in the community, even when exposed to violence.

- Awareness on the harmful effects of gender divisions to the whole Roma community should be raised, especially among young people. It is necessary to initiate discussions with Roma communities about these issues, work to increase knowledge and empowerment of girls, girls and women from the Roma population.

- Schools need to work on developing an inclusive culture, policies and practices that will make education open and accessible for all children and their needs, with particular attention to providing continued support for girls in education.

**5)** Discrimination in education and in the society in general is very discouraging factor that makes Roma girls and boys even more isolated and closed within the Roma community.

There is no real communication and exchange with the majority population. Young people in these communities have no mechanisms to prevent the harmful traditional practices, such as early (and sometimes arranged) marriages and starting a family, or discouragement of education for female students.

There are no support mechanisms that young people can turn to in such cases. Arranged marriages are often a prelude to violence against women and the support to victims of violence is also less available for the Roma than for the general population.

- The fight against discrimination and promoting respect for diversity is necessary at all levels, from primary school and Roma communities, to the local community as a whole. Isolation of the Roma in relation to the majority population is based on deep prejudices and stereotypes that need to be systematically and patiently changed. Of particular importance is work with children and young people from the Roma and non-Roma population, because at that age a key influence on the formation of positive attitudes towards the others can be made. In addition, it is necessary to develop other extracurricular activities and programs in schools that would be available to all children, and that would be adapted to their needs and interests. The civil sector in this area could contribute to this through innovative and participatory approach.

## Novi Sad Humanitarian Centre

Novi Sad Humanitarian Centre (NSHC) is a non-profit, charitable organization founded in 1998 in Novi Sad. NSHC's mission is to contribute to the creation of humane society through provision of assistance to vulnerable and marginalized groups, development of civil society, research and education. In cooperation with governmental and non-governmental sector NSHC contributes to poverty reduction, health promotion, the development of informal education, improvement of social policy and employment policy in Serbia.

Since its foundation NSHC implemented various projects to support the Roma population in Serbia, with the aim of improving their education, living standards and social integration. Activities which NSHC is most involved in are literacy improvement, inclusion of Roma children in regular school system, support in education, psychosocial assistance and support in the economic empowerment of Roma families, and health education.

In previous years NSHC has been active in the field of advocacy for the education of Roma children in Vojvodina. Through various projects, NSHC facilitated the development of local action plans for improvement of Roma education in 11 municipalities in Vojvodina. NSHC also engages volunteers who help the group of children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian population in education and social integration.

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## CARE

CARE is an international organization with more than a decade of experience in implementing community-based programs throughout the North West Balkans region. CARE works to enhance citizen empowerment through income generation programs, civil society strengthening, and peace building. In designing and implementing its programs, CARE focuses on advocacy, rights-based approach (RBA), commitment to civil society strengthening, and gender and diversity. CARE's program approaches are based on principles of partnership, empowerment and participation in addressing poverty and social injustice.

CARE's projects in Serbia started in 1996 related to emergency response and reconstruction assistance. Since 2000, CARE has implemented various developmental projects such as projects which contribute to empowerment and integration of the Roma in the area of education, employment and development of Roma communities, anti-trafficking projects, projects for improvement of reproductive health, youth projects aimed to develop tolerance and activism, and reduce xenophobia, and projects which promote gender equality, healthy life styles and prevention of violence.

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