



Activism, Participation and Security among Roma and Sinti Youth

Conference Report



Activism, Participation and Security among Roma and Sinti Youth

Roma and Sinti Youth Conference: Activism, Participation, Security
Belgrade, 8 and 9 December 2014

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Disclaimer

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Acronyms and abbreviations

BPRI	Best Practices for Roma Integration in the Western Balkans
CSO	Civil society organization
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
MC	Ministerial Council
MHRR	Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NGO	Non-governmental organization
ODIHR	OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RMUSP	Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WB	World Bank

Foreword

Roma and Sinti, one of the largest ethnic minorities in Europe, form a diverse and heterogeneous population. Many Roma and Sinti youth still face numerous obstacles in accessing their human rights, including high levels of intolerance, racism and discrimination. Roma and Sinti attain lower levels of formal education than their non-Roma peers, they are affected by considerably higher unemployment rates and reduced access to social security and services. This is especially the case with young Roma and Sinti women.

Two years ago, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) took stock of the results of efforts within the last decade to implement the *2003 Action Plan to Improve the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area*. OSCE participating States recognized the continuing gap between Roma and Sinti and the general population and that further work is needed in a number of areas. At the same time in 2013, they acknowledged the potential of Roma and Sinti women and youth as agents of change for both their communities and mainstream society, which was reinforced with the Ministerial Council Decision in Kyiv. With this decision, participating States committed to give particular attention to Roma and Sinti women, youth and children and reinforced the need to invest in promoting their empowerment and education, as well as preventing discrimination against them.

In order to inspire and direct the future work of the OSCE in this area, in close consultation with and active participation of Roma and Sinti youth, ODIHR hosted the international conference Roma and Sinti Youth: Activism, Participation and Security in Belgrade in December 2014. This event provided a platform for youth representatives to explore challenges they face in public and political participation and reflect on the situation of young women and men from their communities from a broader human security perspective. Conference discussions were inspired by research conducted by young Roma and Sinti activists and scholars.

This report aims to give voice to Roma and Sinti youth by highlighting the key conclusions and recommendations to OSCE participating States made at the Belgrade conference and presenting research on Roma and Sinti activism, participation and security conducted by young scholars. The report also includes important new statistical data on the situation of Roma and Sinti youth in 12 OSCE participating States. It demonstrates that young Roma and Sinti are ready to responsibly engage in combating the racism and discrimination they face and in working towards the improvement of their communities.

I encourage participating States to utilize the resources provided by this report, to recognize and meaningfully employ youth in these communities and to support young Roma and Sinti in becoming active and engaged citizens.

Michael Georg Link
ODIHR Director

**PART I:
CONFERENCE REPORT**

Roma and Sinti Youth Conference: Activism, Participation, Security

Belgrade, Serbia, 8-9 December 2014

Introduction

Roma and Sinti youth represent a demographic of growing importance, as they make up a considerable proportion of the school-age population and the future workforce of many OSCE participating States. In the European Union (EU), 35.7 per cent of Roma and Sinti are under the age of 15, compared to 15.7 per cent among the general population, while the average age of Roma is 25, compared with 40 across the EU.¹ Nevertheless, exclusionary mechanisms based on stigmatization in education and employment stop young Roma and Sinti from developing their potential and capacity. A survey conducted in 2012 in 12 European states showed that less than half of young Roma aged 17-23 completed lower secondary education in some of these countries, and less than one per cent of Roma obtained university education across the survey region.² Furthermore, the greatest difference in employment levels between Roma and non-Roma was in the 15-24 age category: only 15 per cent of Roma of this age are employed.³ At the same time, Roma and Sinti youth who manage to successfully obtain an education often feel forced to deny their identity and rarely return to their communities to work.

Marginalization and discrimination lead to low levels of public and political participation among Roma and Sinti. As noted in the 2013 OSCE Status Report on the Implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area, “mainstream parties are still relatively reluctant

to put forth Roma candidates, despite a significant increase in the pool of potential Roma candidates”⁴ This reluctance is often connected to negative perceptions about Roma and Sinti. Roma and Sinti women participate in public and political life to an even lesser degree; the OSCE Status Reports from 2008 and 2013 note that “Roma and Sinti women are still underrepresented and are far from enjoying equal participation in public and political life”⁵ This is often linked to the fact that “Roma women [...] suffer multiple forms of discrimination by virtue of their ethnicity, gender, and place within Roma and Sinti communities.”⁶ In addition, Roma and Sinti youth also have “limited access to political participation and [are absent] from relevant decision making bodies and processes.”⁷

The work of the OSCE/ODIHR related to Roma and Sinti youth

Improving the situation of Roma and Sinti youth is fully grounded in the OSCE commitments. The active participation of Roma and Sinti youth is a priority in the organization’s capacity-building mandate under the Action Plan for Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area, adopted in 2003.⁸ Moreover, the role of the OSCE in this area was recently enhanced through the focus on youth in

1 Fundación Secretariado Gitano, *Health and the Roma community, analysis of the situation in Europe* (Madrid, 2009).

2 Christian Brueggemann, *Roma Education in Comparative Perspective: Findings from the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey. Roma Inclusion Working Papers* (Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme, 2013), pp. 22 and 24, <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/154052340/Roma-education-in-comparative-perspective>>.

3 Niall O’Higgins, *Roma and Non-Roma in the Labour Market in Central and South-Eastern Europe. Roma Inclusion Working Papers* (Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme, 2013), pp. 22 and 26, <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/154053014/Roma-and-non-Roma-in-the-labour-market>>.

4 OSCE, *Implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area: Status Report 2013* (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2013), <<http://www.osce.org/odihr/107406>>.

5 Ibid.

6 OSCE, *Implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area: Status Report 2008* (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2008), <<http://www.osce.org/odihr/33500?download=true>>.

7 Council of Europe, *Roma Youth Conference: Guidelines for a European Roma Youth Plan* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2011), <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/News&Calls/2011_Guidelines_Roma_Youth_Action_Plan_en.pdf>.

8 The project was implemented under the mandate of ODIHR to support “capacity-building projects for Roma and Sinti organizations and the empowerment of Roma and Sinti communities”, as provided in the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area.

the Ministerial Council Decision 4/13 on “Enhancing OSCE Efforts to Implement the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti Within the OSCE Area, with a Particular Focus on Roma and Sinti Women, Youth and Children” of December 2013.⁹ In particular, the MC Decision 4/13 calls on “relevant OSCE executive structures to enhance their activities meant to build the capacities of Roma and Sinti women and youth organizations, with a view to promoting empowerment, education and non-discrimination among Roma and Sinti women and youth, and to encourage the participation of Roma and Sinti women on an equal footing with men in all areas of their interest”.

In addition, the role of Roma and Sinti youth was also highlighted during a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting of the OSCE held in 2013, which marked the 10th Anniversary of the 2003 OSCE Action Plan. The meeting featured a session dedicated to the “Integration of Roma and Sinti with a particular focus on women, youth and children: Best practices and ways forward”. Meeting participants stressed that Roma and Sinti youth should be considered stakeholders in the processes that affect them, and indicated that young people need support to fight anti-Gypsyism. During the meeting, young Roma and Sinti participants called for a stronger focus on the political participation of youth, and highlighted the need to create opportunities that allow young Roma and Sinti to work in the public sector. Participants also referred to perceptions of Roma and Sinti as passive beneficiaries in a culture of welfare assistance provided by the state. They drew attention to the potential of Roma and Sinti youth to mobilize themselves, strengthen solidarity and build bridges through youth activism. Participants called on OSCE participating States to provide “support to Roma youth to continue activism and integrate Roma youth issues in the mainstream youth agenda”, and highlighted the need for “young Roma to be actively involved in politics and in local

and central administrations as well as observers in electoral processes in the OSCE area”.¹⁰

Current work on issues relating to Roma and Sinti youth build on past activities implemented by ODIHR in this area. In 2013, ODIHR implemented the Roma and Sinti Youth Initiative project through a small grant-giving scheme for Roma and Sinti youth organizations. In the same year, ODIHR co-sponsored the “Dik I Na Bistar”¹¹ (Look and don’t forget) Roma Genocide Remembrance Initiative of the ternYpe International Roma Youth Network, which brought together over 430 young Roma and non-Roma from 18 countries to the former Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau for the 2 August commemoration of the Roma and Sinti genocide. ODIHR also supported the Roma Young Professionals programme (2012-2014) organized by the Best Practices for Roma Integration (BPRI) in the Western Balkans, a regional ODIHR project funded by the European Union and supported by OSCE participating States. The Young Roma Professionals programme enabled 25 young Roma women and men from across the Western Balkans to undertake traineeships in public institutions and OSCE field operations, and to participate in policy making and advocacy activities. The programme included training on specific skills to strengthen the trainees’ future employment prospects. Additionally, this experience enabled a number of former participants to progress towards employment opportunities in OSCE field operations and government institutions.

Objectives and outcomes of the Roma and Sinti Youth Conference

The 2014 OSCE/ODIHR Roma and Sinti Youth Conference was developed as part of the OSCE Chairmanship plans to strengthen the involvement of civil society in the work of the OSCE. As part of this priority, the Swiss Chairmanship of the OSCE launched initiatives aimed at giving young people a voice. In particular, the Model OSCE series of events organized by the Chairmanship enabled youth from

9 OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/13, “Enhancing OSCE Efforts to Implement the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti Within the OSCE Area, With a Particular Focus on Roma and Sinti Women, Youth and Children”, Kyiv, December 2013, <<https://www.osce.org/mc/109340>>.

10 OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, “Implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti”, 7-8 November 2013, Warsaw, <<http://www.osce.org/odihr/110008?download=true>>.

11 “DIK I NA BISTAR – Roma Genocide Remembrance Initiative 2013”, ternYpe – International Roma Youth Network website, <<http://www.ternype.eu/dik-i-na-bistar-roma-genocide-remembrance-initiative-2013>>.

OSCE participating States to discuss issues related to security, the economy, the environment and human rights. Furthermore, the 2013 Joint Workplan of Switzerland and Serbia, which guided their consecutive chairmanships in 2014 and 2015, also features a focus on youth and envisages the development of “an action plan on youth and security from a cross-dimensional perspective”.¹² Activities of the Roma and Sinti Youth Conference provided Roma and Sinti youth activists with a platform for becoming stakeholders in the process and for contributing to the future action plan in this respect.

The OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, in accordance with its mandate, continues to work to empower young Roma and Sinti in the OSCE region with the objective of strengthening the active participation of Roma and Sinti youth, especially young Roma and Sinti women, in society. The Roma and Sinti Youth Conference brought together 61 participants, including 48 Roma and Sinti youth representatives from 18 countries across the OSCE region, for a two-day conference in Belgrade, Serbia, on 8 and 9 December 2014. The conference provided a platform for Roma and Sinti youth to speak about the issues that concern them in three thematic areas:

- The empowerment and social inclusion of Roma and Sinti communities through youth activism.
- The participation of Roma and Sinti youth in politics and democratic processes.
- Roma and Sinti youth and security.

In order to ensure that Roma and Sinti youth actively participated at the conference at all levels, eight Junior Experts from Roma communities were selected through a competitive process and contracted to produce background papers on the thematic areas of the conference. During the conference, the Junior Experts played an active role as panel experts and topic introducers.

The youth activists shared their knowledge and experience of organizing youth campaigns, programmes and activities to foster youth activism, and of mobilizing marginalized communities. They also proposed possible policy measures to address the

challenges and obstacles that hinder Roma and Sinti youth activism, in particular that of young Roma and Sinti women. In addition, Roma and Sinti youth activists explored issues surrounding participation in public and political life, a subject that so far has not received sufficient attention from policy makers and civic actors. In particular, the Junior Experts and participants discussed the processes that can hinder or advance the participation of Roma and Sinti youth in public and political life.

The different dimensions of security were explored, including the politico-military, economic and environmental and human dimensions of security as they apply to Roma and Sinti youth. Particular attention was paid to the security of Roma and Sinti women in the OSCE area and to security in crisis and post-crisis situations. Subjects of discussion ranged from security threats (including trafficking in human beings and the labour exploitation of children and youth) to aspects of human security, such as tolerance and non-discrimination, the problem of hate crimes and the human rights of Roma and Sinti.

Forty-eight Roma and Sinti youth representatives, the majority of whom were aged between 20 and 35, participated in the conference. Roma and Sinti youth participants were selected to participate on the basis of their experience and a proven track record of engagement with issues concerning Roma and Sinti youth. The selection process was competitive and ensured gender and geographic balance among participants. A total of 35 participants were selected, and an additional 13 participants were invited by the Government of Serbia and the OSCE Mission to Serbia. In addition, the conference was attended by representatives of the Serbian Chairmanship of the OSCE, as well as OSCE/ODIHR staff members.

Opening session

The conference was opened by Mirjam Karoly, OSCE/ODIHR Senior Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues / Chief of Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, who welcomed the Roma and Sinti youth, as well as representatives of the Serbian authorities, namely, Ambassador Dejan Šahović, Head of the OSCE Chairmanship Task Force, Nenad Borovčanin, State Secretary, Ministry of Youth and Sport, Suzana Paunović, Director, Office for Human and Minority Rights, and Danijela Lakatoš, a young Roma activist from Serbia. The Serbian delegation then took the floor to present the situation of young Roma in the country and to

¹² The Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the OSCE, the United Nations and the International Organizations and the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Serbia to the OSCE and Other International Organizations in Vienna, “Joint Workplan of Switzerland and Serbia”, 27 June 2013, <<http://www.mfa.gov.rs/en/images/stories/slike/Joint-work-plan.pdf>>.

provide an overview of the work of the Serbian Chairmanship of the OSCE in this area.

In particular, it was stressed that the protection of the rights of national minorities and the principle of non-discrimination are fundamental to every genuine democratic society. There are some 140,000 Roma living in Serbia, although the actual number is estimated to be much greater. Moreover, with an average age of 28.3, the Roma population is overwhelmingly made up of young people. As such, the situation of young people in Serbia is a key priority of the current government. To this end, a Strategy for Youth was recently developed that includes the needs and priorities of the Roma community. During the Strategy's development, Roma civil society organizations were consulted to help identify priorities and ensure that young members of the Roma community will benefit from the Strategy. In addition, Serbia adopted the Strategy for the Improvement of the Status of Roma in 2009, as well as the Action Plan accompanying the Strategy. A new Strategy will be developed in 2015.

A total of 23 Roma youth civil society organizations (CSOs) are registered in Serbia, while a further 20 per cent of other CSOs registered at the Ministry of Youth and Sport focus on minority groups. The Ministry undertakes a number of projects concerning Roma youth, including information days and campaigns against hate speech on the Internet, among other initiatives. In 2015, the Ministry plans to continue its work to empower young Roma, including by making funds available for young Roma so as to provide them with equal opportunities in Serbian society.

The Government of Serbia continues to work on different issues affecting the Roma community, including the issues of personal documentation and education. In particular, the legal framework for those without personal documentation has improved, while a total of 20,000 documents have been provided. Meanwhile, the number of Roma children enrolled in schools has increased every year by 10 per cent. To further improve school attendance among Roma children, the Serbian delegation proposed providing additional support to families. Recently, 525 scholarships were provided to high school students as part of an OSCE project financed by the EU. By the end of the year, the number of scholarships issued will reach 1,000.

In addition, national minorities benefit from a programme of internships in state institutions supported by the British Embassy, the Swedish International De-

velopment Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the OSCE Mission in Serbia. Danijela Lakatoš, a young Roma activist who was a beneficiary of this programme, spoke of her experiences of a six-month internship programme for young people from national minorities in state institutions in Serbia. The programme provided interns with a better understanding of the implementation of the Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Status in Serbia, including the process of adopting the Strategy's Action Plan, while providing participants with report-writing experience and opportunities to take part in lectures and workshops and to work with the media. In short, such programmes provide young Roma with valuable opportunities to gain practical knowledge of the work of state institutions while learning about empowering minorities to participate in society and political processes.

The session ended with a short overview of the Action Plan for Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area, the 2013 Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting and the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 4/13 on enhancing OSCE efforts to implement the 2003 Action Plan. It was stated that the outcomes of the conference would feed into the work of the OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues and that the Contact Point is ready to assist the Serbian OSCE Chairmanship in including Roma and Sinti youth on their agenda.

Setting the scene: how can Roma and Sinti youth trigger change?

In the second session of the conference, participants discussed the potential of young Roma and Sinti to generate change in their communities, their participation in political processes and security issues affecting Roma and Sinti youth. The session began with presentations of papers prepared by the Junior Experts, followed by remarks and an open discussion with participants.

Cristina Marian, Roma activist from Moldova, began with a presentation of her background paper "Empowering Young Roma: Activism, Challenges and Opportunities",¹³ which explores how Roma youth, and in particular young Roma women, can engage in their communities to become active members of society. In particular, the presentation provided examples of how young Roma have come together on issues affecting them and the tools they have used to do so,

13 The paper is available in Part II of this report.

and detailed the barriers young Roma face to their empowerment, including access to education and the problem of discrimination.

Tudorel Tabă, Roma activist from Romania, then presented his background paper, “The Political Participation of Roma Youth: What Is It and Why Do We Need It?”¹⁴ in which the author reviewed the different forms of political participation and explained its importance to Roma youth. In particular, the presentation focused on the need for Roma youth to be involved in politics to ensure their inclusion in decision-making processes, the equal representation of their interests in society and the equal exercise of their rights.

The next speaker, Petr Torak from the United Kingdom, explored the topic of youth and security in his presentation “Trafficking in Human beings within Roma and Sinti Youth Communities”. In particular, he looked at the different forms of trafficking, barriers to combating trafficking, information on affected victims and ways to tackle the phenomenon.

In accordance with OSCE Permanent Council Decision No. 557, OSCE participating States are committed to combating trafficking in human beings. Nevertheless, the number of cases of trafficking are on the rise, with only a limited number of perpetrators being prosecuted for the crime.¹⁵ The OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE Gender Section and the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings all work to combat trafficking in human beings, including of Roma and Sinti children and women.

The presenter highlighted how trafficking in human beings affects victims on many different levels, resulting in psychological trauma, phobias, depression and psychosis, and how often the effects are long-lasting. He went on to explain the factors that place certain groups of people at greater risk of being trafficked, including poverty, a lack of education and few employment opportunities – all problems that commonly affect young Roma and Sinti. In particular, a number of specific risk factors explain the disproportionate over-representation of Roma and Sinti children and women among the victims of trafficking, including age, poverty, gender, criminality and fear. According to a report published by the European

Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), Roma children aged between 6 and 15 and orphans are at the greatest risk of trafficking for sexual exploitation.¹⁶ Moreover, the prevalence of sex tourism in a country or region increases the occurrence of sexual exploitation of Roma and Sinti women and children. However, trafficking is not limited to sexual exploitation, and Roma and Sinti children and young women are also often forced into labour, marriage, begging and pick-pocketing. Meanwhile, many Roma and Sinti children and women living in poverty are easily tricked by promises of quick and easy financial or material gain. Traffickers also often target young Roma and Sinti men who run away from care homes for children or young people, or who are on the run from the police. Such victims are often reluctant to approach a police officer and report human trafficking because of the fear of being deported and/or imprisoned. Finally, the use of scare tactics by traffickers to threaten and intimidate victims, including physical and psychological abuse, can lead to the Stockholm syndrome, whereby victims begin to see the trafficker as their protector, making it harder for the victim to seek help.

The presenter then described barriers to successfully combating trafficking in human beings, and stressed that a number of preventative, socio-economic and legislative approaches must be taken. In particular, a lack of awareness of the specific signs and patterns makes it difficult to identify victims of trafficking. Communities, including parents, teachers, friends, police officers, social workers and others, must be alerted to the issue and provided with information on how to spot these signs. Awareness raising also involves knowing who to report the crime to; however, information on the organizations, agencies and NGOs engaged in combating trafficking is not always easily accessible or well-advertised. In particular, Roma and Sinti victims and those wishing to report suspected trafficking may be unable to do so owing to language or financial barriers. Awareness of the issue is also hindered the fact that trafficking is treated as a social taboo, especially where sexual exploitation is concerned, and victims and others may be afraid to report the issue as a result. In addition, the negative media discourse on Roma and Sinti contributes to their situation as it often portrays Roma

14 The paper is available in Part II of this report.

15 OSCE Permanent Council, Decision No. 557, “Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings”, Vienna 2003, <<http://www.osce.org/actionplan>>.

16 ERRC, “Breaking the Silence: Trafficking in Romani Communities”, March 2011, p. 53, <<http://www.errc.org/article/breaking-the-silence-trafficking-in-romani-communities/3846>>.

and Sinti women and children as the perpetrators of crimes connected to trafficking (such as pick-pocketing and prostitution) without paying attention to the fact that they may have been trafficked and forced to commit crimes. Finally, if there is a lack of appropriate victim support then the victim may be reluctant to testify against the trafficker, sometimes leading to the victim being re-trafficked.

A number of suggestions were made as to what young Roma and Sinti can do to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings, including conducting youth work to raise awareness of the issue, applying political pressure by increasing the visibility of the issue, organizing trainings within “hot-spot” areas and educating themselves about the phenomena. The presenter also suggested working closely with the media to underscore the seriousness of trafficking in human beings, including that of Roma and Sinti children and women, and to counteract negative stereotypes.

In response to the presentations, one participant stressed the importance of increased representation of Roma and Sinti youth in public institutions, and highlighted how even the new generation of educated and skilled Roma and Sinti young people still face huge problems with unemployment and a lack of opportunities. Therefore, Roma and Sinti youth should be provided with more opportunities to participate in local and state institutions. The respondent also highlighted the need for Roma and Sinti youth to mobilize and network to strengthen their co-operation and ability to generate change.

Another respondent noted how, even in multicultural societies, negatives stereotypes about and the discrimination of Roma and Sinti are still prevalent. As a result, Roma and Sinti, including youth, still face security threats. The respondent agreed that the position of Roma and Sinti women is particularly difficult and called for a stronger focus on their needs. With regards to Roma and Sinti youth, the respondent suggested creating national youth structures to help young Roma and Sinti strengthen their capacities and develop their community activism projects. In this respect, the respondent stressed the need for stronger dialogue and co-operation between young people, local and national authorities and institutions such as the OSCE, in order to increase young people’s inclusion in decision-making processes at the local, national and international levels.

During the follow-up discussion, participants agreed on the need for special attention to be focused

on issues affecting Roma and Sinti women. One participant cited the positive example of skateboarding schools for girls in post-conflict Afghanistan and the impact on girls’ development. A participant highlighted the multiple types of discrimination that women face in Albania, reflecting on how women’s traditional roles conflict with the need for the empowerment and engagement in public life of young Roma women.

In addition, several participants spoke of the need for similar conferences and meetings of Roma and Sinti youth and youth organizations to enhance their co-operation and capacities. In this vein, participants noted the lack of institutional support for Roma and Sinti youth organizations, highlighting the need for more investment in youth structures and long-term support for Roma and Sinti youth organizations and networks. They also stressed the need to revise national youth strategies to mainstream Roma and Sinti youth in government youth policies, as well as to provide more educational programmes and trainings on political participation for Roma and Sinti youth.

Regarding activism, participants reflected on the lack of historical understanding of Roma and Sinti movements, including among Roma and Sinti youth. In order to be more effective, it was suggested that activists learn about the history of activism and its impact in order to strategize more effectively.

In terms of security issues facing Roma and Sinti communities in Europe, participants highlighted a number of worrying developments, including extreme right demonstrations in the Czech Republic, forced evictions of Roma in France and Hungary and the building of walls around Roma settlements in Slovakia. In this regard, participants discussed how Roma and Sinti can mobilize and work with communities to challenge racism towards their communities and to restore the dignity of Roma and Sinti.

In response to questions on youth structures and political participation of Roma and Sinti, the panellists provided further information on Roma and Sinti youth networks, including the Forum of European Young Roma People (FERYP) and the ternYpe network, and their work on youth empowerment. On the subject of political participation, Tudorel Tabăcă encouraged Roma and Sinti youth to create political parties, be more involved with local parties and authorities and become more politically active. Petr Torak encouraged participants to become better acquainted with security issues, including trafficking in human beings, and to discuss such issues with their

peers. He also stressed the need for more Roma and Sinti in police forces to help deal with the security issues facing Roma and Sinti communities.

Youth perspectives: Identifying the main issues, analysing the existing approaches and sharing experiences

Working Group I: Empowerment and social inclusion of Roma and Sinti communities through youth activism

The first speaker, Dragana Jovanović Arias from Serbia, discussed volunteerism, the importance of role models and peer education, as elaborated in her background paper.¹⁷ The presenter highlighted that activism requires the participation of different individuals to ensure that a diverse range of interests and approaches are represented. In her conclusion, the speaker listed the main characteristics and values necessary for successful activism.

The second speaker, Aldijana Dedić, presented her paper on the situation of Roma women in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Roma youth activism.¹⁸ In particular, the speaker brought attention to the low rate of employment and Bosnia and Herzegovina's Action Plan for Roma Integration, which includes few provisions on Roma women and youth.

During the discussions of the working group, a number of challenges were identified with regard to Roma and Sinti youth activism and empowerment. Roma and Sinti youth organizations face difficulties applying for project funding and, thus, are unable to ensure the sustainability of the organization. They are often excluded from calls to apply for project funding, are discouraged from applying for general youth grants and told to apply for Roma and Sinti-related grants, and sometimes struggle to understand the language and procedures of project applications. Roma and Sinti NGOs are unable to compete for funding against larger, more established NGOs. Moreover, Roma and Sinti youth organizations and youth groups also often have to contend with a lack of resources, including inadequate space in which to meet and a lack of infrastructure.

Roma and Sinti youth activists encounter a number of socio-cultural barriers. Parents often prevent their children from taking part owing to traditional

and patriarchal norms. Gaps exist between educated and uneducated individuals, while wealthier Roma and Sinti sometimes do not wish to identify themselves with the poor. Young Roma and Sinti activists are sometimes discouraged by the older generation, and the community is not supportive of role models.

Young Roma and Sinti activists sometimes suffer from low self-esteem due to stigmatization by society. They are also wary of contributing to programmes that do not seem to provide sustainable results or to impact their lives. As many trainings are conducted in English, young Roma and Sinti who do not know the language are unable to benefit from these. Those who do become active in their communities must often neglect their studies and personal development in order to pursue their activism.

Roma and Sinti youth are not sufficiently considered in policies on youth in general. There is a lack of strategic framework on Roma and Sinti youth issues, while more research is needed to develop evidence-based policies on Roma and Sinti youth. In particular, policies do not take into account the diversity in Roma and Sinti communities, including religious, cultural and traditional differences, and tend to treat young Roma and Sinti as a homogenous group with identical needs.

Working Group II: The participation of Roma and Sinti youth in politics and democratic processes

The first speaker, Dafina Savić, began her presentation with an overview of the situation of Roma in Canada. Until recently, Canada had been a model of success in Roma integration, as Roma are given equal opportunities, work in mainstream occupations and graduate from university. In recent years, in response to the influx of Roma seeking asylum from persecution in Europe, including as a result of the rise of far right movements and anti-Roma rhetoric there, the Canadian government has introduced a number of legislative and policy instruments aimed at restricting asylum for Roma. This has given way to a wave of political discrimination against Roma communities living in Canada.

With regards to political participation, Savić noted that there is no data on Roma political participation in Canada, since Roma ethnicity was not officially recorded in Canada until recently. However, based on the work of her organization, Romanipe, the speaker noted that a lack of interest in political life is a key challenge to Roma political participation. This of-

17 The paper is available in Part II of this report.

18 The paper is available in Part II of this report.

ten stems from a lack of awareness, including of the mechanisms and structures of the political system, of their rights and ways to ensure they are respected, of the human rights abuses faced by Roma communities other than their own, and of changes that can result from political engagement. In particular, Roma youth tend to favour less institutionalized forms of participation, including community-driven initiatives and activities involving arts and sports.

The speaker then went on to explain the issue with documentation. As many Roma new arrivals to Canada are asylum seekers, their status often remains unstable. Many families wait for two years to have their claims reviewed. Since asylum seekers are not granted the right to vote, they have little incentive to become politically active. High rates of deportation mean Roma asylum seekers have little incentive to plan for the long-term. Those Roma who are given leave to remain often choose not to identify as Roma for fear of discrimination. The speaker noted that the situation is similar to that of Europe, where many internally displaced Roma lack documentation and permanent status, which prevents them from voting. Although several initiatives have been undertaken to regularize the status of internally displaced Roma in Europe, many are still without status. According to the speaker, a lack of political will is the main obstacle to resolving this issue, and more pressure should be put on national governments to ensure they undertake the necessary measures to facilitate the regularization process of undocumented people.

Another challenge to youth political participation is that young people do not trust the political system to improve the situation of Roma. Most Roma asylum seekers have had negative experiences with local Roma representatives in their home countries, causing them to distrust politicians. According to Dafina Savić, a subject often overlooked when discussing Roma political participation is the need to create a global Roma movement with the common goal of fighting discrimination against Roma. This can be achieved by first mobilizing young Roma using innovative and creative tools and strategies to galvanize their activism and interest in the fight against discrimination. To realize this objective, young Roma from different countries also require more platforms and opportunities to meet and exchange experiences and ideas. The speaker also noted the myriad challenges facing the political participation of Roma women. To this end,

she suggested introducing quotas to address the under-representation of Roma women in politics.

The next speaker, Atanas Stoyanov, presented his paper on the political participation of Roma youth in Bulgaria.¹⁹ In particular, Stoyanov focused on issues affecting the success of Roma parties and candidates in Bulgaria, including a lack of co-operation and support, the use of Roma as token minority candidates, a voting system that disadvantages smaller parties, and a lack of political interest and engagement among Roma youth. The speaker also described the problem of vote buying and the reasons why the practice persists.

During the discussions of the working group, a number of challenges were identified with regard to Roma and Sinti youth political participation. In particular, participants noted a number of issues affecting the ability and willingness of Roma and Sinti youth to participate in politics. Trust in politicians is often low as they do not fulfil their campaign promises, while corruption scandals and a lack of education make them unsuitable role models for young people. Moreover, young people do not see the benefits of voting, and consequently are sometimes only persuaded to vote for a candidate if offered a bribe (vote buying) or through manipulation. The process of voting is often complicated or unclear, while a lack of dialogue and information mean that young Roma and Sinti are often unsure of the differences between candidates and have low awareness of democratic processes. Young Roma and Sinti do not have information on how to become candidates, and believe they are unable to meet educational requirements to run for public office. Finally, a lack of documentation often means that Roma and Sinti are unable to add their names to the vote register.

When they do run for election, young Roma and Sinti candidates often lack the necessary support and resources, and are sometimes used as token minority candidates by mainstream parties and then forced to resign. In some countries, Roma and Sinti are dispersed, making it difficult for an ethnic Roma or Sinti candidate to win votes. In addition, smaller parties and independent candidates often struggle to cross the threshold to gain a seat in parliament or on a local council. Finally, when they do get elected, some Roma and Sinti forget their identity and no longer represent the communities.

19 The paper is available in Part II of this report.

Working Group III: Roma and Sinti youth and security

The opening speaker of the third working group, Maksym Flora, a young Roma activist from Ukraine, described the difficult situation of Roma in Ukraine as a result of the ongoing conflict there. Many Roma from east Ukraine have been displaced, and many have been left homeless, including families with young children and infants. In addition, the speaker noted the lack of opportunities for young Roma in Ukraine to engage in activism, politics and issues of security. In particular, no Roma youth structure exists in the country, while many young Roma also live in poor conditions and struggle with self-esteem issues.

The next speaker, Patricia Caro Maya from Spain, discussed issues related to gender-based violence. According to her presentation, most cases of physical violence are committed by men against women. The speaker also presented findings that revealed alarming attitudes towards gender-based violence among young people, with boys thinking that sexual violence is caused by a woman's "inappropriate behaviour", as well as high levels of sexual assault among young people. The speaker noted that husbands and partners are most often the perpetrators of gender-based violence. Other family and household members also suffer as a result of domestic violence against women: in many cases, one or more dependent children are present, while some cases also result in physical injury to a child or children.

The speaker also highlighted some of the factors that can lead to gender-based violence, including cultural and traditional norms that permit such violence, a lack of education, a lack of justice for the victims and the fact that the topic is often a social taboo, making it harder for victims to come forward. The speaker also suggested ways to prevent gender-based violence, including working to improve awareness of the problem among state institutions, civil society, communities and victims, as well as ensuring that the appropriate legislative framework is in place to deal with cases of gender-based violence. In particular, the speaker stressed that a multi-sectional approach that emphasizes prevention and focuses on youth is needed, as are funds to enable young people to work more effectively on the issue.

During the discussions of the working group, a number of challenges were identified with regard to Roma and Sinti youth and security. Roma and Sinti face a number of security threats, including hate

crimes, extremism, anti-Roma marches and demonstrations. These threats are often driven by hate speech and a negative public discourse about and portrayal of Roma and Sinti, including in the media. Roma and Sinti who migrate or seek asylum are portrayed as a threat to internal security, leading to discrimination and forced evictions. In addition, Roma and Sinti are often subjected to police abuse, including harassment, police raids and the segregation of Roma and Sinti communities, while a lack of police response and the discriminatory treatment of Roma and Sinti by police further undermine trust in law enforcement bodies among Roma and Sinti.

Roma and Sinti are also at risk of trafficking in human beings, child exploitation and forced labour, early and arranged marriages, and the numerous effects of these security risks on health, education and human development. Drug abuse also exposes the Roma and Sinti communities to security risks. In addition, Roma and Sinti encounter different types of violence, including physical and psychological violence against Roma and Sinti women and domestic violence. In resolving these issues, the institution of Romani Criss, a traditional way of dealing with issues in the community, sometimes runs counter to the rule of law.

Environmental issues also expose Roma and Sinti to risks, including as a result of health hazards owing to unsuitable housing and dangerous work, such as collecting scrap metal. Finally, displaced Roma and Sinti face specific risks as they are often unable to access humanitarian assistance and services due to a lack of documentation, and face challenges in accessing education.

General conclusions and recommendations

Representatives of the working groups summarized the meeting and highlighted the following conclusions and recommendations:

Empowerment and social inclusion of Roma and Sinti youth

- Roma and Sinti youth face a number of barriers to their empowerment and social inclusion, including insufficient access to education, a lack of facilities and funding for youth centres and organizations, and traditional values that sometimes inhibit their activism.
- Governments and international organizations must do more to improve the life of Roma and Sinti youth, including by providing support to Roma

and Sinti youth organizations and centres to develop their infrastructure and facilities and to ensure their sustainability.

- Roma and Sinti youth action plans should be developed at the national level so that Roma and Sinti youth are included on the policy agenda.
- Roma and Sinti youth organizations should be included in decision-making processes to ensure that Roma and Sinti youth have a say in matters that affect them.
- To empower Roma and Sinti women and girls, projects on Roma and Sinti youth should mobilize more Roma and Sinti women and girls and address topics relevant to them. Roma and Sinti men should also be included in activities intended to empower women, while gender issues should be mainstreamed into all programmes and trainings related to Roma and Sinti. Peer education projects should also target Roma and Sinti women and girls.
- State institutions should provide places for Roma and Sinti women in bodies dealing with gender equality. Gender equality should be taken into account when elaborating policies and programmes on Roma and Sinti issues.
- To encourage acceptance of youth activism in Roma and Sinti communities, information campaigns should be conducted. Cross-generational activities should be developed to create a platform for Roma and Sinti to discuss traditional norms affecting youth.
- To strengthen the capacity of Roma and Sinti youth organizations, government structures and international organizations should develop sustainable funding opportunities to promote youth activism, including through issuing mini grants.
- To develop networks between Roma and Sinti youth structures, online platforms for youth NGOs should be created at the national and international levels. Roma and Sinti youth organizations should strengthen co-operation with non-Roma structures.
- Research and needs assessments should be carried out to improve the planning and design of Roma and Sinti-related policies, strategies and programmes.
- To improve their employment opportunities, internship programmes for Roma and Sinti youth should be made available in the public and private sectors.
- Scholarship programmes for Roma and Sinti young people in all stages of education should be developed to improve school attendance rates.
- Roma and Sinti history should be included in school curricula, and 2 August should be designated as a Roma and Sinti Genocide Remembrance Day.

Political participation of Roma and Sinti youth

- Roma and Sinti encounter numerous challenges to their participation in political processes, including a lack of information and their mistrust of politics and politicians.
- To overcome these challenges, OSCE participating States should create programmes on youth political participation that focus on Roma and Sinti.
- OSCE participating States should devise ways to simplify the procedure for obtaining identification documents for Roma and Sinti, in particular for Roma and Sinti youth and women. Voter registration campaigns can also be launched to ensure that Roma and Sinti are included on the voter register.
- State institutions should provide citizenship education from an early age in schools and high schools in order to promote awareness of political processes and the importance of voting.
- To improve trust in politicians and political processes, monitoring campaigns involving Roma and Sinti youth should be conducted to monitor the activities of Roma and non-Roma politicians, including during elections, parliamentary debates and political statements.
- Roma and Sinti youth should be provided with the tools and resources to create alternative political movements and organizations.

Security of Roma and Sinti youth

- Roma and Sinti communities face a number of real security threats, including those related to the stigmatization and discrimination of Roma and Sinti in society (such as hate crimes, extremism and police abuse); those related to risk factors present in the Roma and Sinti communities (such as trafficking in human beings, child labour, early marriages and gender-based violence); and those related to displacement (such as environmental hazards and the inability to access humanitarian support).
- A number of measures can be taken to strengthen Roma and Sinti communities' resilience to risk factors, including awareness-raising among youth, cross-sectoral co-operation on security threats, in-

formation sharing between different stakeholders (including local law enforcement and community members) and strengthening the capacity of Roma and Sinti youth organizations.

- To reduce the vulnerability of Roma and Sinti youth to security threats, campaigns and educational programmes should be conducted to raise awareness of security issues among Roma and Sinti youth. Such campaigns can use sport, music and art, among other mediums, to raise awareness, and can include non-Roma youth to promote community cohesion.
- Research on the socio-economic situation of Roma and Sinti communities and youth should be conducted to analyse risk factors to security threats.
- Roma and Sinti youth should be provided with employment opportunities in institutions working on security issues to strengthen awareness of such issues in the community.
- To combat the negative portrayals of Roma and Sinti in the media and in society, training should be provided to media representatives on the effects of stereotyping. In addition, police should receive training on the history and culture of Roma and Sinti people and their issues in order to build mutual respect between police and communities.
- OSCE participating States should improve and implement the legislative framework on gender-based violence. In addition, mechanisms should be in place to provide support to victims of violence and trafficking, as well as those with post-conflict traumas, to enable them to reintegrate into society.
- OSCE participating States should also ensure cross-sector co-operation on security threats to Roma and Sinti communities in order to facilitate information sharing on human traffickers and the victims of human trafficking. In general, governments must acknowledge the seriousness and extent of trafficking, and should pay particular attention to vulnerable groups, including Roma and Sinti children and women.
- Awareness-raising campaigns should be conducted to address stereotypes and myths about human trafficking and its victims and to help community members identify cases of trafficking and report these to the appropriate authority.

Work of the OSCE

- The OSCE/ODIHR works to mainstream the Roma and Sinti youth agenda in its activities and in the Model OSCE Youth Action Plan. The OSCE/

ODIHR will consider organizing a side event on Roma and Sinti youth in a forthcoming human dimension meeting.

- The OSCE/ODIHR will distribute widely the summary report and papers developed as a result of this conference, including among OSCE field operations and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, in order to co-operate on issues raised during the conference.
- It was proposed that the Serbian Chairmanship organize an event on Roma and Sinti issues that would focus on the participation of Roma and Sinti youth.
- The situation of Roma and Sinti youth should be high on the agenda of the Serbian Chairmanship of the OSCE. Recommendations developed during the conference can help to steer discussions and work in this area.
- The OSCE/ODIHR should conduct research into the situation of Roma and Sinti youth in OSCE participating States and incorporate findings into programmes and projects targeting Roma and Sinti youth.
- The OSCE/ODIHR should reach out to Roma and Sinti youth to ensure their inclusion in capacity-building and youth-related activities. Roma and Sinti youth issues should be incorporated into the work of other OSCE/ODIHR departments.
- It is recommended that the OSCE/ODIHR and OSCE participating States create and support long-term training and mentorship programmes to develop Roma and Sinti youth political participation, including mentorship programmes for Roma and Sinti youth interested in running for office, with a particular focus on improving participation at the local level. Information campaigns should also be conducted to improve understanding of democratic processes at the local, regional and national levels. Such activities should be undertaken with the co-operation of civil society.
- In addition, the OSCE/ODIHR and international organizations should support voter education programmes targeting Roma and Sinti youth and women.
- The OSCE/ODIHR should provide training to Roma and Sinti youth and women on elections monitoring to improve awareness of and trust in electoral processes. This recommendation will be raised with the OSCE/ODIHR Elections Department.

- OSCE institutions should follow up on recommendations issued to participating States to ensure that Roma and Sinti women and children are classified as a risk group and that appropriate national mechanisms for combating trafficking are adopted.

Part II:
BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Position of Roma Youth in Central and South-Eastern Europe: Results from the Regional Roma Survey 2011

Ermira Kamberi²⁰

This paper was written by the author, a young Roma activist, for the Roma and Sinti Youth Conference: Activism, Participation, Security, organized by the OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues. The opinions contained herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the OSCE, ODIHR, or any participating State.

Introduction and methodology

This paper intends to analyse the position of Roma youth in Central and South-Eastern Europe. Under the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area, adopted in 2003 in Maastricht, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is committed to support capacity-building measures for, as well as the empowerment of, Roma and Sinti women and youth.²¹ As such, the Action Plan recognizes the importance of Roma youth as future contributors to their communities and to wider society. However, much of the existing research on Roma focuses on the community as a whole and does not address the particular situation of and challenges facing Roma youth. As a result, there is a shortage of empirical information on Roma youth in Central and South-Eastern Europe, and we know much less about the specific challenges facing Roma youth. In order to make the most of their potential, it is necessary to compare the current situation of Roma youth with that of their non-Roma counterparts. In this way, we can gain a more balanced perspective on the actual position of Roma youth and how it compares to that of non-Roma youth within their respective countries.

Owing to the lack of available quantitative data on Roma youth in OSCE participating States, this paper relies on data collected during the Regional Roma Survey conducted in 2011, which provided

a unique, large scale and cross-country dataset. The 2011 Regional Roma Survey consisted of two parallel and complementary surveys. This paper analyses data from the survey carried out by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the World Bank (WB) and the European Commission (EC) (hereafter referred to as the UNDP/WB/EC survey), with a focus on the social and economic development of Roma and non-Roma respondents in 12 countries in Central and South-Eastern Europe: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia.²² The survey was carried out via face-to-face interviews in respondents' households. Approximately 750 Roma and 350 non-Roma households were interviewed in each country.

Although the UNDP/WB/EC survey is a valuable tool for comparing the socio-economic situation of Roma across different countries, there are certain shortcomings in the sampling methodology, which is not entirely representative of the target population. For each country, the sampling design targeted Roma households living in settlements where Roma constitute more than 50 per cent of the population, as determined by the most recent national census in each country. The cluster of Roma households located in each of these settlements was identified as a Roma sample, with each sample containing on average 30 Roma households. The Roma sample included those who implicitly identify as Roma or as another Roma

20 Ermira Kamberi, M.Sc., is Roma Policy Research Fellow at the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (ERCOMER), Utrecht University, the Netherlands.

21 "Implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area: Renewed Commitments, Continued Challenges", OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), 2013, p. 60.

22 Another survey was conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) among Roma and non-Roma participants in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain, and focused on the fulfilment of key fundamental rights.

subgroup, such as Ashkali or Egyptian. The non-Roma sample consisted of households located within 300 metres from the Roma sample. The non-Roma sample consisted of members of the titular group and members of a minority group other than Roma. This was the first step of the sampling procedure, also referred to as the primary sampling unit. In the secondary sampling unit, seven Roma and three or four non-Roma households were randomly selected to participate in the survey.²³

One of the challenges in conducting surveys involving Roma participants is selecting a sampling method. In the case of the 2011 Regional Roma Survey, the sampling method over-represented Roma living in social exclusion, namely those with limited access to social goods, including education, employment, housing and public services.²⁴ Furthermore, Ivanov and colleagues (2012) confirm that the data are “as representative as possible of those Roma who face social exclusion and risk marginalization.”²⁵ Although not entirely representative, the data nevertheless provide good insight into the position of the majority of Roma youth in Central and South-Eastern Europe. In general, large scale cross-national data on Roma of this kind are rarely available, and the 2011 Regional Roma Survey provides a good basis on which to improve future quantitative data collections. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the conclusions extracted from these data do not reflect the situation of all Roma in the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe.

The questionnaire in the UNDP/WB/EC survey consisted of four parts, known as modules. This paper

analyses data from Module 1 and Module 4.²⁶ Module 1 provides demographic information on all members of the household surveyed, and Module 4 provides information on the attitudes of a randomly selected member of the household. Roma youth are defined as participants who at the time of the survey were between the ages of 18 and 30, or born between 1981 and 1993. The same selection procedure was applied to non-Roma youth participants.

To understand the situation of Roma youth in Central and South-Eastern Europe, this paper presents the survey’s descriptive statistics relating to Roma youth and compares these with the non-Roma sample, disaggregating respondents by gender where relevant.

The situation of Roma youth in Central and South-East Europe

Participants

The single criterion used to select data for this study was the age of the respondent. Thus, the data of all participants in the UNDP/WB/EC survey between the ages of 18 and 30 were selected for the present study. The final sample size for this study included 11,682 survey participants, or 21.4 per cent, of all individuals surveyed. Of them, 74.8 per cent were Roma and 51 per cent were female. The country distribution of respondents included in this study was as follows: Albania (1,224), Bosnia and Herzegovina (997), Bulgaria (819), Croatia (1,014), the Czech Republic (770), Hungary (849), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1,125), Moldova (881), Montenegro (1,045), Romania (857), Serbia (1,016) and Slovakia (1,085). Figure 1 shows the sample distribution of Roma and non-Roma respondents to the survey from each country. With the exception of Slovakia, where the number of Roma and non-Roma youth is almost equally distributed, the number of Roma youth from all other countries included in the original survey is significantly higher than the number of non-Roma youth. The female/male distribution was similar across all countries and within the Roma and non-Roma groups.

26 Module 2 consisted of questions related to early childhood education and care, while Module 3 consisted of questions related to the status of the household. As we were interested in the status of Roma youth, only Module 1 and Module 4 provided the necessary data on which to base our analysis.

23 In cases where there were no non-Roma households in close proximity to the Roma households surveyed, or when the difference in socio-economic status between Roma and non-Roma was high and visible (for example, in cases where the Roma settlement was surrounded by large new buildings occupied by non-Roma residents), interviews with non-Roma were not conducted in the secondary sampling unit. To compensate for this, twice as many non-Roma interviews were conducted in the next sampling unit (See Andrey Ivanov, Jaroslav Kling and Justin Kagin, *Integrated household surveys among Roma populations: One possible approach to sampling used in the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey 2011* (Bratislava: United Nations Development Program, 2012).

24 Vera Messing, “Methodological puzzles of surveying Roma/Gypsy populations, *Ethnicities*, Vol. 14, No. 6, 2014, pp. 811-829.

25 Ivanov et al., *op. cit.*, note 23, p. 11.

Figure 1: Distribution of Roma/non-Roma respondents by country (%)

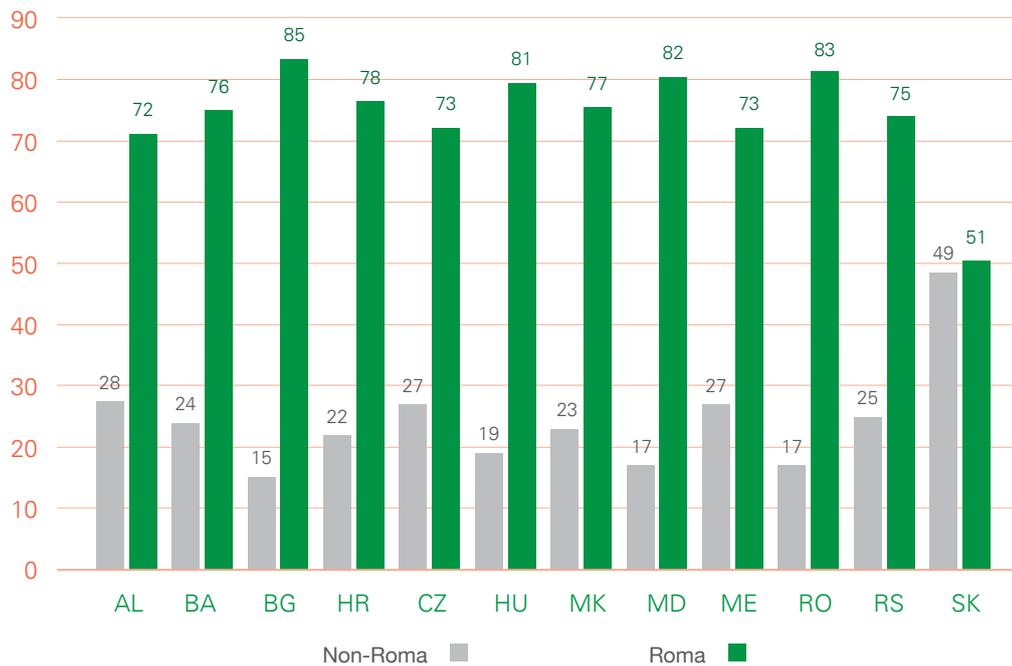


Figure 1. Distribution of Roma and non-Roma respondents by country. The country abbreviations used in this and all subsequent figures follow the EUROSTAT country coding,²⁷ as follows: AL (Albania), BA (Bosnia and Herzegovina), BG (Bulgaria), HR (Croatia), CZ (the Czech Republic), HU (Hungary), MK (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), MD (Moldova), ME (Montenegro), RO (Romania), RS (Serbia) and SK (Slovakia).

Personal documents

One of the serious challenges facing Roma populations in Central and South-Eastern Europe is the fact that they often do not possess personal documents, including birth certificates, identification (ID) cards and passports. Historically, this has prevented Roma from enjoying and exercising their rights and responsibilities as citizens in the countries in which they live. In order to improve the social inclusion of Roma, it is important to continuously assess how many of them possess personal documents. Therefore, the 2011 Regional Roma Survey asked participants if they have a birth certificate, an ID card and/or a passport.²⁸

The survey found that 98 per cent of Roma and 99 per cent of non-Roma youth possess a birth cer-

tificate.²⁹ Figure 2 shows the country distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth in possession of a birth certificate; as can be seen, similar percentages of Roma and non-Roma youth possess a birth certificate across all countries. The highest discrepancy between the two groups was 4 per cent in Montenegro (93 per cent Roma compared to 97 per cent non-Roma) and 3 per cent in Slovakia (100 per cent Roma compared to 97 per cent non-Roma). Table 1 disaggregates the data on possession of birth certificates among Roma and non-Roma by gender. There are no major gender discrepancies in the number of Roma youth holding birth certificates. Only in Montenegro can we detect a slightly higher percentage of Roma males in possession of a birth certificate compared to Roma females (96 per cent and 89 per cent, respectively). Overall, these results suggest high rates of possession of birth certificates among Roma youth.

27 “Tutorial: Country codes and protocol order”, EUROSTAT website, 4 December 2014, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Tutorial:Country_codes_and_protocol_order>.

28 The original question included in Module 1 was “Does s/he possess the following documents?”

29 The question on birth certificates was answered in total by 11,619 participants.

Figure 2: Possession of birth certificates among Roma/non-Roma youth by country (%)



Figure 2. Distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth in possession of a birth certificate by country.

Table 1: Possession of birth certificates among Roma/non-Roma youth by gender and country (%)

	AL		BA		BG		HR		CZ		HU	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Roma	99.1	99.5	98.7	99	99.4	98.6	99.5	99	100	99.6	100	100
Non-Roma	100	100	99.2	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

	MK		MD		ME		RO		RS		SK	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Roma	98.6	98.6	100	99.4	89.1	96.4	99.1	99.2	99.7	99.5	100	99.6
Non-Roma	100	100	100	100	97.2	97.1	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 1. Distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth possessing birth certificates by gender and by country (F – female; M – male).

With regards to ID cards, 91 per cent of Roma and 94 per cent of non-Roma youth surveyed possessed an ID card.³⁰ Figure 3 shows the country distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth who hold an ID card. As shown, the country with the lowest percentage of Roma youth possessing an ID card and the greatest discrepancy between Roma and non-Roma youth was Montenegro, where 78 per cent of Roma and 94 per cent of non-Roma possess ID cards. On the other hand, Roma youth in the Czech Republic and Hungary have the highest rate of ID card possession, at 99 per cent. Table 2 disaggregates the data on posses-

sion of ID cards among Roma and non-Roma youth by gender. In general, the rate of Roma males and, in particular, Roma females who possess an ID card is lower than that of non-Roma males and females, although the difference in most cases is minor. The greatest divergence in this regard was detected in Montenegro, where only 69 per cent of Roma females possess an ID card compared to a rate of 94 per cent among non-Roma females. Overall, these results suggest that, in some countries, including Albania and Montenegro, there is a need to improve the rate at which Roma youth, and particularly young Roma females, obtain ID cards.

30 A total of 11,532 Roma and non-Roma youth responded to the question on ID cards.

Figure 3: Possession of ID cards among Roma/non-Roma youth by country (%)

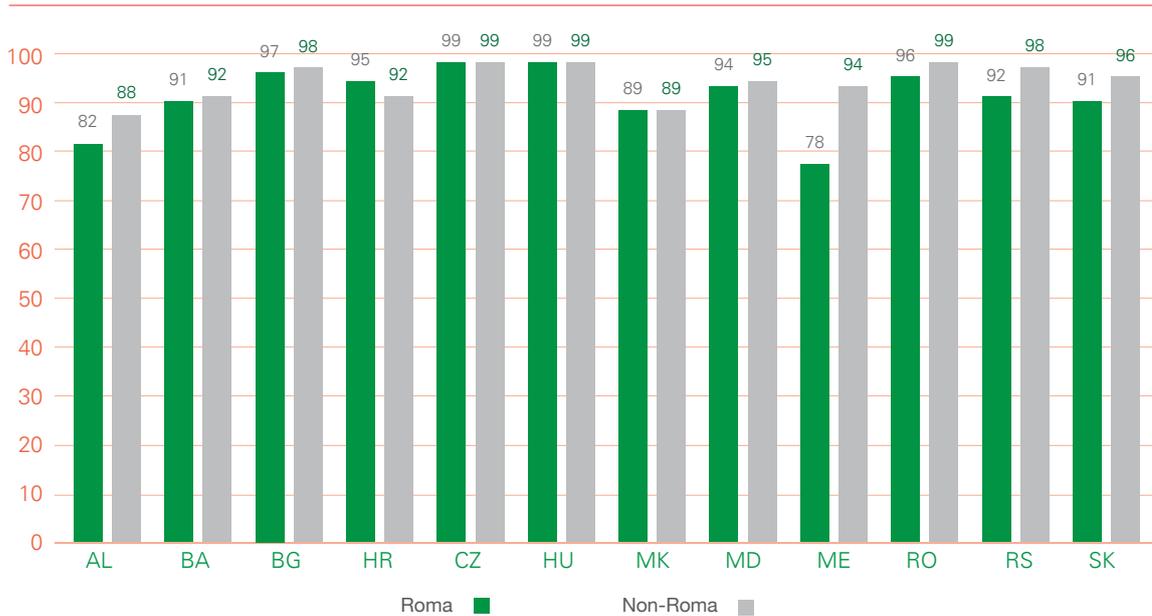


Figure 3. Distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth in possession of an ID card by country.

Table 2: Possession of ID cards among Roma/non-Roma youth by gender and country (%)

	AL		BA		BG		HR		CZ		HU	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Roma	81.7	82.7	91.8	91.1	96.8	97.2	94.8	96.7	99.3	99.6	99.4	99.1
Non-Roma	84.3	91.1	91.9	92	100	95.7	98.1	95.3	100	99	98.8	100

	MK		MD		ME		RO		RS		SK	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Roma	91.9	94.1	93.8	93.8	69.3	86	96.2	96.4	93.2	92.8	98.2	97.9
Non-Roma	94	97.1	94.2	96.8	94.3	93.4	98.7	98.5	99.2	98.4	98.1	98.8

Table 2. Distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth in possession of an ID card by gender and by country (F – female; M – male).

Compared to the possession of birth certificates and ID cards, the rate of passport possession among Roma youth, on the one hand, and among non-Roma youth, on the other, differed considerably.³¹ Figure 4 shows the distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth in possession of a passport by country. In the Czech Republic and Hungary, the percentage of passport possession among non-Roma youth is more than three times greater than among Roma youth. One explanation for this finding is the fact that both the Czech Republic and Hungary are EU member states,

and that EU residents do not necessarily need a passport to travel to other EU member states. This may also explain the low rate of passport possession among non-Roma youth in EU member states, including those in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. The lowest rate of passport possession among Roma youth was observed in Hungary (7 per cent), while the highest rate was in Moldova (80 per cent), where the percentage of Roma youth possessing a passport was in fact higher than among non-Roma youth (74 per cent). Table 3 further disaggregates the data on passport possession among Roma and non-Roma youth by gender. With the exception of Moldova, the female Roma population has the lowest rate of passport pos-

31 A total of 11,413 Roma and non-Roma youth responded to the question on passports.

session among Roma and non-Roma youth across all countries. The absence of a passport is a more serious problem in non-EU countries, since cross-border mo-

bility of citizens from these countries is much more restricted compared to that of EU member states.

Figure 4: Possession of passports among Roma/non-Roma youth by country (%)

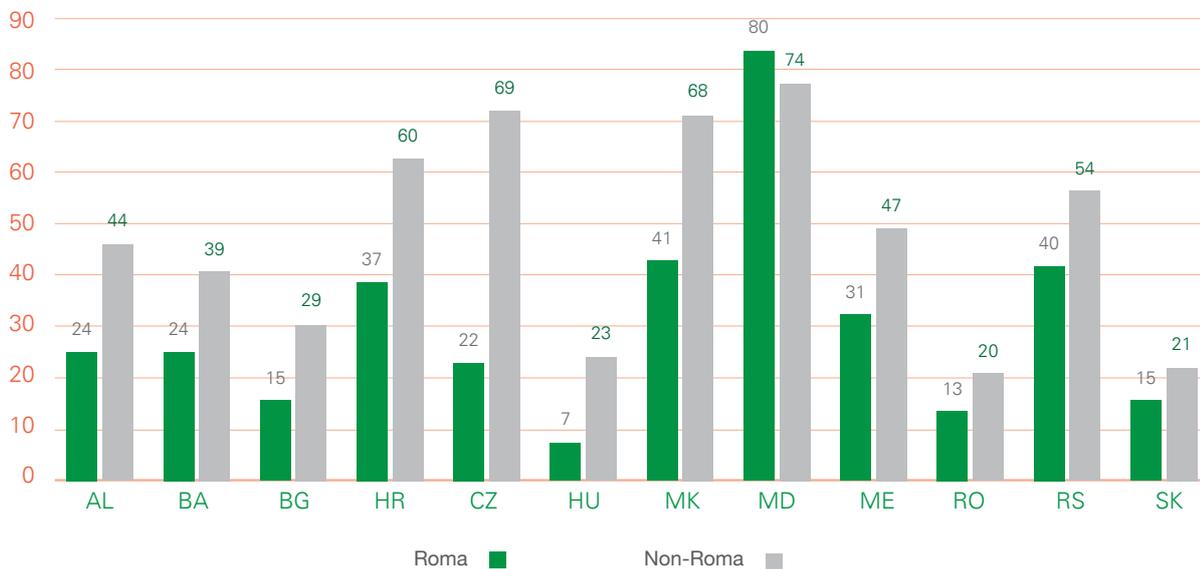


Figure 4. Distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth in possession of a passport by country.

Table 3: Possession of passports among Roma/non-Roma youth by gender and country (%)

	AL		BA		BG		HR		CZ		HU	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Roma	19.5	29.9	23.9	24.7	14.2	15.8	36.4	39.3	20.3	24.4	4.2	9.1
Non-Roma	33.7	53.9	37.4	40.2	40	20.3	64.2	60.7	69.6	68.4	21.7	24.4

	MK		MD		ME		RO		RS		SK	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Roma	35.9	48	78.3	82.6	24.2	39.2	12.1	14.4	35.1	45.6	15.6	20.1
Non-Roma	65.5	73.6	68.6	80.6	45.4	48.5	18.4	22.4	55.5	53.7	26.7	21.9

Table 3. Distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth in possession of a passport by gender and by country (F – female; M – male).

Literacy rate

Improving the literacy rate of Roma is key to improving their social inclusion. This is especially relevant to Roma youth, as they have the most social and economic potential among Roma and, as such, are most able to contribute to the development of the Roma

community.³² Figure 5 provides the sample distribution of literacy rates among Roma and non-Roma youth, and demonstrates how Roma youth have notably lower rates of literacy than their non-Roma counterparts.

³² In order to assess literacy rates among Roma youth, this study used data from Module 1 of the UNDP/WB/EC survey, in which literacy was determined by the question “Can s/he read and write?” A total of 11,618 Roma and non-Roma youth responded to this question.

Figure 6 shows that this trend in literacy rates exists in all countries in the sample. They also show a divergence in the literacy rates between Roma men and Roma women, with Roma women having lower rates of literacy. In Albania, only 60 per cent of Roma women can read and write, while similarly low rates

can be found in Moldova (66 per cent) and Montenegro (65 per cent). These results suggest that the literacy rates among Roma and, in particularly, among Roma females, needs to be improved, especially since the ability to read and write is essential to most jobs.

Figure 5: Literacy rates among Roma/non-Roma youth (%)

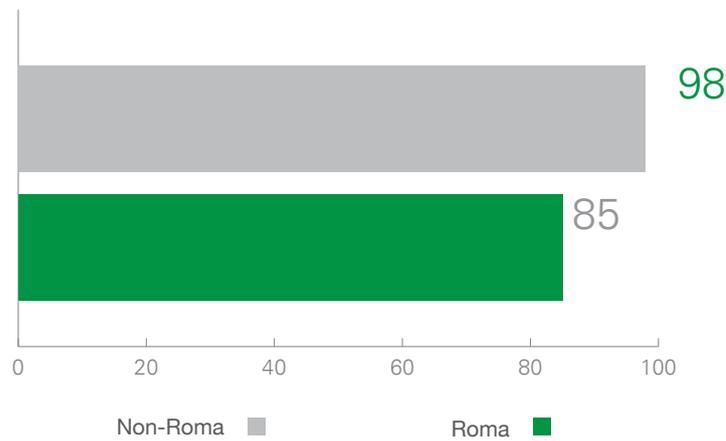


Figure 5. Sample distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth who can read and write.

Figure 6: Literacy rates among Roma/non-Roma youth by gender and country (%)



Figure 6. Literacy rates of women (W) and men (M) among Roma and non-Roma youth in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia.

Education

Beyond literacy rates, the level of education among Roma youth is also important for the development of the Roma community and of society more broadly. Furthermore, improving education levels among Roma has been the focus of many transnational scholarship programmes aimed at alleviating the social exclusion of Roma. Assuming that many Roma young people are or have been scholarship grantees, it is important to assess the impact of such programmes and the education levels of Roma youth.³³

Figure 7 shows that around one in four Roma young people surveyed have no formal education (24 per cent), while 36 per cent of Roma youth have completed lower secondary education. In comparison, most non-Roma youth in this sample (53 per

cent) have completed upper secondary education. Meanwhile, the percentage of Roma youth with completed post-secondary education is only 0.3 per cent compared to 7 per cent among their non-Roma counterparts. The low rate of university education among Roma is disappointing, especially considering the recent availability of scholarships for Roma youth aimed at increasing the number of Roma university graduates.

Figure 8 provides data on the highest levels of education achieved among Roma and non-Roma youth disaggregated by gender. Based on these results, the group with the highest rate of no formal education is the Roma female population (27 per cent). It seems that there is still a need to improve access to education for the female Roma population.

Figure 7: Highest levels of education among Roma/non-Roma youth (%)

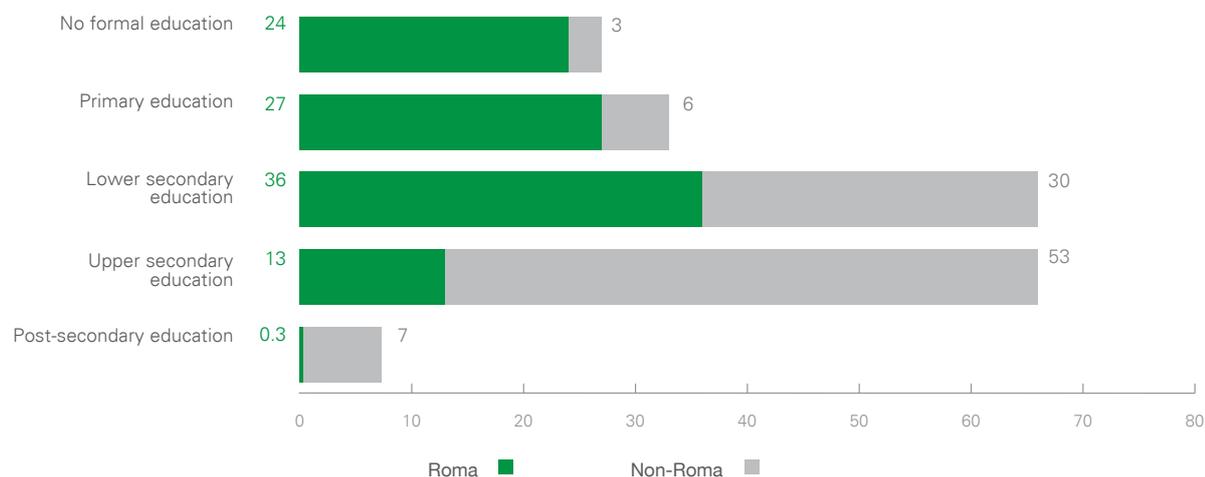


Figure 7. Sample distribution of the highest levels of education achieved among Roma and non-Roma, based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) system.

³³ For this purpose, we used an indicator from the UNDP/WB/EC survey that assessed the highest levels of education achieved based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). This indicator consisted of five categories: 1) No formal education; 2) Primary education; 3) Lower secondary education; 4) Upper secondary education; and 5) Post-secondary education. The total number of valid responses from Roma and non-Roma youth was 11,601.

Figure 8: Highest levels of education among Roma/non-Roma youth by gender (%)



Figure 8. Distribution of the highest levels of education achieved among Roma and non-Roma youth by gender (W – women; M – men).

Perceptions on sufficient levels of education for boys and girls

When analysing the highest levels of education achieved among Roma and non-Roma youth, we noticed that 24 per cent of Roma youth have no formal education, a relatively high percentage compared to the 3 per cent among non-Roma youth. Furthermore, most Roma youth (36 per cent) have only completed lower secondary education, while most non-Roma youth (53 per cent) have completed upper secondary education. This led us to reflect on the possible reasons for this divergence, and we determined to see what Roma and non-Roma youth perceive to be sufficient levels of education for boys and girls.³⁴

Figure 9 shows the sample distribution of perceptions among Roma and non-Roma youth on what constitutes sufficient levels of education for boys and girls. The results show that, in general, Roma and non-Roma youth differ in their opinions on what constitutes

sufficient levels of education for young people; however, we did not detect any major differences in perception concerning boys, on the one hand, and girls, on the other hand. For most Roma youth, secondary vocational education is considered sufficient for both boys and girls, whereas most non-Roma youth consider university and higher education as sufficient for both genders. Nevertheless, the results obtained from Roma youth are surprising and somewhat troubling. It is natural to assume that younger generations who have been exposed to a decade of campaigning on the subject and have access to numerous scholarships to facilitate their education, would value university education highly. Unfortunately, the survey did not ask respondents to explain their choice, and further research should revisit this question using a more representative sample.

³⁴ The 2011 Regional Roma Survey asked respondents: “What do you believe is a sufficient level of education for a child?” This question was asked separately for boys and for girls. The answer categories were: 1) Lower basic (1-4); 2) Upper basic (5-8); 3) Secondary vocation/technical/arts; 4) General secondary; 5) Associate (2 year) college; 6) University and higher; and 7) Special school for disabled. The total number of valid answers for the question on sufficient education for boys was 3,754 and for the question on sufficient education for girls was 3,750.

Figure 9: Perceptions on sufficient levels of education for boys and girls (%)

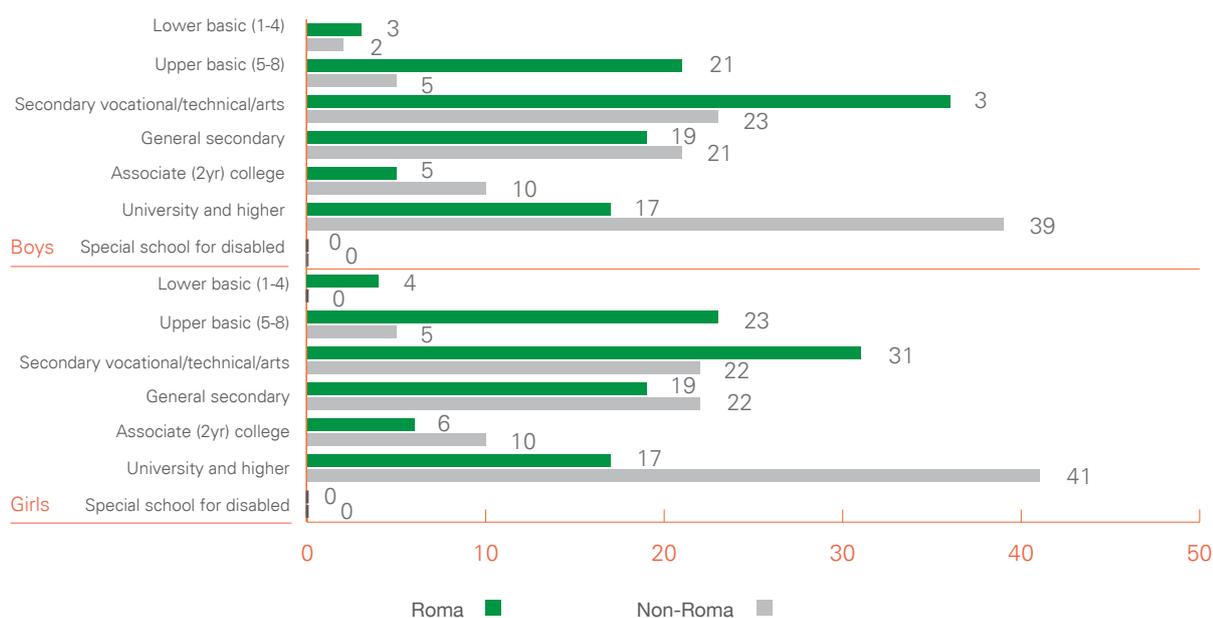


Figure 9. Sample distribution of perceptions of sufficient levels of education for boys and girls among Roma and non-Roma youth.

Activity status

To understand the current situation of Roma and non-Roma youth, it is necessary to assess the types of activities they are engaged in, including whether and the extent to which they are employed.³⁵ For a question on their current activity status, respondents were asked to choose from among the following 13 categories: 1) paid work – full-time; 2) paid work – part-time; 3) paid work – ad hoc jobs; 4) works for the family; 5) self-employed; 6) in compulsory military/community service; 7) parental leave; 8) full-time homemaker; 9) in school / a student; 10) vocational training/apprenticeship; 11) voluntary work; 12) unable to work due to disability; and 13) not working.

Figure 10 shows the sample distribution for the six most frequently selected categories for Roma and non-Roma youth. When it comes to paid work, Roma youth fare considerably worse than their non-Roma counterparts (19 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively). Furthermore, as few as 4 per cent of Roma youth are students, compared to 20 per cent among non-Roma youth. Another big discrepancy exists in

the rate of unemployment, with unemployment rates at 49 per cent among Roma youth and at 26 per cent among non-Roma youth.

Figure 11 shows the gender distribution for the six most frequently selected categories for Roma and non-Roma youth. In terms of full-time paid employment, young Roma women are the least represented group in this category, at only 4 per cent; however, they are also most likely to be full-time homemakers (26 per cent). Nevertheless, the unemployment rate among young Roma women is still among the highest (46 per cent), while 54 per cent of young Roma men are unemployed. Furthermore, the percentage of both young Roma men and women in school is one fifth that of their non-Roma counterparts, at only 4 per cent. These results point to a stunning unemployment rate among Roma youth and, in particular, among the female population, most of whom are full-time homemakers. These gender differences suggest that the current activity status of Roma youth is an issue that must be tackled from a gender perspective.

³⁵ This question was included in Module 1 of the survey as “Activity status”. To assess the activity status of survey participants, the UNDP/WB/EC survey provided 16 categories. The preliminary analysis showed that a total of 11,440 Roma and non-Roma youth answered the question on activity status.

Figure 10: Activity status of Roma/non-Roma youth (%)

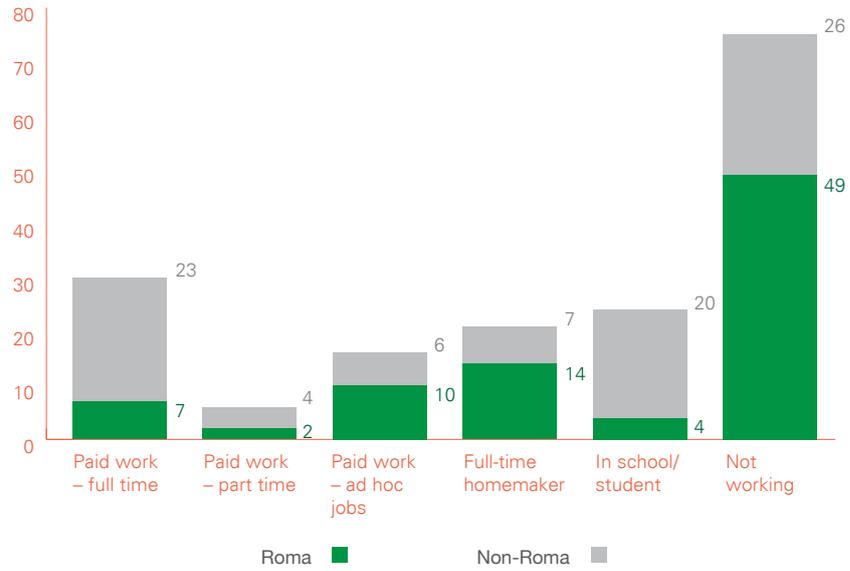


Figure 10. Sample distribution of the six most frequently selected activity status categories among Roma and non-Roma youth.

Figure 11: Activity status of Roma/non-Roma youth by gender (%)

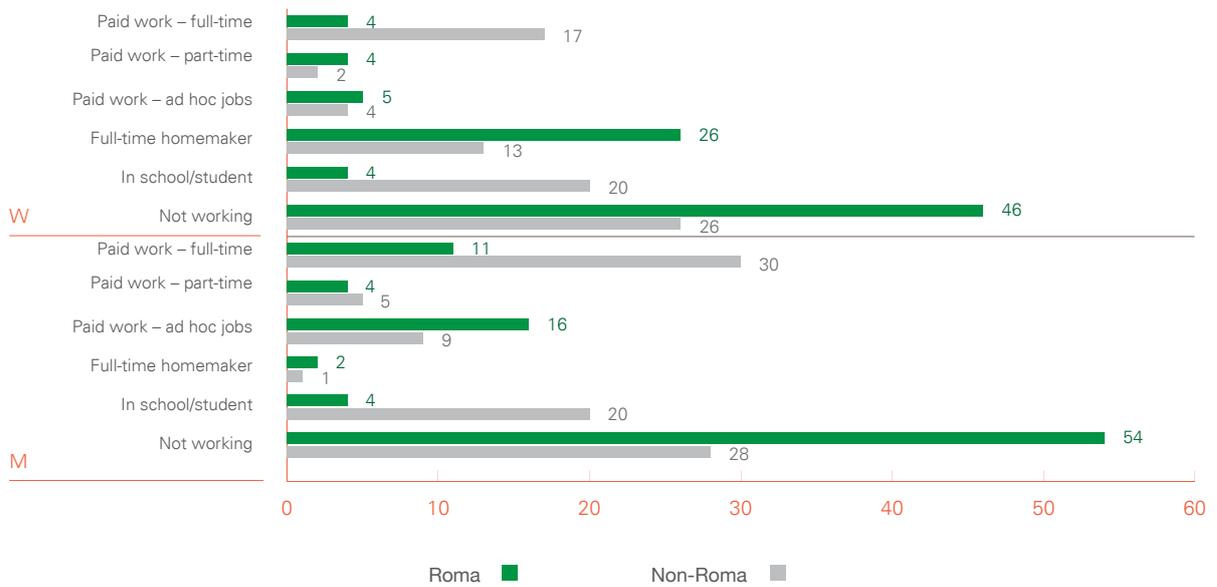


Figure 11. Sample distribution of the six most frequently selected activity status categories among Roma and non-Roma youth, disaggregated by gender (W – Women; M – Men).

Types and status of employment

As shown in the activity status results, about 49 per cent of Roma youth and 26 per cent of non-Roma youth are unemployed. In order to better understand the kinds of jobs that employed Roma and non-Roma youth do, we first added the total number of respondents who have a paid job.³⁶ The total number of youth in our sample with a paid job is 3,030 – less than one third of the entire sample. Among them, the percentage of Roma youth with a paid job is 66 per cent, while the percentage of non-Roma youth with a paid job is 34 per cent.

Figure 12 provides information on the types of employment in which Roma and non-Roma youth are engaged. As shown, employment in private companies was the most common type of work both for Roma (33 per cent) and for non-Roma youth (62 per cent).

The second most common type of employment among Roma youth is as an unskilled, seasonal or hourly worker (29 per cent), while for non-Roma youth it is employment in a public or municipal company (20 per cent).

Figure 13 provides information on the status of employed participants, including whether their employment is 1) permanent; 2) temporary; 3) seasonal; or 4) periodical.³⁷ The results show that the current employment of most Roma youth is either permanent (34 per cent) or periodical (34 per cent). This situation is very different among non-Roma youth, whose current employment is mostly permanent (62 per cent). These results show how unstable the employment situation is for Roma youth. Future research should try to explain this situation by examining the human and social capital of Roma youth.

Figure 12: Types of employment among Roma/non-Roma youth (%)

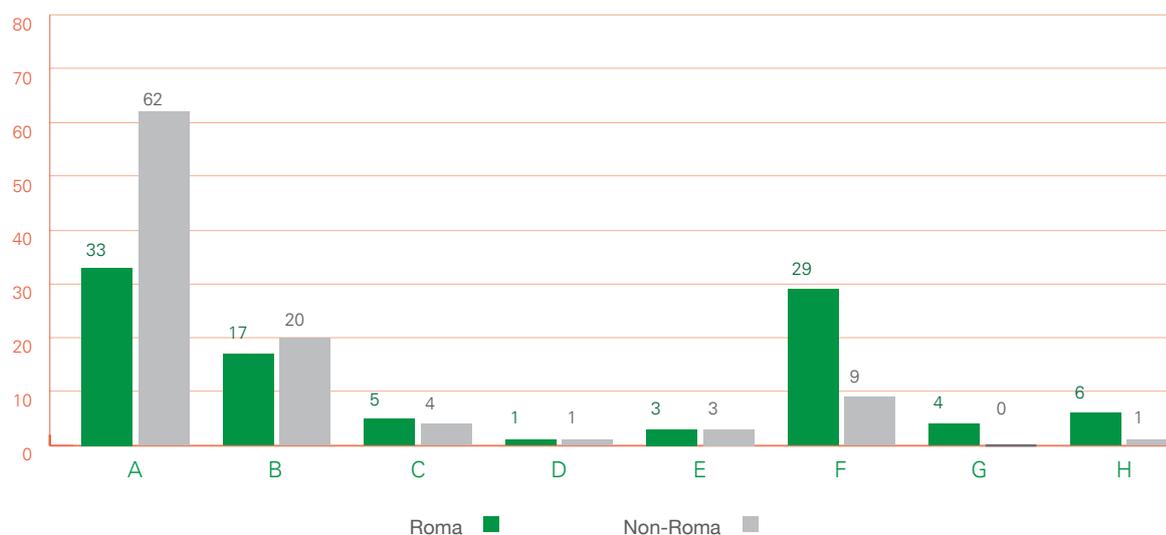


Figure 12. Sample distribution for types of employment among Roma and non-Roma youth. The abbreviations represent the following: A) Employee in a private company; B) Employee in a public or municipal company; C) Self-employed in own business or freelancer; D) Employer in own business with employees; E) Family worker in family business or on a family farm without payment; F) Unskilled, seasonal or hourly worker; G) Agricultural or seasonal worker; and H) Collects scrap. *Note:* A ninth category – “Member of producer’s co-operative society” – was omitted from this figure due to low results (less than 1 per cent) among both Roma and non-Roma youth. Categories E, G and H were added to the original list due to a substantial number of references to these types of employment under “Other employment”.

³⁶ The UNDP/WB/EC survey assessed the number of participants with paid employment using two questions: “During the last week, did [name] do any paid work (in cash or in kind whether payment was received during the reference week or not) for at least one hour?,” and “Although [name] did not work in a paid job during the last week, does [name] have a paid job (or business) from which s/he was temporarily absent (due to illness, leave, maternity leave, bad weather and other) and to which s/he will return after some time?”

³⁷ The original question was formulated as “Is your employment...?,” followed by the categories listed above. This question was answered by a total of 2,877 Roma and non-Roma youth.

Figure 13: Status of employment among Roma/non-Roma youth (%)

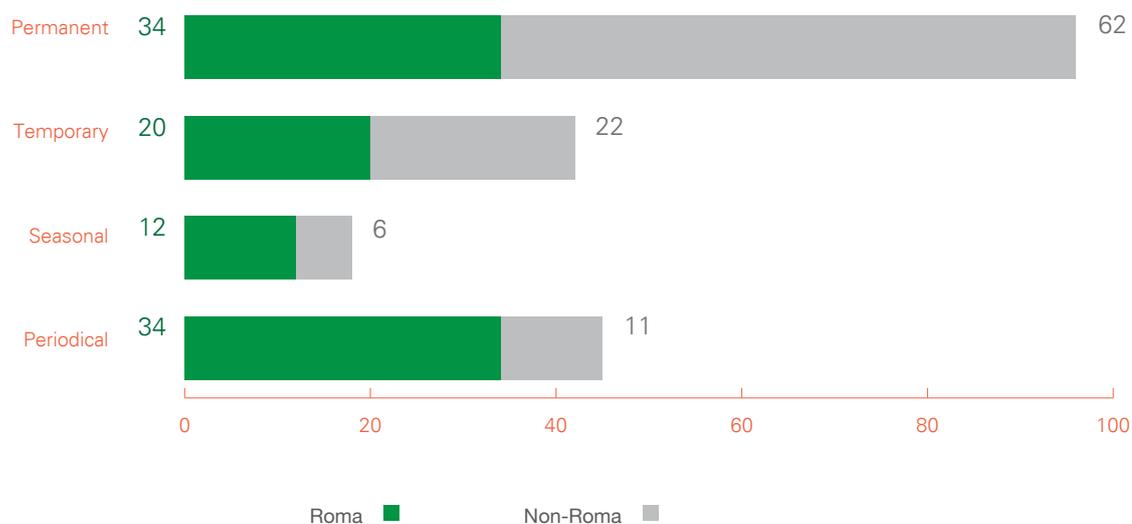


Figure 13. Sample distribution of the status of employment among Roma and non-Roma youth.

Finally, we examined the rate at which employers/employees pay social contributions.³⁸ Based on the results (Figure 14), the rates at which both pension and health care are covered differs significantly among Roma and non-Roma youth. Namely, only 34 per cent of employed Roma youth have both pension and health care, compared to 68 per cent of employed non-Roma youth. These rates are similar to the rates of Roma and non-Roma youth who are permanently

employed, possibly indicating that only those with permanent employment also benefit from social contributions. Similarly, the majority of Roma youth are not covered by either pension or health care (58 per cent). These findings are serious and should be adequately addressed. Improving the employment status among Roma youth may also improve the rate at which their health care and pensions are covered.

Figure 14: Social contributions among Roma/non-Roma youth (%)

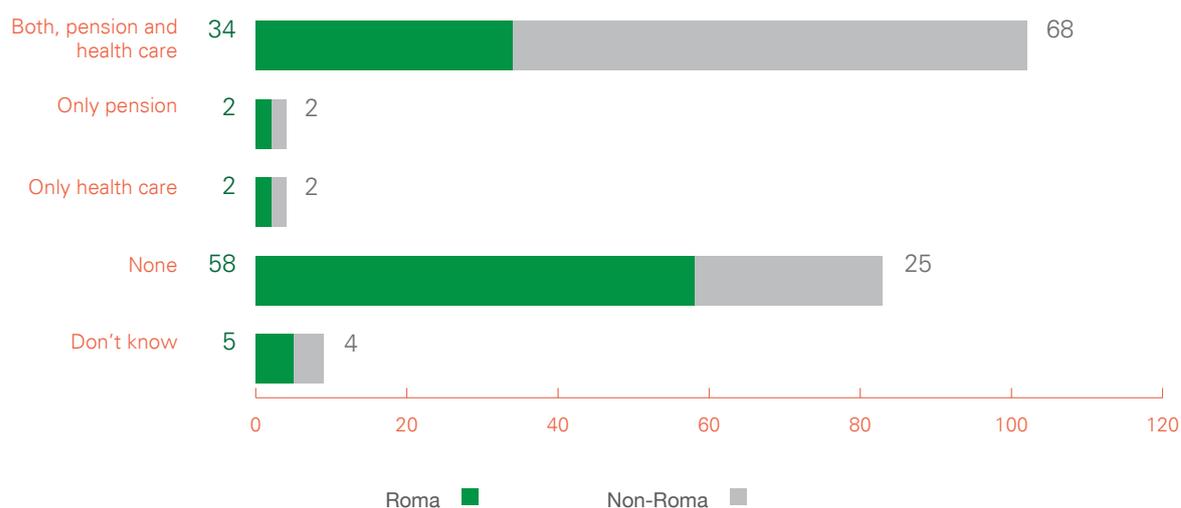


Figure 14. Sample distribution of the coverage of social contributions among Roma and non-Roma youth.

38 The UNDP/WB/EC survey asked the question “Do you or your employer pay social contributions (pensions and health care) for this job?” A total of 2,888 respondents answered this question.

Health

Much of the currently available data suggests that a wide gap exists between the health status of Roma and that of non-Roma, with the former having lower levels of health. Health issues among Roma populations are often linked to discrimination or a lack of documentation impeding their access to public health services. Health is a topic that is often discussed in relation to women and children, but rarely in relation

to youth. Therefore, it is important to assess different aspects of the health status of Roma youth.³⁹ Figure 15 provides information on the percentage of Roma and non-Roma youth that needed a doctor but did not see one, disaggregated by gender. Based on these results, young Roma women were most likely to not see a doctor when the need arose (38 per cent). Around one third of Roma men found themselves in a similar situation.

Figure 15: Percentage of Roma/non-Roma youth who needed a doctor but did not see one (%)

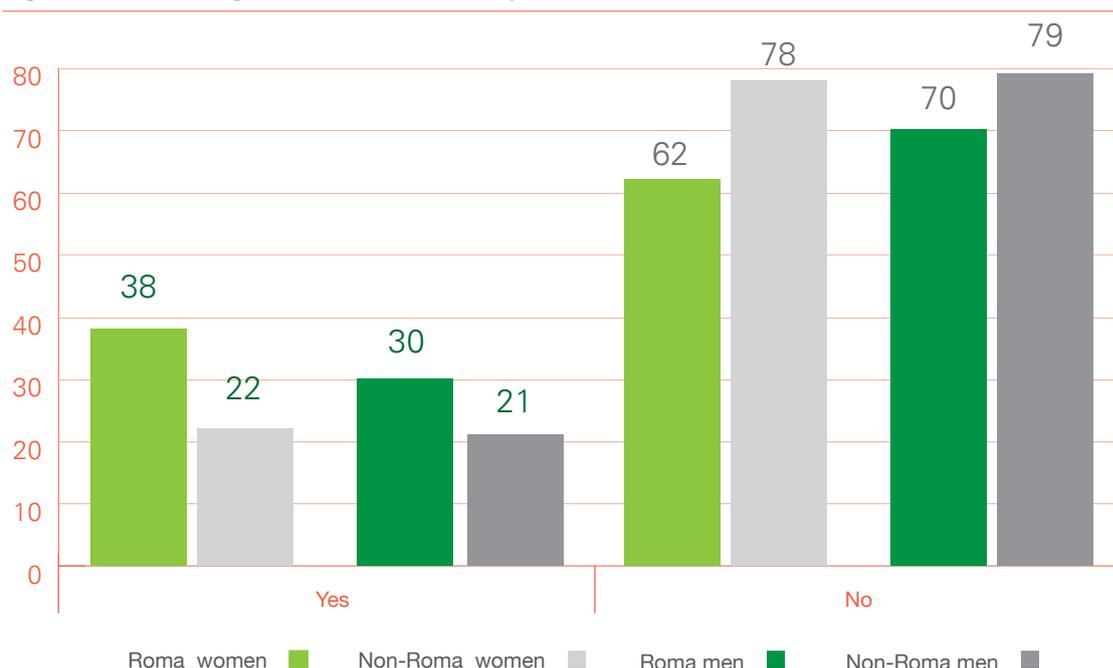


Figure 15. Sample distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth who in the past 12 months felt that they really needed to consult a doctor or medical specialist but did not (Yes – did not see a doctor when needed; No – did not have this experience).

In a subsequent question, participants who answered “yes” were given the opportunity to explain why they had not consulted a doctor. Among Roma youth, the main reason for not seeing a doctor was because they could not afford it (66 per cent), while 10 per cent wanted to wait and see if the problem got better on its own and 6 per cent said they could not take time off work or were busy taking care of children. Among non-Roma youth, the main reason for not seeing a doctor was because they could not afford it (51 per cent), while 16 per cent wanted to wait and see if the problem got better on its own and another 16 per cent could not take time off work or were busy taking care of children. As such, the reasons for not consulting a doctor when needed are similar across the two groups. Nevertheless, it is important to inves-

tigate further why both Roma and non-Roma youth could not afford to consult a doctor. One such reason could be due to a lack of health insurance.

39 For this purpose, we applied a question from Module 4 of the survey that asked the following: “During the past 12 months, was there any time when, in your opinion, you really needed to consult a doctor or medical specialist but you did not?” The answer categories for this question were “Yes” and “No”. The total number of valid responses to this question was 3,855. It is important to bear in mind that the questions in Module 4 were posed to a randomly selected household member who was older than 16. Therefore, the number of young people included in this section of the questionnaire is much lower than in Module 1, which collected information on all members of the household.

Participants in Module 4 were also asked whether or not they have health insurance.⁴⁰ Figure 16a and Figure 16b provide the country distribution for Roma and non-Roma youth who have and do not have health insurance. Based on these results, Albania and Moldova have the highest rates of uninsured Roma youth (76 per cent and 73 per cent, respectively), followed by Romania and Bulgaria (66 per cent and 56 per cent, respectively). The number of uninsured non-Roma youth is also highest in Albania (55 per cent) followed

by Moldova (38 per cent), Bulgaria (26 per cent) and Romania (25 per cent). Although the countries with low rates of youth with health insurance is the same across both groups, young Roma are two to three times more likely not to have health insurance compared to non-Roma youth. Therefore, further study of the health systems in these countries is needed, particularly in terms of the access to health insurance for young Roma.

Figure 16a: Health insurance among Roma/non-Roma youth by country (%)

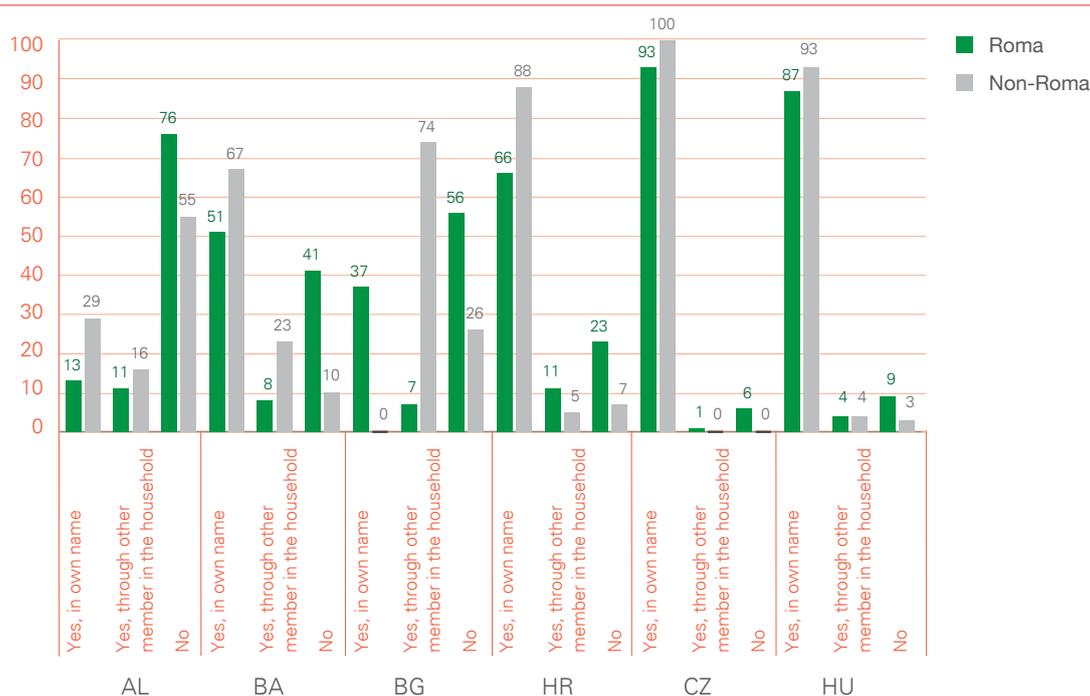


Figure 16a. Country distribution of health insurance among Roma and non-Roma youth in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic and Hungary.

40 The original question was phrased thus: “Do you have any medical insurance under your own name or through another member of your household?” The available answers to this question were: 1) Yes, in own name; 2) Yes through another member of my household; and 3) No. The total number of valid answers to this question was 3,829.

Figure 16b: Health insurance among Roma/non-Roma youth by country (%)

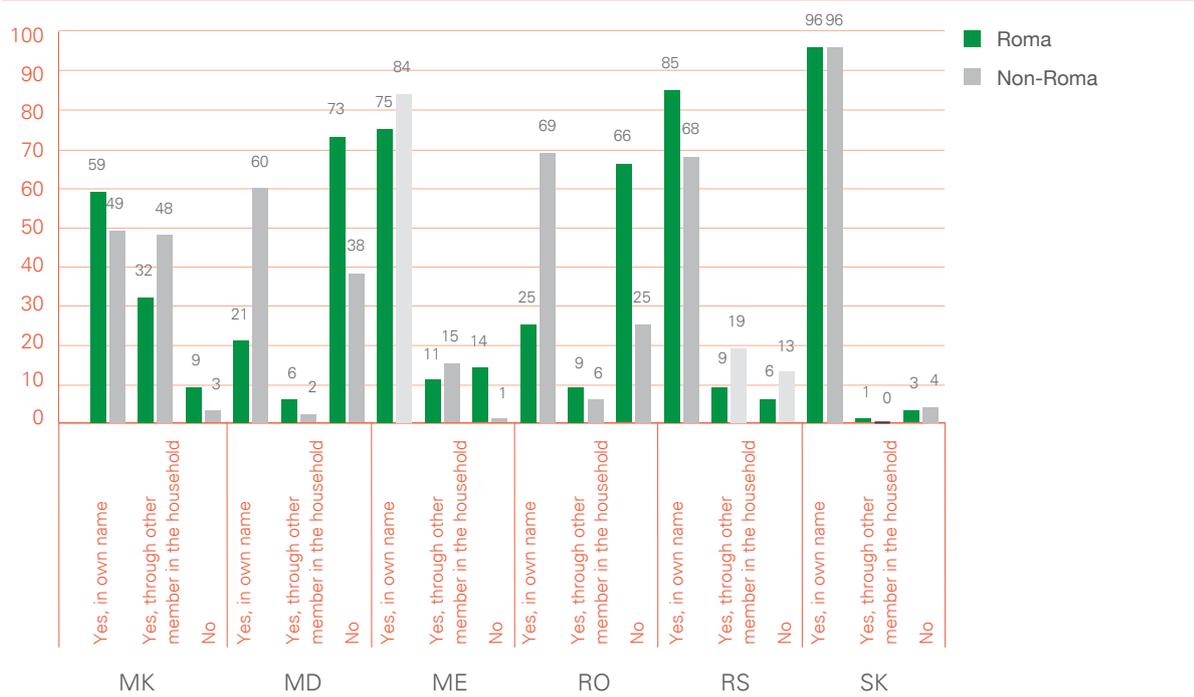


Figure 16b. Country distribution of health insurance among Roma and non-Roma youth in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia.

As mentioned earlier, the health of women, including Roma women, often receives special attention, particularly with reference to their reproductive health. The UNDP/WB/EC survey asked young female participants if they have ever visited a gynaecologist.⁴¹ Figure 17 shows the country distribution of young Roma and non-Roma women who have visited a gynaecologist. As shown, the results vary between countries. In Albania, the rates of both young Roma and non-Roma women who have visited a gynaecologist is lower than in other countries (50 per cent and 56 per cent, respectively). In some countries, such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the rate of Roma

women who have visited a gynaecologist is high (97 per cent and 92 per cent, respectively) and also similar to that of non-Roma. In other countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, the rate of Roma women who have visited a gynaecologist is even higher than that of non-Roma women. These results suggest that, in general, efforts to raise awareness about the importance of reproductive health among Roma women have had a positive impact. However, these results do not provide detailed information on how often women visit gynaecologists throughout the year and whether the visits to which the data refer are due to pregnancy or for a regular check-up.

41 The original question was phrased thus: “If a woman – have you ever visited a gynaecologist?” The available answers were “yes” and “no”. The total number of valid answers to this question was 2,213.

Figure 17: Young Roma/non-Roma women who visited a gynecologist (%)

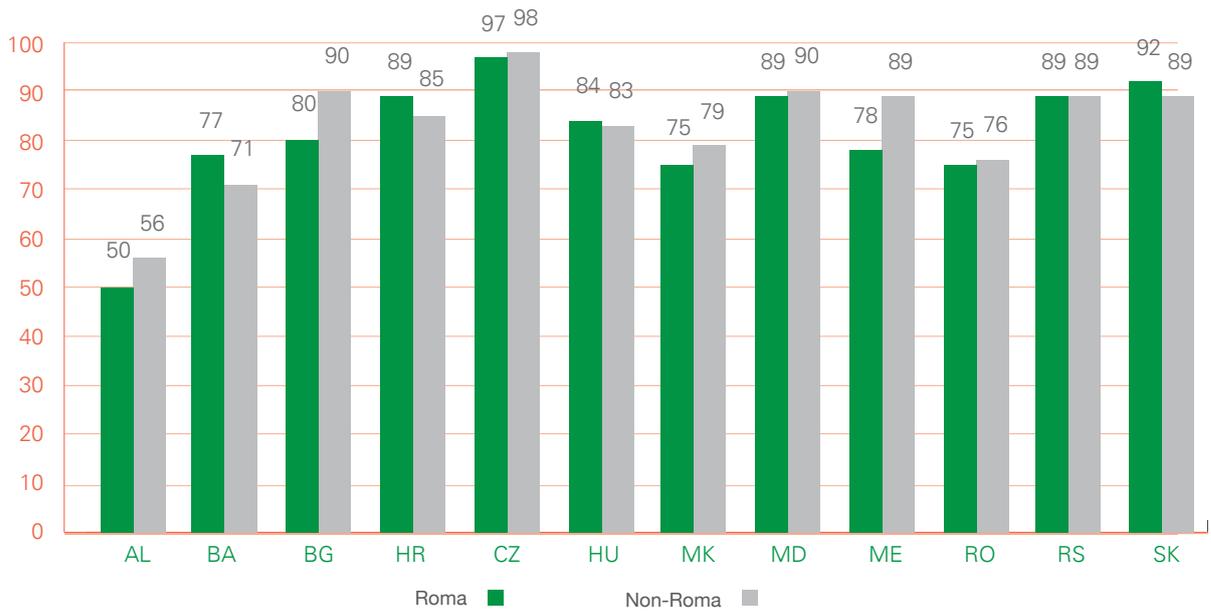


Figure 17. Country distribution of young Roma and non-Roma women who have visited a gynaecologist.

Marital status and early marriages

One of the characteristics that may set Roma youth apart from non-Roma youth is their marital status and, more specifically, the percentage of early marriages among Roma. The current marital status of participants was analysed using one indicator from Module 1 of the survey on the marital status of all household members.⁴² Figure 18 provides the distri-

bution of marital status across the entire sample of Roma and non-Roma participants. Most of the Roma youth in this sample were currently either married (traditionally or officially) or cohabitating with a partner (58 per cent in total), whereas most of their non-Roma counterparts had never been married (59 per cent).

42 This “Marital status” indicator consisted of seven categories: (1) never married; (2) married – traditionally; (3) married – officially; (4) cohabitation; (5) separated; (6) divorced; and (7) widowed. The indicator does not provide sufficient information on the meaning of “married - traditionally” and how it differs from “married - officially” or “cohabitation”.

Figure 18: Marital status of Roma/non-Roma youth (%)

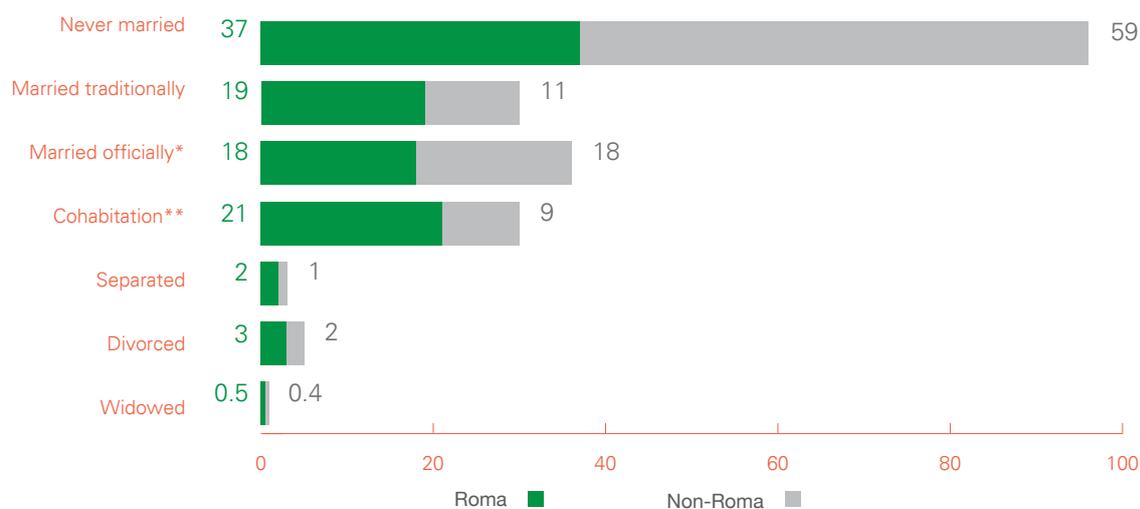


Figure 18. Sample distribution for categories of marital status among Roma and non-Roma youth.

*Married refers to official marriages in a church or municipality office.

**Cohabitation refers to living together with a partner.

Early marriages are often perceived as a tradition in Roma culture. However, studies have shown that early marriages occur in all cultures and are an interdisciplinary problem related to education, social environment, health, patriarchal traditions, poverty, participation in public life and personal development.⁴³ As mentioned in the introduction, the UNDP/WB/EC survey oversampled Roma living in conditions of social exclusion. This increases the likelihood that young Roma who married before the age of 18 were included in the sample. Although the minimum legal age for marriage varies across the countries surveyed,⁴⁴ the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recommend that governments set the minimum legal age for marriage to 18.⁴⁵ According to this standard, the results that follow consider all marriages between people below the age of 18 as early marriages.

43 “Preventing Early Marriages”, Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance, 2011, p. 16, <<http://www.amalipe.com/files/publications/ranni%20brakove%20last.pdf>>.

44 The minimum legal age for marriage is 16 in four of the countries surveyed. The remaining eight countries have set 18 as the minimum legal age for marriage.

45 “Protecting the girl child: Using the law to end child, early and forced marriage and related human rights violations”, Equality Now, January 2014, <http://www.equalitynow.org/sites/default/files/Protecting_the_Girl_Child.pdf>.

In order to measure the number of early marriages among Roma and non-Roma youth, we took responses to the question “Which year did s/he get married/begin cohabiting?” from Module 1 of the UNDP/WB/EC survey and compared these to the year of birth of respondents. Based on the results, out of 6,166 marriages, 2,166 were early marriages. The total number of early marriages among Roma youth was 1,971, compared with 194 among non-Roma youth. The earliest age of marriage or cohabitation with a partner registered among Roma youth was 6 years old, compared to 8 years old among non-Roma youth. Most of the respondents who were married before the age of 18 were female, including 1,412 Roma and 160 non-Roma girls. The number of early marriages varied across the countries surveyed, ranging from 54 in the Czech Republic and 270 in Albania, revealing that early marriages are more common in some countries in Central and South-Eastern Europe than in others. These results show that early marriages are far more likely to occur among Roma populations than among non-Roma populations, particularly among Roma girls, and that early marriages continue to be an issue in the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe. Table 4 shows the number of early marriages among Roma and non-Roma youth disaggregated by the age at which the respondent was married or began cohabiting with a partner.

Table 4: Number of early marriages among Roma/non-Roma by age (N)

	Age of marriage or cohabitation											
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Roma	1	4	7	13	33	33	56	121	215	350	533	605
Non-Roma			3	3	4	6	3	9	8	31	59	68

Table 4. Sample distribution of the number of early marriages (before the age of 18) among Roma and non-Roma youth by age of marriage/cohabitation.

Arranged marriages

In the previous section, we showed that about one third of young Roma respondents to the survey were married before the age of 18, and that more than 70 per cent of them were girls. Early marriages (official and unofficial) often happen as a result of pressure from family members, especially if an opportunity rises for the child to marry someone living abroad. As such, the marriage becomes an arrangement between two families rather than a choice between two people. Although not all arranged marriages are early marriages, the UNDP/WB/EC survey studied attitudes specifically towards arranged marriages for children. Thus, we decided to examine perceptions among Roma and non-Roma youth of arranged marriages for boys, on the one hand, and for girls, on the other.⁴⁶

Figure 19 provides the gender distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth who expressed the opinion that arranged marriages for boys and for girls are unacceptable. The results show that the majority of Roma and non-Roma youth do not agree with the practice of arranged marriages for children. Nevertheless, the difference between Roma and non-Roma respondents who think arranged marriages are not acceptable is more than 20 per cent, with more Roma youth finding the practice acceptable. It is recommended that future research examine the issue of arranged marriages among Roma from a gender perspective, as well as in relation to economic prosperity and education.

⁴⁶ For this purpose, we applied an indicator from Module 4 of the survey that asked respondents how acceptable it is for “Parents to arrange the marriage of their boy child” and how acceptable it is for “Parents to arrange the marriage of their girl child”. These statements were measured on a three-point scale: 1) fully acceptable; 2) somewhat acceptable; and 3) not acceptable. The question on arranged marriages for boys was answered in total by 3,678 participants and the question on arranged marriages for girls was answered in total by 3,674 participants.

Figure 19: Perceptions among Roma/non-Roma youth of arranged marriages as unacceptable (%)

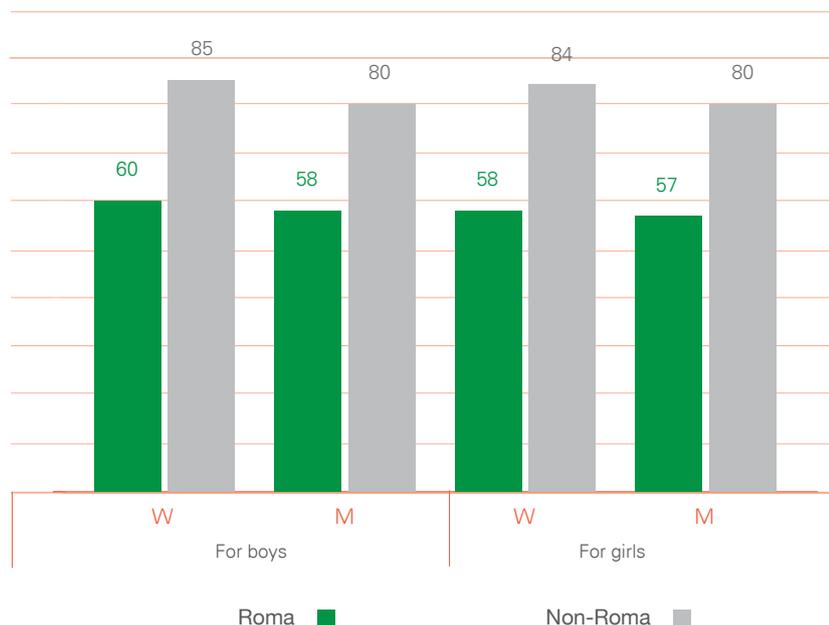


Figure 19. Sample distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth who perceive arranged marriages for boys and girls as unacceptable, disaggregated by gender (W – women; M – men).

Domestic abuse

Another set of questions included in the survey assessed perceptions among Roma and non-Roma youth regarding domestic abuse. To this end, respondents were asked how acceptable they find it “for a man to slap his wife”, on the one hand, and “for a woman to slap her husband”, on the other.⁴⁷ Figure 20 shows the sample distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth who answered that it is unacceptable to engage in such abuse. The results are disaggregated per gender.

No major difference were found between Roma and non-Roma youth, including between female and male respondents, regarding the scenario where the wife abuses the husband. It appears that all groups find such abuse unacceptable (between 81 and 84 per cent). Young non-Roma men and women also agree

that domestic abuse where the husband is abusing the wife is unacceptable. However, there is a difference in how Roma men and women perceive domestic abuse towards women. Roma men scored lower than Roma women (and non-Roma men and women for that matter) in perceiving this type of abuse as unacceptable. What is perhaps even more surprising is that Roma women scored lower on negative perceptions of domestic abuse towards women compared to perceptions of domestic abuse towards men. The question that arises is why Roma women appear to be more accepting of domestic violence towards themselves and other women than they are of domestic violence towards men? The patriarchal attitudes prevalent in some sectors of Roma society may provide some explanation for these results.

⁴⁷ A total of 3,774 respondents provided a response to both statements.

Figure 20: Perceptions among Roma/non-Roma youth of domestic abuse (%)

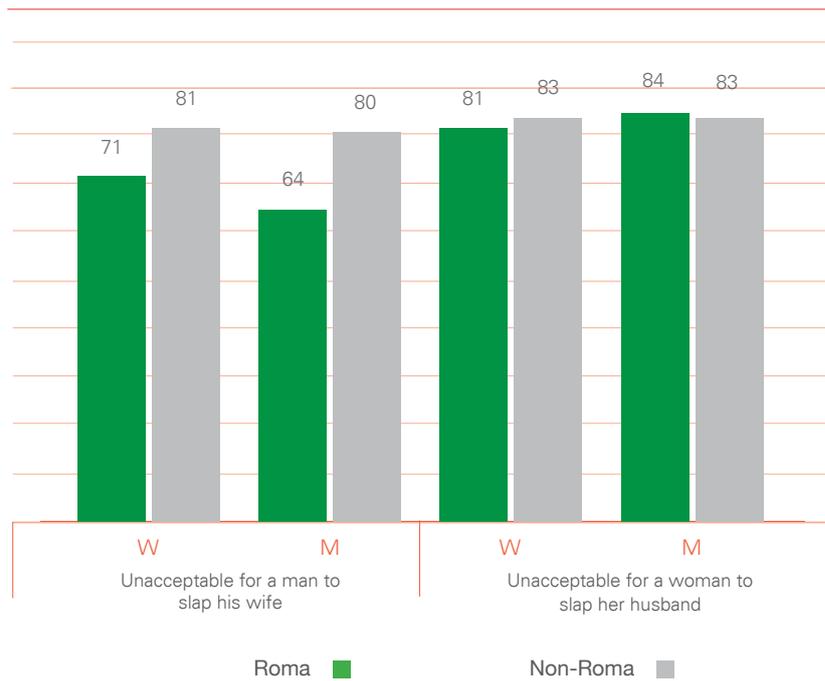


Figure 20. Sample distribution of Roma and non-Roma who perceive domestic abuse as unacceptable, disaggregated by gender.

Institutional support

In order to improve the social inclusion of Roma in Central and South-Eastern Europe, it is important that state institutions devote resources towards and become involved in this effort. Institutional support is vital for the empowerment of Roma and, in particular, young Roma. Therefore, we set out to understand how Roma youth perceive the role of institutions tasked with improving their lives, as well as which institutions young Roma think should be more involved. In particular, we assessed their perceptions of the work of the police, the central government, the local government, political parties and the parliament in strengthening Roma inclusion.⁴⁸ Figure 21 shows

that most Roma youth think that the local government should become more involved in such efforts (22 per cent), followed by the central government (17 per cent) and the parliament (7 per cent). These results demonstrate that Roma youth rely on local government more than on other institutions to help them improve their lives. This may also indicate higher levels of trust in local government than in any other institution in their countries. Future research should try to assess levels of trust in these institutions among Roma in order to provide a more complete picture of how Roma youth view institutional support.

⁴⁸ For this purpose, we used a question from the 2011 Regional Roma Survey that asked the following: “Please name three institutions that you think should be more involved in helping people like you have a better life?” The total number of responses to this question was 6,042, which means that, on average, around 2,000 Roma youth respondents answered this question.

Figure 21: Perceptions of institutional support among Roma youth (%)

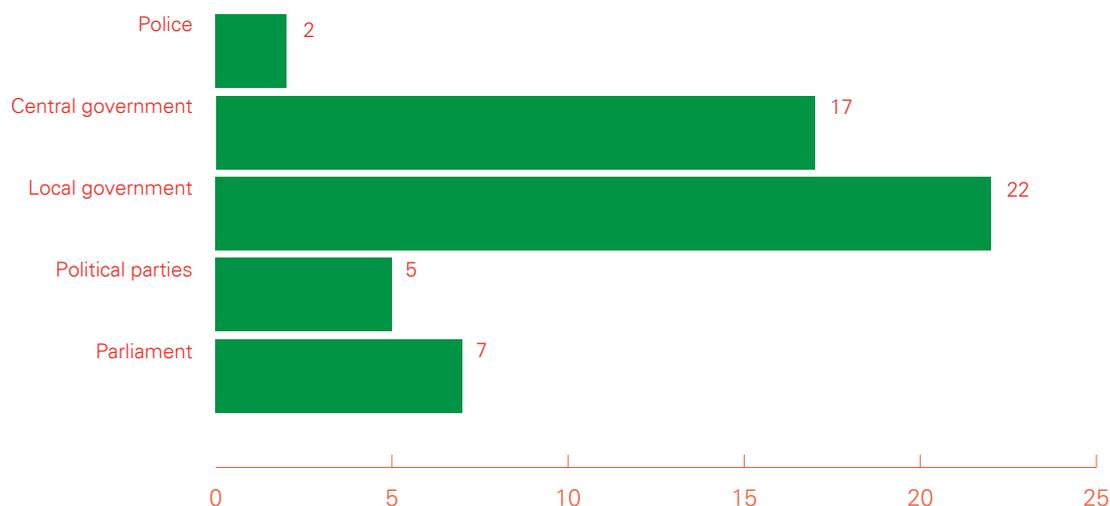


Figure 21. Perceptions of Roma youth concerning the involvement of specific institutions in improving their standard of life.

Social inclusion

In order for Roma to enjoy opportunities to participate in their societies on an equal basis with non-Roma groups, it is important that they are empowered in specific ways. The UNDP/WB/EC survey asked participants to provide their opinions on a set of statements that explore the role of social and political participation in social equality.⁴⁹ For the purpose of this paper, we studied the responses to 10 out of 13 of these statements.

Figure 22 provides mean values for the responses given by Roma and non-Roma youth on the importance of each situation for achieving social equality

with the majority population. The results suggest that Roma youth place a higher value and attach greater importance on each of these statements than do their non-Roma counterparts. For example, having a government minister from the Roma community is more important for Roma youth ($M = 2.24$) than for non-Roma youth ($M = 1.66$). In fact, for non-Roma youth, the mean values of the statements relating to Roma political participation (statements 1 and 2) are well below the mid-point value of 2 (important). These results are quite important as they demonstrate differences in perceptions among Roma and non-Roma regarding the importance of empowering Roma. In order for Roma to enjoy an equal status in society, both sides should have similarly positive attitudes to this question.

⁴⁹ The question was phrased thus: "Below is a list of situations that reflect the degree to which different groups are included and participate in society. Please tell us how important you think each of these situations are for ensuring that Roma enjoy an equal status in society?" The statements used in the analysis were as follows: 1) Having a government minister from a Roma community; 2) Having a Roma mayor or deputy mayor in a municipality where many Roma live; 3) A high number of Roma completing university education; 4) Roma serving as policemen; 5) Roma working as doctors; 6) Roma working as teachers; 7) Roma working in public administration; 8) That all Roma children are given at least basic schooling; 9) That Roma have the same average income as the majority population; and 10) That Roma live in neighbourhoods where the majority population also live. Respondents were asked to answer how important each these statements is to achieve social equality for Roma according to a three-point scale (1 – not important; 2 – important; and 3 – very important). On average, a total of 3,700 responses were collected for each statement.

Figure 22: Importance of social inclusion statements among Roma/non-Roma youth (M)

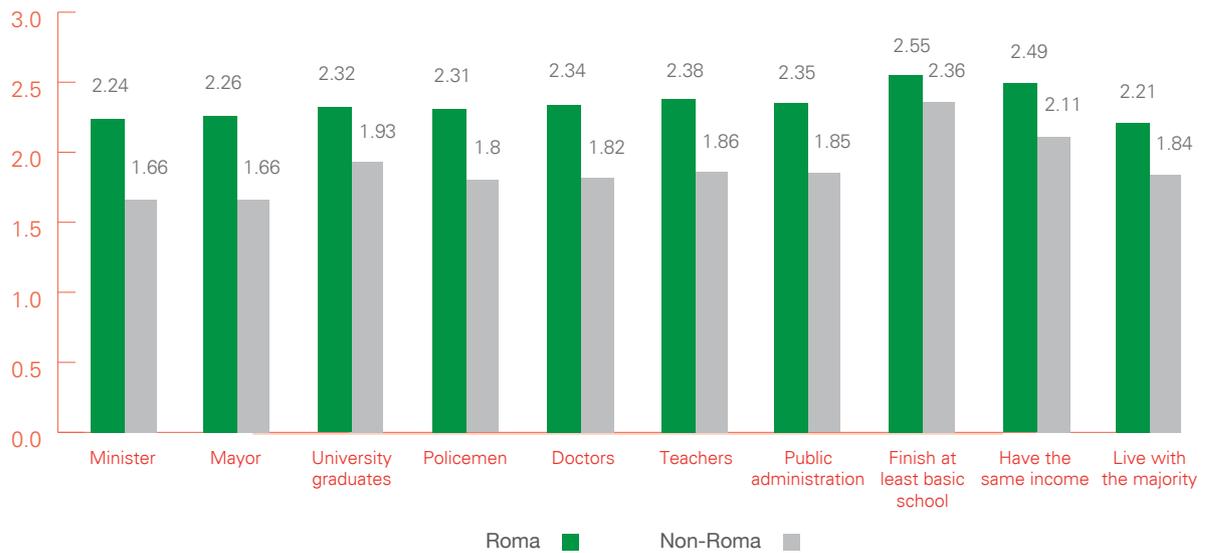


Figure 22. Mean values (M) of the importance of statements related to the social inclusion of Roma among Roma and non-Roma.

Preferential treatment

Many countries in Central and South-Eastern Europe, in particular those with significant ethnic minority populations, implement policies that provide easier access to education and employment for members of minority groups. This is known as preferential treatment. One example of preferential treatment would be to create a quota of the number of places reserved for students from an ethnic minority at a public university. Perceptions of preferential treatment may vary among members of ethnic minority and majority groups. Since Roma are often the beneficiaries of preferential treatment policies, it is useful to examine how Roma and non-Roma youth perceive specific instances of preferential treatment.^{50 51}

Figure 23 provides the sample distribution of responses from Roma and non-Roma youth to state-

ments on preferential treatment (see description below Figure 23). The general trend is that most Roma and non-Roma youth respondents found preferential treatment in all five situations to be acceptable. Furthermore, in most cases, similar proportions of Roma and non-Roma youth find preferential treatment acceptable. The main discrepancy concerned statement D on admitting students from disadvantaged groups to secondary schools and universities without requiring that they sit an entrance exam. Thus, 84 per cent of Roma respondents and 65 per cent of non-Roma respondents found this type of preferential treatment acceptable. One possible reason for this finding is that the respondents would prefer admittance to secondary schools and universities to be based on merit.

50 It is important to keep in mind that the situations provided in the survey referred to disadvantaged populations in general and did not refer specifically for Roma. However, one might argue that the respondents are primed to relate these situations to Roma since the questionnaire concerns Roma.

51 The UNDP/WB/EC survey asked participants to rate how acceptable they find the five situations of preferential treatment. The original question was phrased thus: "How acceptable do you find preferential treatment in the following situations?" The question was answered on a two-point scale with "acceptable" and "unacceptable". On average, between 3,500 and 3,600 respondents provided a response to each statement.

Figure 23: Attitudes towards preferential treatment among Roma/non-Roma youth (%)

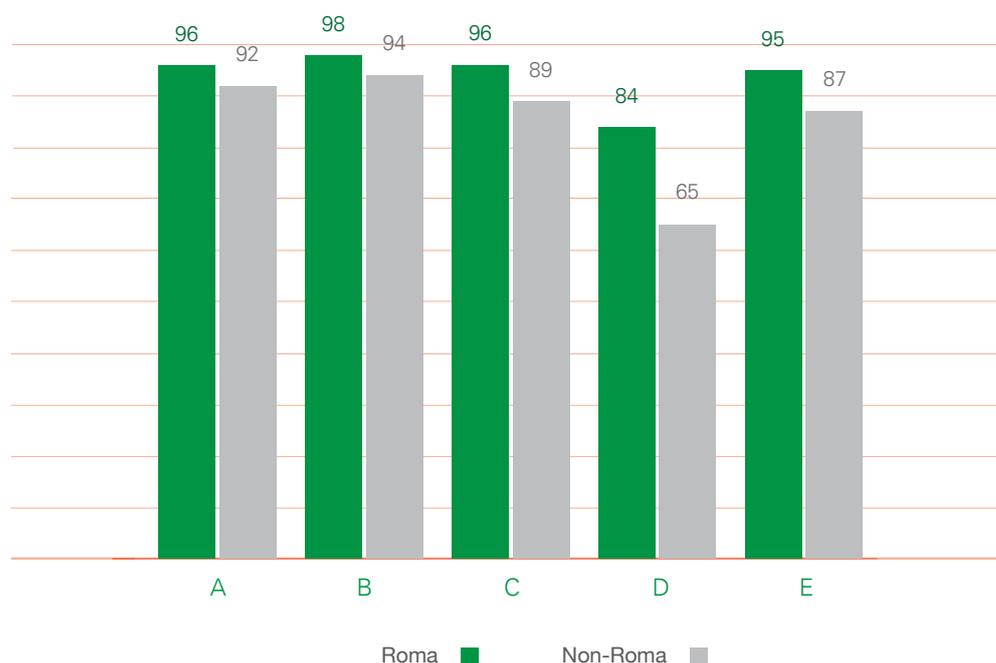


Figure 23. Sample distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth who perceive specific situations of preferential treatment to be “acceptable”. The five statements that respondents were asked to assess as “acceptable” or “unacceptable” are as follows: A) Providing additional support to school children who do not have sufficient command of the language of instruction; B) Providing scholarships to pupils and students from poor families; C) Subsidizing companies that employ persons from disadvantaged groups; D) Permitting students from disadvantaged groups to be admitted to secondary school or university without sitting an entrance exam; and E) Employing a certain number or percentage of people from disadvantaged groups in the public sector.

Life satisfaction

The countries included in the survey vary in terms of their standards of living. Moreover, the member states of the EU, including the Czech Republic and Hungary, are usually assessed as having higher standards of living compared to the other countries included the sample. The subject of living standards is especially relevant to Roma, and in particular Roma youth, since their experiences of discrimination may create obstacles in accessing education and finding work. As a result, the life satisfaction of Roma and non-Roma youth may be expected to differ.⁵²

Figure 24 provides the country distribution of mean values of life satisfaction among Roma and non-Roma youth. The results show that in all countries surveyed Roma youth have lower life satisfaction than their non-Roma counterparts. The three lowest mean values for life satisfaction among Roma youth were observed in Albania (4.07), Bulgaria (4.87) and Serbia (5). In comparison, the mean value for life satisfaction among non-Roma youth in these three countries was higher by at least one full point than that observed among Roma youth. Overall, these results point to significant differences in life satisfaction among Roma and non-Roma youth at the country level.

52 For this purpose, we used an indicator from the UNDP/WB/EC survey that measured the level of life satisfaction of the participants on a ten-point scale. The original question was phrased thus: “All things considered, how satisfied are you currently with your life as a whole? Please use rate your life satisfaction on a scale from 1-10, where 1 means completely dissatisfied, and 10 means completely satisfied.” There were a total of 3,828 valid responses to this question.

Figure 24: Mean values of life satisfaction among Roma/non-Roma youth by country (M)

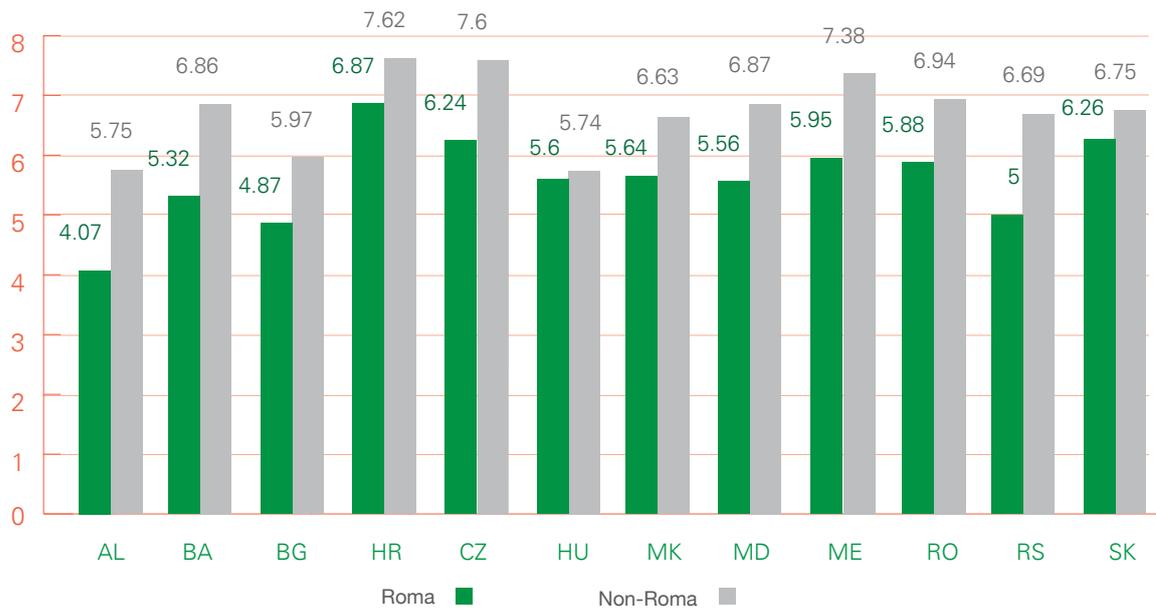


Figure 24. Country distribution of mean values of life satisfaction among Roma and non-Roma youth. Life satisfaction was measured on a ten-point scale, from 1 – completely dissatisfied, to 10 – completely satisfied.

Improvement of personal situation

The previous section looked at the level of life satisfaction among Roma and non-Roma youth. This section will focus on ways in which their personal situation can be improved.⁵³

Figure 25 provides the sample distribution of responses from Roma and non-Roma youth to ten possible conditions that they think would improve their situation. The three most frequently selected conditions among Roma youth were financial support from state institutions (18 per cent), employment in industry (17 per cent) and employment in services or trade (17 per cent). The three most frequently selected conditions among non-Roma youth were employment in services or trade (17 per cent), going abroad

to work (16 per cent) and employment in industry (15 per cent). Considering recent discussions regarding the propensity of Roma to migrate to Western Europe and the UK to find work, it is interesting to note that “going abroad to work” does not feature in the three most frequently selected responses among Roma youth.

53 The UNDP/WB/EC asked participants to select a total of three ways in which their personal situation could be improved. The original multiple-choice question was phrased as: “Which of the following, do you think, would improve your personal situation?” The available choices were: 1) Being employed in agriculture; 2) Being employed in industry; 3) Being employed in services or trade; 4) Increasing my level of education; 5) Receiving financial support from state institutions; 6) Receiving financial support from international organizations; 7) Receiving financial support from relatives abroad; 8) Going abroad to work; 9) Going abroad to study; and 10) I am satisfied with my personal situation: it does not need to be improved. The overall number of options selected was 7,155, out of which 5,459 were made by Roma youth respondents and 1,663 were made by non-Roma youth respondents.

Figure 25: Ways of improving one's personal situation (%)

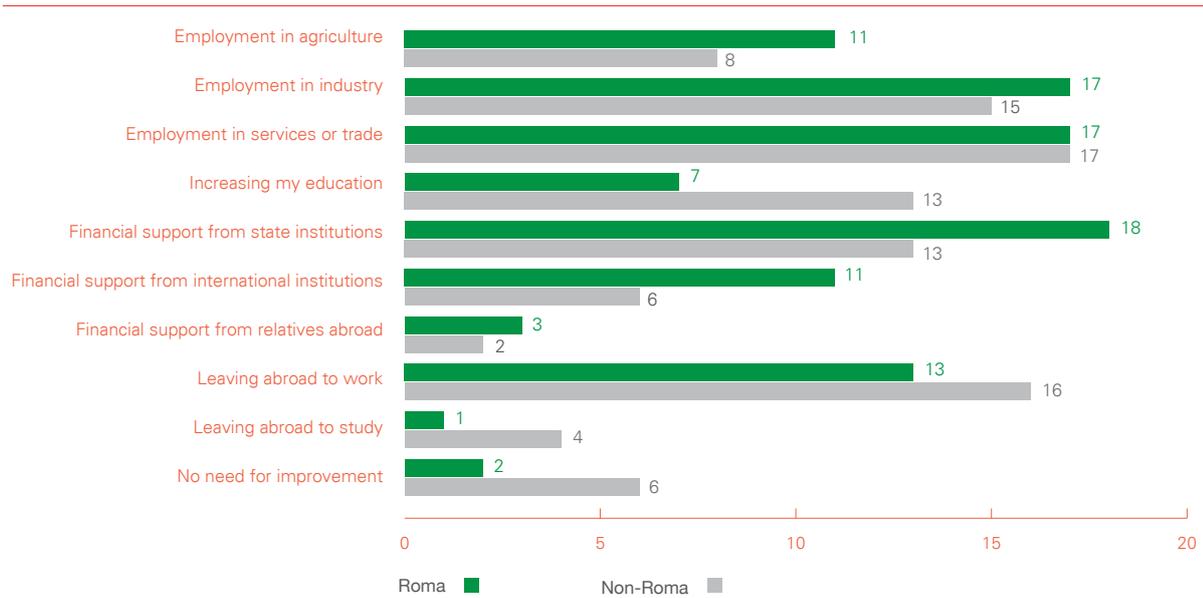


Figure 25. Sample distribution of conditions that Roma/non-Roma youth respondents believed would improve their personal situation.

Perceived discrimination

Discrimination against Roma has been a topic of much discussion in Central and South-Eastern Europe, with instances of discrimination against Roma often mentioned in the media. Indeed, discrimination against Roma in the region is one of the key factors explaining their marginalization. Although most discrimination happens on ethnic grounds, Roma may also experience discrimination on the basis of their gender and age. Therefore, it is important to assess the levels of discrimination experienced among Roma and non-Roma youth. The 2011 Regional Roma Survey included a number of questions related to discrimination.⁵⁴

Figure 26 shows the sample distribution of participants who responded that they have been discriminated against in the past 12 months on the basis of their ethnicity, gender and age, disaggregated by gender. Among those young Roma who said they had experienced discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, 36 per

cent were Roma women and 35 per cent were Roma men – three times the rate observed among young non-Roma women and men (10 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively). Furthermore, among those who said they had experienced discrimination on the basis of gender, 10 per cent were Roma women. Indeed, Roma women were more likely to have perceived discrimination than any other group (including both Roma and non-Roma men, and non-Roma women). The responses to the question on discrimination on the basis of age were similar across all groups, however. These results suggest that at least one third of Roma youth have experienced discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity, with fewer experiencing discrimination on other grounds.

⁵⁴ One of the questions that respondents were asked is whether they have felt discriminated against in the past 12 months on the basis of their ethnicity, gender and age. The original question was phrased thus: “In the past 12 months (or since you have been in the country) have you personally felt discriminated against in [country] on the basis of one or more of the following grounds? Please mark all that apply.” The two possible answers were “yes” or “no”. On average, around 3,700 Roma and non-Roma youth participants answered this question.

Figure 26: Perceived discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, gender, and age among Roma/non-Roma youth (%)

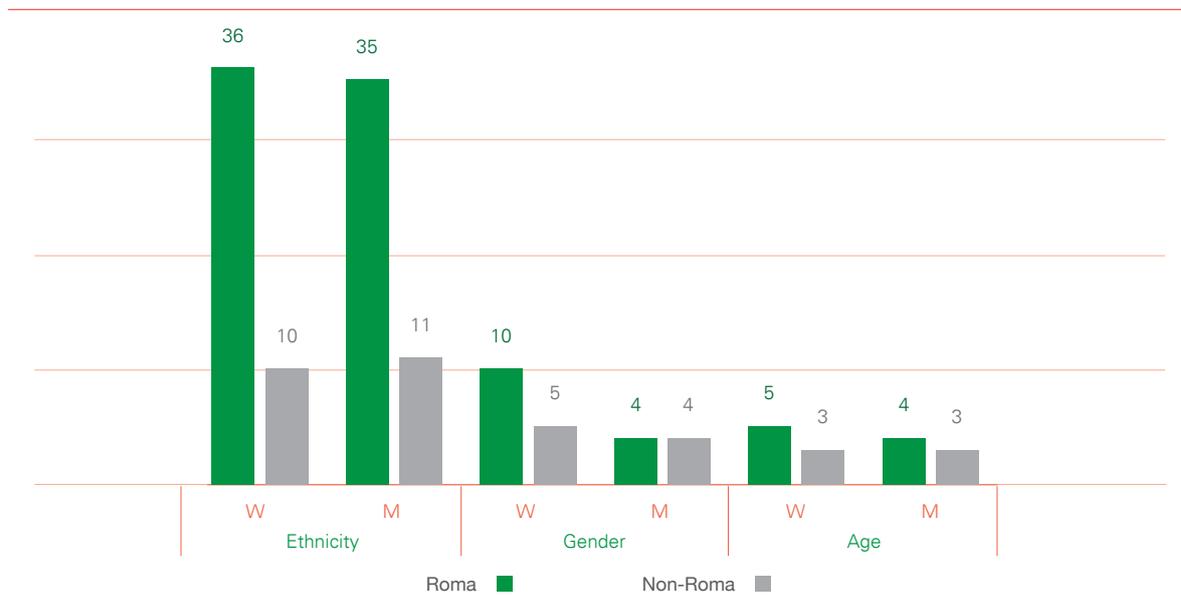


Figure 26. Sample distribution of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, gender and age perceived among Roma and non-Roma women (W) and men (M).

To find out the situations in which Roma youth experience discrimination based on their ethnicity, we studied responses to other questions on discrimination included in the survey. One question in particular asked respondents to indicate whether they had been engaged in the following activities in the past five years: 1) looking for a job; 2) having a job; 3) looking to buy or rent a place to live; 4) being a patient in a private or public health facility; and 5) having contact with an educational institution as a parent or a student.⁵⁵

Figure 27 shows the sample distribution of responses to the question from Roma and non-Roma youth, disaggregated by gender. The results reveal some interesting variations in the activities in which Roma and non-Roma youth have been engaged. For example, more Roma men have looked for a job in the past five years (65 per cent) than any other group surveyed, while only 18 per cent of Roma women have had a job in the same period. Considering the low employment rate among Roma women, it might be assumed that they would be more likely to look for a job.

⁵⁵ The original question posed was “In the past 5 years in [country], have you been engaged in the following activities...?”, followed by a list of five activities. Around 3,700 Roma and non-Roma youth answered this question.

Figure 27: Activities undertaken in the last 5 years by Roma/non-Roma youth (%)

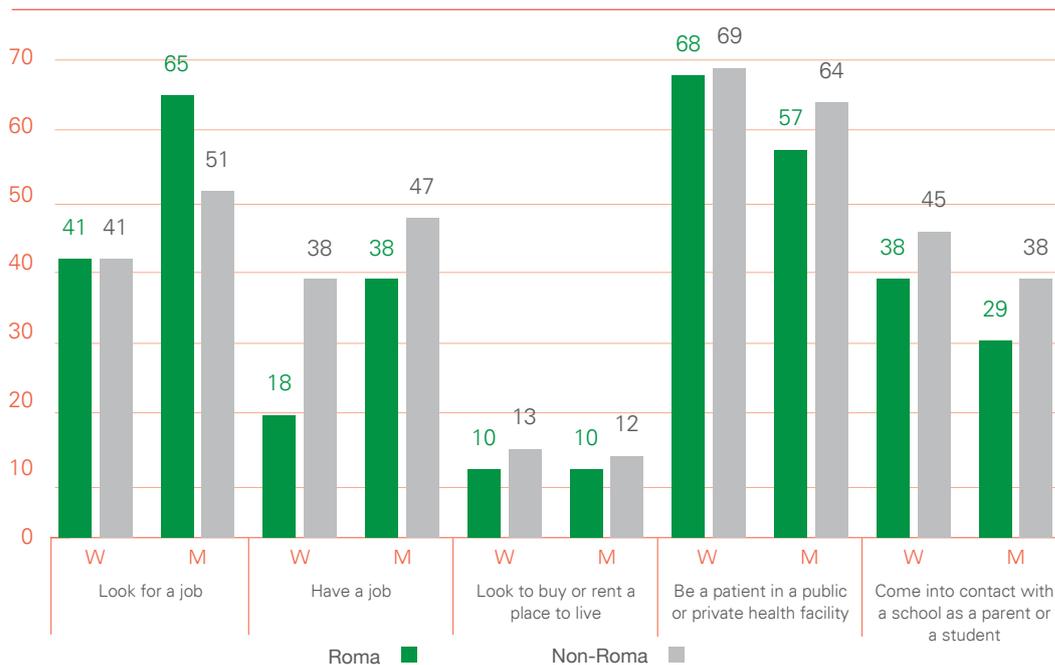


Figure 27. Sample distribution of responses from among Roma and non-Roma youth on the activities in which they have been engaged in the past five years.

The next question in the UNDP/WB/EC survey asked participants if they had been discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity while performing each of these activities.⁵⁶

Figure 28 shows the percentage of youth who responded to this question in the affirmative for each activity, disaggregated by gender. In addition, Figure 28 also provides the percentage of cases of discrimination against Roma that happened in the last 12 months,⁵⁷ as well as the percentage of reported cases of discrimination.⁵⁸

The results show that the highest proportion of cases of ethnic discrimination occur while young Roma men and women are looking for work (40 and 45 per cent, respectively). However, once on the job, the cases of perceived ethnic discrimination decrease by 50 per cent in the case of both genders. As such, Roma women were more likely to have experienced discrimination on the basis of ethnicity than Roma men. We can also conclude that cases of discrimination were equally likely to occur in the last 12 months as they were to occur at an earlier date.

What is more worrying, however, is the rate at which Roma youth report cases of discrimination. For example, of those who perceived ethnic discrimination while looking for a job, only 12 per cent of Roma women and 14 per cent of Roma men reported the incident to the authorities. In most cases, Roma women tend to be less likely to report cases of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity than Roma men, although Roma men also consistently under-report incidents of discrimination against them. Thus, we can conclude that although Roma can identify discrimination, they do not report it to the authorities (see Figure 28).

56 The question on discrimination on the basis of ethnicity was only posed to participants who said that they had been engaged in a particular activity. The percentage of people engaged in each activity is provided in Figure 27. The original question included in the survey was: “During the last five years, have you been discriminated against on the basis of your ethnicity when performing a given activity?” The respondents could answer this question with either “yes” or “no”.

57 The original question on when the respondent had experienced discrimination was: “Thinking about the last time you experienced discrimination, did this happen in the last twelve months or before then?” As the question suggests, the two possible answers to this question were “in the last twelve months” or “before then”.

58 The original question on whether cases of discrimination had been reported was: “Regarding the last time you were discriminated against: did you or anyone else report this incident anywhere?” The possible answers to the question were “yes” or “no”.

Figure 28: Perceived ethnic discrimination in the 12 months among Roma in each domain, including reported cases (%)

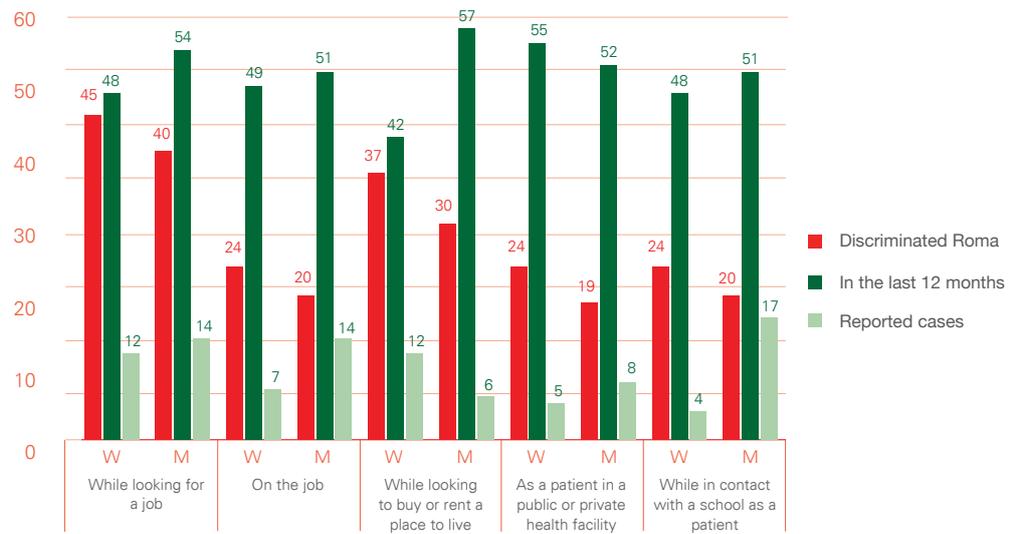


Figure 28. Distribution of Roma youth who have experienced ethnic discrimination in each of the five activities listed; distribution of the cases of discrimination that have happened in the last 12 months; and distribution of percentages of cases of discrimination reported by respondents while engaging in an activity. All distributions are disaggregated by gender.

Following on from the results shown in Figure 28 and, in particular, the low rates at which Roma youth report discrimination, we determined to find out the percentages of Roma and non-Roma youth who are aware of anti-discrimination laws in their countries.⁵⁹ Figure 29 provides information on the country distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth who are aware of anti-discrimination laws in their country prohibiting discrimination on the basis of ethnicity when selecting candidates for a job. In most countries included in the survey, Roma youth are less aware of

discrimination laws in their countries than their non-Roma counterparts. In Albania, only 28 per cent of Roma youth surveyed are aware of such laws. Meanwhile, Roma youth in the Czech Republic had the highest rate of awareness about the existence of anti-discrimination laws (75 per cent). This information may shed light on the reasons behind the under-reporting of discrimination among Roma youth.

⁵⁹ The original question in the survey was: “Is there a law in [country] that forbids discrimination on the basis of ethnicity when selecting candidates for a job?” The possible answers to this question were “yes” or “no”. This question was answered by a total of 3,018 Roma and non-Roma youth respondents.

Figure 29: Knowledge of anti-discrimination laws among Roma/non-Roma youth (%)



Figure 29. Country distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth who know of anti-discrimination laws in their country prohibiting discrimination on the basis of ethnicity when selecting candidates for a job.

Besides awareness of anti-discrimination laws, it is also important to be familiar with organizations and institutions that deal with cases of discrimination. Following the question on anti-discrimination laws, the UNDP/WB/EC survey also asked participants if they know of any organization in their country that provides support or advice to people who have been discriminated against.⁶⁰ Figure 30 presents the country distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth who are aware of such organizations. The results showed that awareness of such organizations was low across all countries in Central and South-Eastern Europe and, in particular, among Roma youth. The lowest

awareness rates among both Roma and non-Roma youth were observed in Romania (10 per cent and 12 per cent, respectively). According to the survey results, Roma youth in Croatia and non-Roma youth in Bulgaria are most likely to know of organizations that deal with cases of discrimination (36 per cent and 44 per cent, respectively). These results suggest that there is a need to educate young people in Central and South-Eastern Europe about anti-discrimination laws in their countries, as well as about the ways in which they can receive support and advice on how to deal with instances in which they feel discriminated against.

⁶⁰ The original survey question was: “Do you know of any organization in [country] that can offer support or advice to people who have been discriminated against?” The possible answers to this question were “yes” or “no”. A total of 3,101 Roma and non-Roma youth responded to this question.

Figure 30: Knowledge among Roma/non-Roma youth of organizations that deal with cases of discrimination (%)



Figure 30. Country distribution of Roma and non-Roma youth who know of an organization in their country that can offer support or advice to people who have been discriminated against.

Conclusions and recommendations

The position of Roma youth in relation to non-Roma youth in Central and South-Eastern Europe is an important indicator of the progress and positive impact of numerous national and international projects designed to empower Roma communities in the region. Studying the present position of Roma youth also provides insight into how current generations of Roma youth will be able to contribute to their own community and wider society in the future. As such, the results from the 2011 Regional Roma Survey presented in this paper identify the aspects of life among Roma youth that still need improvement.

The 2011 Regional Roma Survey was conducted in 12 countries in Central and South-Eastern Europe among Roma and non-Roma populations living in close proximity to one another. The findings from among Roma youth show that they are considerably worse off compared to their non-Roma counterparts in terms of their socio-economic status. Thus, Roma are less likely to possess personal documents, in particular passports, restricting their ability to exercise the full range of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Moreover, literacy rates among young Roma are lower than among non-Roma youth, particularly among young Roma women, while the education-

al achievements of Roma youth lag behind those of non-Roma youth. Furthermore, different perceptions among Roma and non-Roma youth on what constitutes sufficient levels of education for boys and girls reflects the limited expectations of Roma youth, posing an additional hurdle in advancing their socio-economic status.

In terms of occupational status, Roma youth are twice as likely to be unemployed compared to non-Roma youth. Among those in some form of employment, only one third are permanently employed – a fact that further influences the rate at which they benefit from social contributions, including health insurance. The data also reveal that early marriages are still common among Roma youth, particularly among young Roma women and girls, while Roma youth have lower levels of life satisfaction compared to non-Roma youth. In terms of solutions to these issues, the survey results suggest that Roma youth believe that state institutions should do more to help them financially. Finally, although Roma youth continue to perceive ethnic discrimination, awareness about anti-discrimination laws in their countries is low, while young Roma are even less aware of organizations that deal with cases of discrimination.

These findings reveal that Roma youth face challenges in many areas of life and would benefit from

the increased attention of national and international organizations. Those organizations already involved in improving the social position of Roma should assess their programmes and accommodate them to the needs of the most deprived Roma communities. Many of the issues discussed in this paper are interrelated, meaning that improvements in one area could result in improvements in another area. For example, increasing literacy rates and educational achievements among Roma would enable them to improve their employment status and, thus, benefit from social contributions, and so on. As discussed in the introduction, Roma with higher rates of social inclusion were perhaps under-represented in the UNDP/WB/EC survey. Therefore, further studies might focus on collecting data from among this group of Roma, in order to understand how they fare in the aspects of life assessed in this paper. Researchers should continue to improve the sampling methodology of studies on Roma in order to collect the most reliable and representative data.

In particular, the UNDP/WB/EC survey revealed clear gender differences within Roma communities. Therefore, current and future programmes aimed at alleviating the social exclusion of Roma should devote special attention to the needs of Roma women, in addition to addressing the needs of Roma youth in general.

Empowering Young Roma: Activism, Challenges and Opportunities

Cristina Marian⁶¹

This paper was written by the author, a young Roma activist, for the Roma and Sinti Youth Conference: Activism, Participation, Security, organized by the OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues. The opinions contained herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the OSCE, ODIHR, or any participating State.

Introduction

Roma are one of the most disadvantaged minority groups in Europe. For the most part, the situation of Roma in Europe is characterized by poverty, social exclusion, discrimination, insufficient access to fundamental rights, high rates of unemployment and low levels of education.⁶² One of the most disturbing problems facing Roma in recent years has been the rise of anti-Roma sentiment and Romaphobia. As such, the increasing violence against Roma in Europe⁶³ and the rise of far-right parties and extremist and neo-Nazi

groups represent a real threat for Roma.⁶⁴ In mainstream politics, the prevalence of denigrating and intolerant discourse among public officials and politicians against Roma has increased,⁶⁵ while stereotypical portrayals of Roma in the media have created a false image of Roma, serving to deepen the prejudice and discrimination against Roma.⁶⁶ In general, Roma, and in particular Roma women, are not represented in decision-making bodies or political life, even in countries where Roma make up a significant percentage of the population. This is an alarming phenomenon considering that Europe is home to some 12 million Roma. As a result, Roma in Europe continue to be excluded from participating in the economic, social, public, political and cultural life of the countries in which they live.⁶⁷

Young Roma also fall prey to prejudices and stereotypes, and frequently encounter discrimination when exercising their rights owing to their ethnicity

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62 "Youth in Action and the Roma Community: Inclusion of Diversity", SALTO Cultural Diversity Resource Centre, p. 2, <<https://www.salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-1799/Booklet%20Youth%20in%20Action%20and%20the%20Roma%20Community.pdf>>.

63 See: Keno Verseck, "No help for Hungary's Roma murder victims", Deutsche Welle website, 21 February 2014, <<http://www.dw.de/no-help-for-hungarys-roma-murder-victims/a-17448323>>;

Dan Bilefsky and Maia de la Baume, "Beating of Roma Boy Exposes Tensions in France's Underclass", The New York Times website, 25 June 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/26/world/europe/beat-ing-of-roma-boy-exposes-tensions-in-frances-underclass.html?_r=0>; and

"Bulgarian unrest: Officials call tragedy a personal dispute, not an ethnic conflict", romea.cz, 27 September 2011, <<http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/bulgarian-unrest-officials-call-tragedy-a-personal-dispute-not-an-ethnic-conflict>>.

64 See: John Palmer, "The rise of far right parties across Europe is a chilling echo of the 1930s", The Guardian website, 15 November 2013,

<<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/15/far-right-threat-europe-integration>>; and Tatiana Vaksberg, "Political extremism on the rise in Bulgaria", Deutsche Welle website, 6 May 2014, <<http://www.dw.de/political-extremism-on-the-rise-in-bulgaria/a-17613184>>.

65 "Recent rise in national security discourse in Europe: the case of Roma", Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), document number 12386, 05 October 2010, <<http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/XRef/X2H-DW-XSL.asp?file-id=12543&lang=EN>>.

66 Mike Jempson, "Portrayal and participation of minorities in the media", MediaWise, 3 October 2007, pp. 2-4, 6-7, <<http://www.mediawise.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Portrayal-and-participation-of-minorities-in-the-media.pdf>>.

67 Marcella Corsi, Chiara Crepaldi, Manuela Samek Lodovici, Paolo Boccagni and Cristina Vasilescu, "Ethnic minority and Roma women in Europe: A case for gender equality?", European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2008, p. 5.

and their age.⁶⁸ As such, young Roma face high rates of unemployment and poverty, have difficulties in accessing education and opportunities outside their communities, and are often unable to openly declare their identity outside of the Roma community.⁶⁹ Moreover, young Roma in the LGBT community and those with disabilities encounter even higher rates of exclusion and discrimination. In the political sphere, young Roma are totally excluded from decision-making processes and, therefore, have very low rates of political participation. Despite initiatives by young Roma to confront these challenges at the local, national and international levels in Europe, more must be done to assist them in their efforts to become more politically active and to generate change in their communities and in society as a whole.⁷⁰

Young Roma women are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion due to the multiple and intersectional discrimination that they face, including on the basis of race, gender and age, both in mainstream society and in Roma communities.⁷¹ Consequently, Roma women struggle to be represented in political processes and be active in the public sphere.

In most European countries, the situation of young Roma women is characterized by low levels of education, a lack of marketable skills and qualifications and low levels of participation in public life, as well as other barriers to the exercise of their human rights. As such, young Roma women can be described as one of the most disempowered groups in Europe. In addition, the gender inequalities that exist in Roma communities and in society more broadly make young Roma women especially vulnerable to social exclusion.

68 SALTO Cultural Diversity Resource Centre, *op. cit.*, note 62.

69 "About the Roma Youth Action Plan", Council of Europe website, 21 February 2013, <<http://enter.coe.int/roma/Roma-Youth-Action-Plan/About-the-Roma-Youth-Action-Plan>>.

70 Ibid.

71 "Romani Women from Central and Eastern Europe: A 'Fourth World', or Experience of Multiple Discrimination", Refugee Women's Resource Project, Asylum Aid, March 2002, <<http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/478e3c9c1a.pdf>>.

For example, according to a study on the situation of Roma women and girls in Moldova,⁷² only a very limited number of Roma women in the country are engaged in civic and community work. However, discussions with young Roma women have revealed that, if given the opportunity, they would choose to be actively involved in the life of their communities. It has to be emphasized that, at the moment, Roma women are not represented in decision-making bodies at the local level or in central government.⁷³

The difficulties they face make them extremely vulnerable. In particular, the patriarchal system within Roma communities does not facilitate their active involvement in community or public life. Roma women are not empowered and do not have the necessary skills to become active citizens or to generate social change in their communities and in society. In most European countries, the issues and needs of young Roma women are absent from the public agenda.⁷⁴ In fact, the participation and contribution of young Roma girls is sorely needed in Roma communities.

In light of the above, it is necessary to discuss the extent to which young Roma, and in particular young Roma women, are empowered to defend their rights, mobilize themselves and combat discrimination, human rights infringements, hate speech and violence against Roma. At the same time, it is useful to examine the tools they have at their disposal to become more active and to be more fully involved in public and political processes.

The empowerment and activism of young Roma

In recent years, a number of different activities and programmes have been established in Europe to train and empower young Roma. These include the establishment of Barvalipe Summer Schools, organized by the Open Society Foundations' Roma Initiatives Office since 2011. Barvalipe schools aim to strengthen Roma identity among young people and to empower them to become active citizens and to represent the

72 "Study on the situation of Romani women and girls in the Republic of Moldova", UN Women, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2014, <http://www.md.undp.org/content/moldova/en/home/library/democratic_governance/study-on-the-situation-of-romani-women-and-girls-in-the-republic.html>.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

interests of Roma. In addition, between 2009 and 2014, the Roma Initiatives Office organized internships for young Roma at the European Commission. The Council of Europe has also organized a series of events, study sessions, discussions and conferences for young Roma aimed at strengthening Roma identity, building a Roma youth movement and increasing the capacity of Roma youth organizations to participate in policy making and human rights education, among other fields.⁷⁵ In addition, in 2011, the Council of Europe organized a Roma Youth Conference⁷⁶ that led to the creation of the Roma Youth Action Plan. Meanwhile, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has established an internship programme for young Roma in the Balkans as part of its Best Practices for Roma Integration project. The Roma Education Fund, the Fundamental Rights Agency, the European Roma Rights Centre, the Romedia Foundation and other organizations have also developed internship schemes for young Roma students and graduates.⁷⁷ At the same time, several initiatives have been set up to empower young Roma women, including by creating international networks and organizations led and run by Roma women.⁷⁸

Nevertheless, efforts to improve the participation of young Roma in civic and political life have achieved minimal success. Training programmes for young Roma that aim to build certain capacities are usually temporary and often lack focus and a long-term

plan. In addition, they often only reach certain young Roma who are already involved in voluntary activities and Roma NGOs, or who are studying at university. Meanwhile, the most deprived young Roma do not get to benefit from such initiatives. Therefore, it is important to discuss how empowerment at the grassroots level can enable young Roma to become active citizens, regardless of their levels of education, work experience and the opportunities they have enjoyed. To this end, the terms “empowerment” and “activism” are defined and analysed below, as well as how these terms relate to young Roma.

The World Bank defines empowerment as “the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.”⁷⁹ This meaning has developed to encompass a “process of increasing the assets and capabilities of individuals or groups to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.”

Essential for the process of empowerment is the strengthening of certain skills and capacities among individuals and groups so that they can use them to demand more efficient and fair institutions. Thus, empowered individuals have more control over their lives and can take and influence decisions that directly affect them and their communities. This is reflected in the four key areas of empowerment outlined by the World Bank, namely: access to information, inclusion and participation, accountability and local organizational capacity.⁸⁰

When talking about empowerment, it is important to discuss the meaning of activism, since the two are complementary as they both enhance people’s capacities and lead to change. Activism is regarded as the process of “taking action to effect social change.”⁸¹ Activism usually occurs in a variety of forms and by applying different tools to promote, influence or even block changes and initiatives, be they social, economic, political or environmental. Examples of activism

75 See: “Roma Youth Action Plan: Overview of Activities”, Council of Europe website, <<http://enter.coe.int/roma/Roma-Youth-Action-Plan/Overview-of-activities>>.

76 See: “Roma Youth Action Plan: Roma Youth Conference 2011”, Council of Europe website, <<http://enter.coe.int/roma/Roma-Youth-Action-Plan/About-the-Roma-Youth-Action-Plan/Roma-Youth-Conference-2011>>.

77 See: “Internship Opportunity for Young Roma at the Roma Education Fund”, Roma Education Fund website, <<http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/news/ref/news-and-events/internship-opportunity-young-roma-roma-education-fund-ref>>; “Join us”, European Roma Rights Centre website, <<http://www.errc.org/join-us>>; “Roma Internship”, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights website, <<http://fra.europa.eu/en/about-fra/recruitment/roma-internship>>; and “Recruitment Call”, Romedia Foundation website, 4 January 2015, <<http://www.romediafoundation.org/news-events>>.

78 See: “A Joint Romani Women Initiative: Developing a Roadmap for Implementing the Strategy on Romani Women”, RomaReact website, 25 March 2014, <<http://www.romareact.org/reports/view/1691>>.

79 “Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Sourcebook”, PREM World Bank, May 2002, p. 11, <<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/486312-1095094954594/draft.pdf>>.

80 “What is Empowerment?”, World Bank website, <<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTEMPowerment/0,,contentMDK:20272299~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:486411~isCURL:Y,00.html>>.

81 “What is Activism?”, Permanent Culture Now, Tools and Knowledge to Create a New Life, <<http://www.permanentculturenow.com/what-is-activism/>>.

include contacting politicians, writing articles for newspapers, campaigning, demonstrating, mobilizing and organizing the community, using social media or simply acting as a watchdog. Through activism, people and social movements can exercise pressure on those who hold power in order to bring about change.⁸²

The empowerment of young Roma, and in particular of young Roma women, can have a tremendously positive impact on Roma society as a whole. When young Roma are empowered, they are able to freely exercise their rights, encourage their peers to be more active, are more aware of existing challenges and possess the know-how to address them. Enhancing the empowerment of the current young generation of Roma would allow them to effectively participate in public and social life, vote in elections, demand their rights, raise awareness of or support issues that concern them, network on an international level and contribute to the betterment of their community and society. Being empowered can lead to activism, while activism can sometimes lead to the empowerment of others.⁸³ By being empowered and involved in public life, as well as by trying to resolve the issues facing their communities, young Roma can become active citizens.

Active citizenship is any effort through which state institutions are held accountable for ensuring people's access to goods and services. This can take a number of forms, including creating, signing and sharing petitions, and collective litigation. Active citizens are also those who work to improve the life of their communities, are involved in voluntary activities, challenge policies and actions, and who make decisions and develop solutions collectively with other members of the community.⁸⁴

82 "Advocacy and Activism", Maxwell School Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration website, <https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/parcc/Research/advocacy/Advocacy_and_Activism_Overview/>.

83 "Youth Engagement: Empowering Youth Voices to Improve Services, Programs, and Policy", CYCC Network, 2013, p. 6, <<http://cyccnetwork.org/files/2.2%20-%20Summary%20-%20Youth%20Engagement%20-%20Empowering%20Youth%20Voices%20to%20Improve%20Services,%20Programs%20and%20Policy.pdf>>.

84 Peter P. Houtzager and Arnab K. Acharya, "Associations, active citizenship, and the quality of democracy in Brazil and Mexico", *Theory and Society*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2011, p. 10, <<http://www2.ids.ac.uk/futurestate/pdfs/HoutzagerAcharya%20Assoc%20and%20Active%20Citizenship%20TS2010.pdf>>.

Empowerment, activism and active citizenship are interrelated as they all involve acquiring knowledge and skills, making collective decisions, addressing issues affecting the community and being engaged in public affairs. They are all used to individually or collectively contest policies, demand rights and ensure equal representation. All involve developing a better understanding of the role of the state and other interested stakeholders, as well as their role vis-à-vis the community.

In this regard, in order to become empowered, young Roma must learn what it is to be an active citizen within their societies, and must consider how they can make a positive contribution to the environment in which they live. They must also be aware of the benefits of participating and of generating change. Unfortunately, young Roma's access to the social, educational, political and decision-making life of their societies is often jeopardized by the challenges they face both in their communities and in mainstream society. This results in their limited participation and exclusion from these processes, thus diminishing their chances of exercising their rights, taking control of their lives and acting as agents of change.

Challenges of Roma youth activism

As mentioned above, young Roma face many challenges that prevent them from taking an active role in society, including multiple forms of discrimination, a lack of educational and employment opportunities, insufficient government support, as well as problems within the Roma community itself. Among the institutional challenges facing Roma are the discriminatory and indifferent behaviour of government representatives responsible for their education, social inclusion and employment. In Moldova, for example, the Ministry of Education has failed to facilitate Roma children's inclusion in state kindergartens and schools, often invoking culture and traditions as reasons for Roma not to attend school. In this way, authorities excuse themselves for their inaction and failure to ensure that Roma children obtain compulsory education as prescribed by law. As a result, young Roma often fail to obtain qualifications and have limited employment opportunities.

In several villages in Moldova, for example, there are Roma communities where the children speak only the Roma language at home. Consequently, they face difficulties when attending pre-school or primary education as they do not speak the languages of instruc-

tion. They then fall behind their non-Roma peers and have lower rates of school completion. According to a report on Roma in Moldova, just 4 per cent of Roma in the country have higher education compared to 38 per cent of non-Roma.⁸⁵ At the same time, 43 per cent of Roma children aged between 7 and 15 do not attend school, compared to 6 per cent of non-Roma.⁸⁶ These data are troubling, and reflect a lack of commitment from authorities to improve the situation of Roma in Moldova. In 2009, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recommended that Moldova “take measures to address ethnic disparities in accessing education; (b) develop and implement strategies and programmes to ensure access to mainstream education for Roma children.”⁸⁷ However, these measures were not implemented. The Moldovan government does not provide Roma children with state language classes so that they can start primary education on an equal footing with their non-Roma peers. It has also not developed other programmes to help Roma children acquire education or to prevent them from dropping out of school.

Young Roma who miss out on the first stage of their education face subsequent difficulties in getting into higher education and finding work later in life. As such, limited access to education has a negative impact on their quality of life. At the same time, there are very few educational opportunities to help young Roma advance in the job market. According to UNDP data, 29 per cent of Roma in Moldova are unemployed, which is double the rate of unemployment among non-Roma.⁸⁸ The Roma Education Fund and the Open Society Foundations are among the few organizations that support the education and training of young Roma by providing scholarship programmes for those will-

ing to pursue a higher education, as well as training courses and summer schools to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to advance in a profession.⁸⁹

In addition to overlooking the linguistic needs of Roma children, governments also fail to develop programmes and policies that take into account the often precarious financial situation of Roma. They also neglect to design programmes for teachers, professors, government officials and law enforcement bodies on diversity and working in multi-ethnic environments. Meanwhile, pupils rarely learn about multi-culturalism and the importance of tolerance. This lack of progress demonstrates governments’ weak sense of commitment when adopting action plans for Roma integration. As such, these action plans often include good initiatives but are not accompanied by the allocation of a sufficient budget for their implementation, while monitoring mechanisms are often not provided. Furthermore, governments often fail to consult and involve the Roma community when designing programmes that directly affect them.⁹⁰

Another challenge to the empowerment of young Roma concerns cultural or traditional elements in Roma society. The efforts of young Roma to become active citizens and to engage in decision-making processes are often thwarted by inter-generational conflicts and perceptions among senior members of the Roma community that they are not yet mature enough to take on leadership roles and to be active in their communities. Such issues make it all the more important that every member of the community is empowered, including Roma women and Roma men. It is important to note that Roma women require particular attention owing to the intersectional discrimination that they face, both as Roma and as women.⁹¹ Roma women living in a patriarchal environment

85 Sorin Cace, Vasile Cantarji, Nicolae Sali and Marin Alla, “Roma in the Republic of Moldova”, UNDP Moldova, 2007, p. 60, <http://www.undp.md/publications/roma%20_report/Roma%20in%20the%20Republic%20of%20Moldova.pdf>.

86 “Situation of Roma children in Moldova”, UNICEF, 2010, p. 23, <http://www.unicef.org/moldova/2008_001_Eng_Roma_Children.pdf>.

87 “Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations: Republic of Moldova”, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 20 February 2009, CRC/C/MDA/CO/3, para. 63, <<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/co/CRC-C-MDA-CO3.pdf>>.

88 “Roma in the Republic of Moldova”, UNDP, *op. cit.*, note 85, p. 70.

89 See, for example: “REF Scholarship Program”, Roma Education Fund website,

<<http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/programmes/ref-scholarship-program>>;

“European Commission Internship for Young Roma University Graduates”, Open Society Foundations website, 31 October 2013, <<http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/grants/european-commission-internship-young-roma-university-graduates>>;

and “Serbian minority youth succeed in OSCE-supported internships”, osce.org, 9 May 2012,

<<http://www.osce.org/serbia/90377>>.

90 “To be or not to be...Roma Decade after 2015?”, Decade of Roma Inclusion, Presidency of Republic of Croatia, <http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9283_file1_to-be-or-not-to-be-roma-decade-after-2015.pdf>.

91 European Commission, *op. cit.*, note 67, p. 122.

with traditional gender roles are excluded from participating in public life.⁹² In some communities, early marriage is still a problem.⁹³ Despite attempts to prevent this practice, there is still much work to do before Roma women will be able to make their own choices and to challenge gender roles in their families and communities.

Limited access to information is another challenge facing young Roma. In most European countries, only a limited number of young Roma participate in youth or Roma-related events, trainings, conferences, scholarships and educational programmes. Usually, the Roma who do participate in such activities are those who have access to information and who live in regions, cities or towns where Roma NGOs operate. Access to information, including the Internet, is especially limited for the large percentage of young Roma living in poor conditions. Meanwhile, educated Roma do not take it on themselves to provide peer-to-peer education to their less educated counterparts.⁹⁴ Young Roma who are active in civil society face challenges in ensuring the sustainability of their projects, while informal groups working directly with communities have trouble accessing funds, since donors usually require that they be formally registered for administrative purposes.⁹⁵ Young Roma are virtually absent from political and public life, and political parties do not attract young Roma as members and do not invest energy and resources in developing the political skills of young Roma. Although in some countries, including Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia, a number of Roma men have succeeded in politics, the same cannot be said of Roma women. That is why the political empowerment of young Roma women is especially important, as it is their advancement that will bring about the biggest changes to their communities.

92 Ibid., pp.122-124.

93 "ERRC Submission to the Joint CEDAW-CRC General Recommendation/Comment on Harmful Practices: Child Marriages among Roma", European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), 9 September 2011, p. 1, <<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/HarmfulPractices/EuropeanRomaRightsCentre.pdf>>.

94 From discussions among young participants of the Roma and Sinti Youth Conference: Activism, Participation, Security, organized by the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Belgrade, December 2014.

95 Ibid.

Examples of Roma youth activism

The past decade has witnessed significant developments in terms of the activism and formal organization of young Roma. In particular, several international Roma youth networks have been created, including the Forum of European Roma Young People (FERYP)⁹⁶, Pakiv European Network (PEN)⁹⁷ and ternYpe,⁹⁸ all of which have triggered the activism and engagement of young Roma individuals and organizations at the local, national and international levels. These networks have also boosted the empowerment of young Roma and Roma youth organizations.

These networks aim to support the personal and organizational capacity-building of young Roma organizations, promote Roma identity, advocate for the increased participation of Roma at the local, national and international levels, address challenges of diversity in Roma communities, combat discrimination and create a space for young people in which to become active citizens through empowerment, mobilization, self-organization and participation in campaigns.^{99 100} The networks have given many young Roma the confidence to found their own organizations and, thus, to have a greater impact on their communities. Besides providing such opportunities, these organizations also enhance young Roma's participation in decision-making processes. A significant achievement of the work of the networks has been the adoption of

96 The Forum of the European Roma Young People (FERYP) was founded as informal network in 1996. For more information on the FERYO: <www.feryp.org>.

97 The Pakiv European Network (PEN) was born out of the Pakiv European Roma Fund Leadership and Management initiative, launched in 2000.

98 The International Roma Youth Network was founded in January 2010 and unites Roma youth organizations from Albania, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia and Spain.

99 "About Us", FERYP website, <http://www.feryp.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=90&Itemid=53>.

100 "About ternYpe", ternYpe website, <<http://www.ternype.eu/about-ternype>>.

a Roma Youth Action Plan¹⁰¹ by the Council of Europe, the key aim of which is to promote Roma youth involvement in policies concerning young Roma. The action plan also aims to support equal opportunities and to initiate pilot programmes combating discrimination against young Roma by protecting their human rights and strengthening their active participation and social inclusion.

Another focus of Roma empowerment and activism has been to develop a Roma women's movement that is led by and for young Roma women.¹⁰² A number of Roma women leaders and activists have struggled to bring issues concerning Roma women to the attention of their national governments and decision makers in Europe. Some of them have tried to address the challenges facing Roma women during European Roma Platform meetings,¹⁰³ as well as by lobbying for the incorporation of these issues in the texts of national strategies on Roma inclusion. Although there are no clearly defined programmes and policies for Roma women at the national level, several initiatives to strengthen the activism and political empowerment of Roma women have been developed.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, the fact that three Roma women have succeeded in getting seats in the European Parliament is an achievement in itself (namely, Viktoria Mohacsi, Livia Jaroka and Soraya Post).¹⁰⁵

Indeed, young Roma throughout Europe have displayed a strong sense of initiative in using different means in order to exercise their rights and to bring about social and political changes in their communi-

ties. Through social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter, young Roma activists now have at their disposal an unprecedented range of tools and opportunities to voice their demands, organize campaigns, publicize messages and mobilize people and ideas. These online tools help to bring young Roma from around the globe together to network, co-ordinate and come up with initiatives, allowing them to easily access, publish and share information.¹⁰⁶ The use of social media is especially important for young Roma working to raise awareness of an issue at the international level but who are dispersed across different countries. It is important to mention that, in spite of the benefits of the Internet and social media, these tools are often used at the expense of other means that might be more effective in reaching out to young Roma who do not have access to the Internet, computers and other electronic devices. Therefore, this shortcoming of social media should be taken into consideration by organizations when designing programmes for young Roma or when trying to mobilize them.

Some examples of Roma youth activism are presented below, including information on the types of initiatives developed by and for young Roma and the tools they have applied. For the most part, these initiatives aim to empower and engage young Roma in public and political life using social media, community organizing and campaigning. As such, these initiatives help to mobilize people to voice their concerns, influence decision makers, conduct advocacy work and even run for elections.¹⁰⁷ These are just a few examples that can be applied by young Roma to empower their peers and help them to become active citizens.

Example 1: Young Roma in Macedonia campaign for equal representation in government

In 2012, Romano Avazi!, a Roma youth organization based in Skopje, Macedonia, began collecting signatures from Roma in the country to demand their equal representation in public administration. To this end, they asked that the government create 200 jobs

101 The Roma Youth Action Plan (2012-2014) is the result of the Roma Youth Conference held in Strasbourg from 27 to 30 September 2011. The conference was organized by the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Roma issues and Youth Department of the Council of Europe together with the FERYP and ternYpe. For more information on the conference, see: "Previous meetings of the European Roma platform", European Commission website, <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/roma-platform/meetings_en.htm>.

102 For example, the Romedia Foundation's "I am a European Roma Woman" campaign, (<<http://www.romawoman.org/>>); and Phenjalipe, an informal network of Roma (see: "A Joint Romani Women Initiative", RomaReact website, *op. cit.*, note 78).

103 "Previous meetings of the European Roma platform", European Commission website, *op. cit.*, note 101.

104 "Femeile rome din Moldova doresc să se implice in politica (Roma Women in Politics), trm.md, 1 March 2015, <<http://www.trm.md/ro/social/femeile-rome-din-moldova-doresc-sa-se-implice-in-politica/>>.

105 "European Parliament MEPs", European Parliament website, <<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/map.html>>.

106 Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media", Foreign Affairs website, January/February 2011, <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67038/clay-shirky/the-political-power-of-social-media>>.

107 Ibid. See also: Dave Beckwith and Cristina Lopez, "Community Organizing: People Power from the Grassroots", Center for Community Change, <<http://comm-org.wisc.edu/papers97/beckwith.htm>>.

in public administration for educated and qualified Roma.

The young Roma involved in the campaign used community organizing and campaigning tools and involved senior members of the Roma community. Between June and August 2012, the young people participating in the campaign went from door to door to talk to people, share their stories, explain the cause, ask for support and collect signatures. They succeeded in collecting more than 5,000 signatures. On 12 August 2012, they organized a march in front of the government building in Skopje. Approximately 1,000 young Roma took to the streets that day to demand that they be represented in public administration.¹⁰⁸

Despite criticism that the campaign failed to negotiate with the government, it can nevertheless be considered a success, as it was the first time in the history of Macedonia that young Roma succeeded in mobilizing themselves on such a scale. Their success lay in the fact that they had a common goal and jointly voiced their demands on an issue that concerned not only them but the entire Roma community in Macedonia. This example shows that, by applying community organizing techniques and campaigning, young Roma are able to unite around a common aim and successfully organize the community. This proves the effectiveness of such tools in the Roma community, as well as their potential applicability in different countries and for different causes. First and foremost, young Roma must learn the techniques involved in community organizing and campaigning so that they know exactly how to proceed when attempting to bring about change.

As such, community organizing is an effective tool for empowering young Roma, as it helps them to act in unison in an organized manner when campaigning, performing advocacy work or influencing decision makers. Community organizing is essential for young Roma in order to identify the issues they face both within and outside the community, but also to develop solutions and, thus, to identify the people or structures that can help them realize their goals, including when negotiating with and putting pressure on institutions to hold them accountable.¹⁰⁹

108 Bernard Rorke, "Young Macedonian Roma Demand the Right to Equal Representation", Open Society Foundations website, 27 September 2012, <<http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/young-macedonian-roma-demand-right-equal-representation>>.

109 Dave Beckwith and Cristina Lopez, "Community Organizing", *op. cit.*, note 107.

Community organizing helps to develop campaign leaders' understanding of their community's needs and how to channel their demands, as well as of how to share responsibility and build commitment. Through community organizing, young Roma can learn to be active citizens while developing their understanding of how they can impact decision-making processes and what the benefits of active citizenship are to them and their people.¹¹⁰

To bring about change, young Roma must first identify an issue and decide how to campaign on that issue in order to change policies and attitudes. As such, campaigning is another effective tool for mobilizing individuals and organizations for the purpose of achieving social, economic, environmental or political changes.¹¹¹

Among the challenges of the campaign was the fact that the campaign organizers did not establish an internal structure or a clear division of roles, which later on affected the process and led to internal conflicts. Secondly, owing to their enthusiasm for change, the young people did not anticipate the pressure they received from corrupt politicians who tried to suppress the initiative. Unable to cope with such pressure, many of those involved left the campaign.¹¹²

One lesson that young Roma can take from this initiative is that they must explore how to deal with internal conflicts and to learn to negotiate with government and politicians. In order to achieve the end goal, it is important to have a well-designed strategy that envisages potential risks and plans measures to overcome those risks.

Unfortunately, there are currently no training programmes on community organizing aimed at Roma youth. The Open Society Foundations have organized such trainings in Macedonia and Serbia, but unfortunately the initiative has not been repeated in other countries.

In the past few years, there have been more and more examples of Roma campaigns to mobilize their communities, with Roma communities demonstrat-

110 Ibid.

111 "What is Campaigning?", knowhownonprofit.org, <<http://knowhownonprofit.org/campaigns/campaigning/about-campaigning-and-lobbying/whatis>>.

112 Based on interviews with organizers of the initiative in Macedonia.

ing in front of governments and embassies.¹¹³ Such activities testify to the growing courage and motivation among young Roma. Nevertheless, these initiatives have been limited, take place in different cities and are not always well co-ordinated. Equipped with knowledge of community organizing and campaigning techniques, young Roma activists and potential activists can go on to implement yet more successful initiatives. That is why it is essential that they study community organizing and campaigning in detail in order to avoid the problems and shortcomings experienced by many other campaigns. In this regard, specialized trainings on community organizing and campaigning are needed to familiarize young Roma with the entire process of community mobilization and with successful examples from other countries.

Example 2: The Buvero media training for young Roma women

Another initiative that has contributed to the empowerment and activism of young Roma, and especially young Roma women, is Buvero, a training programme launched by the Romedia Foundation in May 2013.

Buvero is a training course that aims to tackle two problems: the lack of access of Roma to the media, on the one hand, and negative stereotyping of Roma in the media, on the other. To this end, Buvero has trained a generation of young Roma women by equipping them with a range of media skills, including the use of digital technology. When applying their skills, these Roma women then have the opportunity to change perceptions of Roma, combat stereotypes, promote alternative viewpoints, influence public opinion and present stories and information on the problems Roma face every day.¹¹⁴

Buvero was established with the aim of creating a network of young Roma media professionals skilled in using digital technology. Buvero training courses are offered to young Roma women aged between 16 and 22 from different countries. During the courses,

the women receive media training and are encouraged to come up with stories and videos on issues affecting them, including their identity and culture. Experts in the field are invited to hold classes. The courses last 15 days, including five days of classes followed by ten days of practical training. In the first five days, the participants learn about visual storytelling, media ethics, gender identity, funding for journalism, photography basics, video production and television editing. Participants are then invited to choose a socially important subject and to create their own videos. Buvero courses have been held in Germany, Hungary, Macedonia and Serbia. A total of 60 young Roma women have participated in the programme so far, with a further 24 to receive training in 2015.

The Buvero programme is an effective means to help young Roma women become agents of change. How Roma women go on to use their knowledge of journalism and to what end is an important question for this research. For example, through their journalism skills they can become activists to advocate for their peers, or they can seek to bring about change in their communities by using their knowledge and the audio-visual materials they produce. At the same time, they can provide media coverage to social and cultural problems affecting them and their communities. Moreover, materials produced during Buvero courses can be used as successful examples of advocacy and activism.

In short, the Buvero programme is an innovative initiative that has the potential to change the lives of thousands of young Roma by equipping them with the tools to speak out on issues affecting them while at the same time empowering other generations through their messages.

One current shortcoming of the Buvero training programme is that, up until now, only a few countries have benefited from the programme. Expanding the programme to include more countries would certainly help to improve its reach. At the same time, young Roma men should also be invited to take part in the programme to ensure maximum coverage and provide for an inclusive process. One question arising from this initiative is whether it can be used for political purposes or as an advocacy instrument. It is unclear whether participants are trained to design strategies that permit them to reach large audiences and how many young people the programme hopes

113 For example, a protest concerning housing rights was organized by young Roma in Albania ("Roma community in Tirana protesting for housing", RomaReact website, 29 October 2014, <<http://romareact.org/news/view/2146>>). Similarly, a protest was held outside the French Embassy in Budapest to protest the deportation of a Roma girl from France (see: "Supporting Leonarda: Protests in Hungary", RomaReact website, 8 November 2013, <<http://www.romareact.org/reports/view/1271>>).

114 For more information, see the Buvero website (in Hungarian only), <<http://www.buvero.com/>>.

to engage. In particular, the programme might benefit from capturing young peoples' interest in cameras and using this to spread messages.

The programme undoubtedly comes up against several challenges. In particular, the young Roma women who take part in the programme may be subject to pressure or even reprisals from their families and communities for speaking out on taboo issues. In Roma communities, such issues include early marriages, patriarchal norms and traditions that often limit the rights of young women. Therefore, the programme must ensure that the women involved have the support and encouragement of their families so that they can continue their activities once the training course has ended. Moreover, parents and/or senior members of the community should receive training on or be encouraged to discuss the programme in order to help them understand its purpose and benefit for young women and girls.

Another question concerns the subjects on which the women are trained to report on, and whether these include serious issues, such as incidents of hate speech from politicians and extremist groups, as well as issues affecting Roma both within their communities and in wider society. The question remains as to whether the young women who receive such training are politically engaged and whether they strive to change public opinion about Roma.

Example 3: Barvalipe Schools

The Barvalipe Schools were established by the Open Society Foundations' Roma Initiatives Office¹¹⁵ in 2011. The aim of the schools was to strengthen the identity of young Roma, provide them with tools for active citizenship and enhance their commitment to the Roma cause.¹¹⁶ Three international Barvalipe Summer Schools were held each year from 2011 to 2013. During the summer schools, around 30 young Roma from across Europe came together for a period of 10 days to learn about Roma history, culture and identity. They also gained skills in activism, visiting Roma communities and becoming mobilized so that they

115 "Programs: Roma Initiatives Office", Open Society Foundations website, <<http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/about/programs/roma-initiatives-office>>.

116 "Barvalipe: Building Roma Pride", Open Society Foundations website, 28 September 2011, <<http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/barvalipe-building-roma-pride>>.

can give back to the community. Participants were Roma aged between 18-30 who had been actively involved in Roma issues, who had worked for Roma NGOs or the government or who had participated in internship and scholarship programmes provided by the Open Society Foundations.¹¹⁷ Currently, Barvalipe schools are held on the national level in Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, Spain and Turkey, and are organized in modules held throughout the year.

Some activism methods used by participants of the 3rd Barvalipe Summer School are presented below. For instance, in the summer of 2013, during the 3rd Barvalipe Roma Pride Summer School, 21 young Roma from across Europe decided to raise awareness about the disastrous situation in the Konik refugee camp in Montenegro, where more than 2,000 Roma refugees from Kosovo¹¹⁸ live. The young people visited the camp, talked to people there, took interviews and designed a strategy to spread awareness of the issue via social media. As part of the initiative, they wrote an article portraying the situation at the camp in which they highlighted the main issues affecting people living there. They also made a video featuring an interview with a Roma woman in which she tells her story about life in the camp. The video was then posted on the video-sharing website YouTube. These materials were shared widely on social media, thereby familiarizing the public with the situation in the Konik camp and the hardships people face there.¹¹⁹ After the material was posted, participants started receiving many messages asking questions about the woman in the video and requesting more information about the camp and the current situation. Even though no significant decisions were made regarding the camp, the campaign nevertheless brought the issue to the attention of the general public.

117 "Barvalipe: Identity, Pride, Commitment", from the Open Society Foundations, published on youtube.com, 1 December 2011, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsUaGPoRrao>>.

118 All references to Kosovo refer to Kosovo under UNSCR 1244.

119 "My home, the Konik camp, by Zule Alijaj", from Barvalipe 3rd Roma Pride Summer School, published on youtube.com, 27 September 2013, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0MwctBi4Ic>>; and "The Forgotten Europeans", Barvalipe 3rd Roma Summer School photos, facebook.com, 1 October 2013, <<https://www.facebook.com/Barvalipe3rd/photos/pb.182199265274502.-2207520000.1419238261./217666805061081/?type=1&theater>>.

During the 2013 Barvalipe Summer School, participants also decided to raise awareness of neo-Nazi marches and protests against Roma that took place in the Czech Republic in August 2013. The young Roma came up with an innovative way of showing their solidarity with Roma in the Czech Republic while informing the public of the alarming events: they painted their hands and faces with the Roma flag and messages of support. Photos of their body art were then distributed on social networks to encourage more people to campaign against the protest. This initiative was intended to show solidarity to those Roma who went out on the streets that day in a counter-demonstration against the neo-Nazis.

These two initiatives demonstrate how methods learned during the summer school, including the use of social media and campaigning, helped participants to design strategies that would raise awareness among the public about issues affecting Roma. A positive aspect of these activities is that they managed to reach a relatively large number of people thanks to the sharing of materials, videos and photos produced by Barvalipe school participants on social networks. Such activities allowed them to attract the attention of hundreds of social media and Internet users.¹²⁰ At the same time, in order to produce the article and video about Konik camp and the campaign photos, the participants had to work together in teams and pool their skills and knowledge. This enhanced their co-operation and solidarity, motivating them to stay in touch after the camp had ended.

In addition, the Barvalipe schools clearly succeeded in motivating young Roma to become active citizens in their communities. Indeed, participants went on to apply the skills they gained back home in their local communities and continued to co-operate with one another from a distance by supporting each other in other initiatives and campaigns.¹²¹

One key advantage of the Barvalipe Schools has been their ability to bring together participants from different countries to create campaigns on selected issues. This has allowed them to unite around common goals, making them more likely to co-operate long after the school has ended. For that reason, the schools

would be even more effective if participants were admitted from a wider range of countries, as this would give more young Roma the opportunity to meet and design campaigns on issues affecting them.

One shortcoming of the campaigns organized by participants in the schools is that they did not properly consider their target audiences, including governmental officials, in campaign strategies, and did not find ways to reach these audiences effectively. Therefore, future Barvalipe Summer Schools might consider focusing on how to reach specific target audiences. Unfortunately, following the 3rd Barvalipe Summer School, it was decided that the schools would only be organized in some countries. This decision has limited the opportunities for young Roma to organize cross-border campaigns and to network, interact and share experiences on the international level, including on issues such as identity, culture and methods of activism.

Example 4: ternYpe Roma genocide remembrance initiative

ternYpe is a European Roma Youth Network¹²² that conducts Roma genocide remembrance initiatives. Every year since 2010, ternYpe has lobbied for 2 August to be recognized as an official day of remembrance for the Roma and Sinti victims and survivors of World War II. In particular, the initiative aims to achieve the following: engage Roma and non-Roma youth organizations from Europe in remembrance education; build the capacity of young leaders and trainers to apply remembrance, holocaust and human rights education tools; involve institutions and organizations in Roma genocide remembrance education at the local, national and EU levels; and mainstream Roma genocide history and remembrance in educational materials, including in non-formal education materials.¹²³

Since 2010, the event has succeeded in attracting an increasing number of young people, from 50 in 2010 to 1,000 in 2014, when the 70th anniversary of the Roma genocide was commemorated.¹²⁴ The event brings together young people from different countries to commemorate the extermination of

120 For example, at least 30 young Roma posted on materials from the summer school on their Facebook page, with each of them reaching at least 100 people online, some of whom also shared the materials. The Barvalipe 3rd Roma Pride Summer School Facebook page has received 427 likes.

121 "Roma community in Tirana protesting for housing", Roma-React website, *op. cit.*, note 113.

122 "About ternYpe", ternYpe website, *op. cit.*, note 100.

123 "Education for Remembrance", 2august.eu, <<http://2august.eu/the-roma-genocide/education-for-remembrance/>>.

124 "Take Action", 2august.eu, <<http://2august.eu/take-action/>>.

Roma in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp and to discuss racism and xenophobia in Europe.

During the event, which includes a conference lasting several days, participants have the opportunity to learn about the Roma genocide during World War II, and to discuss the current situation of Roma communities and the problem of anti-Roma sentiment, as well as methods of youth activism. In this regard, international experts, stakeholders and youth organizations are invited to the event to plan Holocaust memorial days, analyse and revise educational materials and share good practices in Roma genocide remembrance and education.¹²⁵

Social networking websites are used to organize and advertise the event and to mobilize young people to encourage them to take part. As a result, hundreds of social network users changed their profile picture on 2 August 2014 to portraits of Roma genocide survivors and related images.¹²⁶ In this way, the campaign succeeded in making thousands of Internet users aware of the commemorative event, thereby greatly contributing to overall awareness of the Roma genocide.

As such, this initiative demonstrated the power of social media awareness-raising campaigns. Social media have been used for other campaigns to great effect, and campaign methods that draw on online activism can be said to form part of a current trend. At the same time, the campaign was unique in its use of profile pictures on social networking sites to attract the attention of Internet users on the day of the commemorative event.

Such online campaigns are extremely effective in reaching large audience and do not demand substantial financial resources. In particular, this campaign managed to trigger the interest of both Roma and non-Roma, encouraging them to learn more about the event and to participate in the campaign.

In the end, this campaign contributed to a historic change in policy. On 15 April 2015, the European Parliament passed a resolution on anti-Gypsyism in Europe and on the EU's rec-

ognition of Roma genocide memorial day.¹²⁷ This resolution represents an official recognition of the commemoration of Roma extermination during World War II by the Nazis. This is a huge achievement and reflects the intensive work on Roma genocide remembrance of ternYpe over the past five years.

Conclusions and recommendations

This paper has demonstrated how empowerment and activism are strategic tools for strengthening the ability of young Roma to generate social and political change. These tools are essential for enhancing the active citizenship of young Roma and for encouraging them to become more involved in public and political life. The paper has looked at the importance of awareness and knowledge of certain societal processes among young Roma women and men.

Young Roma must be prepared to become agents of change and, to this end, must acquire the necessary knowledge and skills and be ready to apply them appropriately. In particular, a special focus must be placed on empowering young Roma women, as they are more susceptible to discrimination and social exclusion. Programmes and trainings developed for young Roma should cover issues affecting young Roma women, and young Roma women should be encouraged to discuss gender issues.

The present paper has explored a number of youth activism tools that have been to some extent successful in mobilizing young Roma to get involved in or support a cause. Nevertheless, a more comprehensive study of all the existing activism tools used by young Roma in different country contexts should be carried out to assess their impact at the local, national and international levels.

It is important to note that successful campaigns involving young Roma employ different activism tools simultaneously. For example, when using social media for a campaign, we should not forget about those who lack access to the Internet and information technologies. In their case, other tools can be used, including community organizing, door-to-door campaigning or the staging of local events for young people to give

125 "International Conference on Remembrance and Holocaust Education", 2august.eu, <<http://2august.eu/events/program/international-conference/>>.

126 See, for example, the poster uploaded on the Facebook page of ternYpe on 7 July 2013: <<https://www.facebook.com/www.ternype.eu/photos/pb.219541904731000.-2207520000.1429576611./614919315193255/?type=3&theater>>.

127 "Resolution on the occasion of International Roma Day – anti-Gypsyism in Europe and EU recognition of the memorial day of the Roma genocide during World War II", 2015/2615(RSP), European Parliament, 15 April 2015, <<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2015%2F2615%28RSP%29#technicalInformation>>.

them the opportunity to discuss issues and encourage one another to be active. It is also important to explore other types of innovative and creative tools used by young Roma and non-Roma in different countries to enhance the impact of campaigning, with an emphasis on using the arts, music, theatre, photography and sports, among others, as tools of activism.

In order to ensure the success of these tools, organizations working with young Roma should ensure that the training programmes and activities that they design are sustainable. At the same time, young Roma should be encouraged to be more involved in public matters, including those that concern their rights, and to adopt an active role. Meanwhile, young Roma should themselves explore opportunities and venues for activism. They need to be more persistent in demanding support from Roma and non-Roma civil society, international organizations, private donors and state institutions.

Moreover, when deciding to address the authorities or the public regarding an issue concerning them, young Roma should devise appropriate strategies by consulting their peers to identify the main issues that need to be addressed. This includes mapping each step of their campaign, detecting possible risks and finding ways to prevent them, as well as identifying potential partners to back their cause and supporting their mobilization and training.

In addition, young Roma should seek to learn from one another, and should use those tools that have already been tried and tested, while also being innovative in devising new tools to increase their impact on society. Grassroots activism and mobilization is one possible area in which they might improve their activism.

Young Roma need to demand an equal role in the Roma movement. In particular, young Roma women must insist on playing an active role and on being able to control their own lives and influence decision-making. To this end, it is necessary to organize programmes that would encourage Roma men to be equally involved in the struggle for the rights of Roma women; at the same time, empowerment programmes aimed exclusively at young Roma women would also be beneficial. Fragmented and periodic initiatives are not enough. Substantial results can only be achieved through a sustained process of empowerment in all Roma communities across all countries.

As such, this paper recommends that young Roma be provided with a range of different learning and

training programmes with the aim of increasing their activism and strengthening their skills to this end. Such programmes should focus on the following: all types of activism tools, including the Internet, social media and the arts, and how they can be used to generate change and increase campaign outreach; community organizing and campaigning methods with which to mobilize the community and realize common goals; and political participation and representation, including decision-making and organization skills to equip young Roma with the necessary competencies to be active in politics.

Above all, it is important that young Roma are given sufficient space and opportunities in which to meet, network and apply activism tools at the local, national and international levels. Finally, programmes for young Roma should be made sustainable by encouraging the self-empowerment of young Roma.

It is hoped that this paper will assist the relevant stakeholders, including Roma organizations and governmental, intergovernmental and international institutions, to better address the issues facing young Roma and to undertake the necessary steps to improve their engagement in all areas of social, economic, public and political life in the countries in which they live.

Young Roma Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Impact of Their Local-Level Activism

Aldijana Dedić¹²⁸

This paper was written by the author, a young Roma activist, for the Roma and Sinti Youth Conference: Activism, Participation, Security, organized by the OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues. The opinions contained herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the OSCE, ODIHR, or any participating State.

Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a small country that contains many internal divisions and differences. With a population of just 4 million, the country is home to three constituent nationalities and 17 national minorities. Roma constitute the largest national minority in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but live in the most difficult conditions according to all social parameters. This paper assesses the visibility of young Roma women active on the local level among local institutions, Roma organizations and international and intergovernmental organizations, as well as how the activists themselves view their work. The main purpose of this research is to touch the pulse of public opinion and to explore the opinions, attitudes and perceptions of Roma among local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In terms of the activism of young Roma women, the research set out to assess their impact on the development of local communities and how this impact is reflected in their visibility. The relevance of this research lies in the fact that no previous research on the impact of the local-level activism of young Roma women in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been conducted. At the same time, numerous projects have invested in strengthening the Roma non-governmental organization (NGO) sector and, therefore, young Roma women activists.

It is evident from the research findings that activism among young Roma women at the local level has an impact on the visibility of their work and recognition of their potential to generate change among the Roma community and society in general. As such, the activism of young Roma women is being recognized. This recognition is reflected in the fact that 70 per cent (14 out of 20 activists) of young Roma women activists included in this research are members of local institutions, including the Municipal Commission for Gender Equality and other working groups and bodies at the local level.

This paper begins by outlining the methodological framework applied to the research. It then examines the situation of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a focus on Roma youth and women, and discusses the public policies designed to improve the situation of Roma in the country. Finally, the paper presents the findings of the research.

Methodological framework of the paper

The methodology applied for researching this topic included desk research, participant observation and the distribution of interviews and questionnaires among young Roma women activists and representatives of local institutions, international organizations and non-Roma and Roma NGOs. The timeframe for sending the questionnaires and receiving responses was 14 days. Although just three local institutions provided a response to the questionnaire, the responses are still valuable as they demonstrate difficulties in securing the co-operation of local institutions on questions regarding Roma women. For the purpose of this study, a young woman is defined as aged between 18 and 35 years old. Interviews were conducted with 20 young Roma women activists. Since the timeframe for responding to these interviews was

128 Aldijana Dedić is a student at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Sarajevo specializing in social work. Since 2010, she has been an activist in the “Be My Friend” association in Visoko, where she worked to improve the living standards, health, social welfare and education of Roma women and to defend their rights. She has extensive experience in outreach and was a peer educator on HIV prevention among the most vulnerable groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She has also been a member of the Roma Women’s Network “Success” (Uspjeh).

short (five days), they were conducted by phone or via social media.

This research was conducted at the local level in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Srpska and Brčko District. Bosnia and Herzegovina is administratively divided into two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska, which comprise 51 per cent and 49 per cent, respectively, of the total territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Brčko District does not belong to either of the entities but represents a separate administrative unit governed by the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This research focused on four out of the ten cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These four cantons were selected because this research included Roma activists living in those cantons.

In terms of the survey participants, 20 young Roma women activists, representing a total nine Roma women organizations, were included in the research. This number includes independent women activists who are not members of an organization. The young women activists represent the following organizations: the Roma Women's Association "Bolja budućnost" from Tuzla (Tuzla Canton); the Youth Roma Initiative "Budi mi prijatelj" from Visoko, the Roma Women's Association "Nada" from Kakanj and the Centre for Mothers "Utjeha" from Zenica (Zenica-Doboj Canton); the Centre for Mothers "Narcis" from Donji Vakuf and the Roma Youth Association "Mladi Romi" from Vitez (Srednja Bosna Canton); and the Roma Women's Association "Karanfil" from Bosanska Krupa (Una-Sana Canton). Also represented in this study were the Roma Association "Romani ćej" from Prnjavor and the Roma Women's Association "Romkinja" from Bijeljina, both located in the Republic of Srpska. These organizations and their activists were selected for this research in order to ensure that different regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina were represented.

Questionnaires were sent to the Municipal Department of Social Activities and Municipal Centers for Social Work in each town from where the young Roma activists came. Questionnaires were also sent to Roma organizations led by Roma men, including the Roma Association "Romalen" from Kakanj, the Roma Association "Impact" from Čapljina, the Association "Youth Volunteers" from Visoko and the Roma Association "Veseli Brijeg" from Banja Luka. It was decided that the international organizations targeted by this research would be able to provide their

perceptions of the impact of the work of young Roma women activists, since they have already implemented various activities aimed at empowering Roma women and can provide feedback on any progress made in terms of the increased visibility of young Roma women activists. The international organizations included in this research were World Vision, CARE International and the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was also decided that non-Roma NGOs should be included in the research, and the following organizations were targeted: the Foundation "Cure", Sarajevo; the Association "Vaša prava", Sarajevo; and the Association "Otaharin", Bijeljina.

The methods of data collection used for this study were questionnaires and interviews. A total of 55 questionnaires were sent out, but only 35 responses were received. The questionnaires contained a combination of closed questions with multiple-choice answers and open-ended questions to which respondents could respond freely. The questionnaires were tailored according to the different groups of respondents, and different questionnaires were sent to young Roma women activists, Roma organizations that are led by Roma men, local institutions and inter-governmental and international organizations. Questionnaires sent to young Roma women were designed to provide an overview of how they see themselves and whether their local-level activism achieves the expected results. Questions posed to local institutions were intended to obtain information on whether the institution in question recognized any young Roma women activists at the local level and how the institution assesses the impact of their activities in the local Roma community, as well as on whether there was any co-operation between the local authorities and the young Roma women. Responses provided by Roma NGOs led by Roma men were designed to shed light on the situation on the ground, to learn whether and how these NGOs include young Roma women in their work, as well as the extent to which there is an age or gender gap between Roma leaders and young Roma women. The international organizations were asked if they implement specific activities for and with young Roma women, whether they are aware of young Roma activists in the communities in which they work and, if so, whether they have noted any progress made by young Roma women activists at the local level, and whether they work to strengthen the capacity of young Roma women.

Out of 20 young women surveyed, 16 agreed to take part in an interview. The interviews were conducted with young Roma activists by telephone and via social media. During the interviews, young Roma activists discussed their activities and the challenges they face in everyday work. In contrast to the questionnaire, the interviews provided young Roma activists with an opportunity to discuss in more depth the obstacles to their work at local level in communities, including the issue of co-operation between these local Roma NGOs and young Roma activists.

One limitation of the methodology was the short time frame in which the research was conducted. This could have contributed to the fact that not every institution responded to the questionnaire. However, those institutions that did not respond to the questionnaire also failed to respond to telephone calls. This possibly reflects a lack of engagement among certain institutions that were not interested in participating in this research.

The situation of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina

General information about Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina

There are approximately 90 NGOs working on issues affecting Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition, numerous international and intergovernmental organizations, as well as the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, are working to improve the position of Roma through social inclusion projects and by ensuring equality for Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

According to unofficial data, there are around 30,000-40,000 Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina,¹²⁹ making Roma the largest national minority. Unofficial data from the Roma NGO sector show that the majority of Roma are excluded from the health care and education systems, and that similar numbers of Roma have inadequate housing and live in substandard conditions. Many Roma settlements lack basic infrastructure, including lighting, drains, sewage systems and electricity. The Roma population is also the most vulnerable minority in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

129 "Special report on the status of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina", Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Section 3.1: Population, <<https://www.osce.org/bih/110495?download=true>>.

Thus, of 17 national minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Roma minority is the most marginalized.¹³⁰

The social exclusion of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina is reflected primarily in the fact that they are prevented from participating in the economic, social and cultural life of the country, and, as such, are forced to live on the margins of society. High levels of poverty among Roma contribute significantly to the difficult conditions in which they live. These conditions have an overwhelmingly negative impact on the education of Roma children, making it difficult to find employment later in life. Indeed, both those who have some education and those without a proper education struggle to acquire work. Together, these indicators suggest that large numbers of Roma are not active in the community because they struggle to get by.

Over 95 per cent¹³¹ of Roma do not have a job or a steady income, while the distribution of social assistance to Roma is irregular and inadequate. Due to these conditions and their difficult position, Roma face discrimination every day on the basis of their ethnicity, poverty, lack of education and poor living conditions.

One aggravating factor for Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the country's constitution,¹³² which excludes national minorities, including Roma, from decision-making processes at the national level. This makes the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina discriminatory towards national minorities, as it prevents them from being represented in politics. Indeed, it is very difficult to improve the situation of Roma without the possibility of representing their interests at the national level. The Sejdić-Finci case against Bosnia and Herzegovina is well known: it was brought before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) following a lawsuit by Dervo Sejdić and Jakob Finci against Bosnia and Herzegovina. Because they belonged to national minorities, Sejdić and Finci were ineligible for election to the presidency or to

130 "Revised Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Addressing Roma Issues in the Field of Employment, Housing and Healthcare, 2013-2016", Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR), Section 1, p. 1, <<http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/PDF/LjudskaPrava/bos-rom-eng.pdf>>.

131 "Special report on the status of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina", Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Section 3.3.2: Roma associations' perspective, <<https://www.osce.org/bih/110495?download=true>>.

132 The Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Geneva, 1995, <http://www.ccbh.ba/public/down/USTAV_BOSNE_I_HERCEGOVINE_engl.pdf>.

the parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2002, Bosnia and Herzegovina became a member of the Council of Europe, and undertook to amend electoral legislation preventing persons belonging to national minorities from being elected to certain state authorities. As such, Bosnia and Herzegovina was required to carry out reforms with the help of the Venice Commission. In its 2005 report, the Venice Commission stated that the country must amend its constitutional provisions in order to comply with the European Convention on Human Rights and put forward concrete proposals for the reform.

In the *Sejdić-Finci* case, the appellants before the ECtHR referred to Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, in conjunction with Article 3 of Protocol 1, Article 3 of Protocol 1, separately, and Article 1 of Protocol 12 on the general prohibition of discrimination. On 22 December 2009, the ECtHR issued a decision in which the complaint was defined as valid and compensation was assigned to the claimants. According to the court, no reasonable and objective justification was found for maintaining the existing provisions, which have a discriminatory effect. The court concluded that Bosnia and Herzegovina had violated Article 14, as well as Article 3 of Protocol 1, which guarantees the right to free elections.¹³³

Bosnia and Herzegovina is working to harmonize its constitutional provisions with the judgement of the European Convention on Human Rights. The country is also bound by the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union that it signed in 2008. The Agreement provides for a period of one to two years for these changes. To date, the ECtHR judgement has yet to be implemented, which remains a barrier to Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership in the European Union.

In the meantime, Roma can try to participate in decision-making processes at the local level, although in reality this is very difficult to achieve. Roma who want to be politically engaged can run for local elections as a national minority candidate for a mandate within the municipality. However, according to the Election Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina,¹³⁴ this position is

open to representatives of all the 17 national minorities in the country, which means that Roma have to compete for this position with other national minorities. As such, this provides an additional obstacle to the political participation of Roma in the country.

The position of young Roma women in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Young Roma women in Bosnia and Herzegovina are exposed to multiple types of discrimination. First, they are discriminated against as women in a society where gender equality is lacking and where men enjoy advantages over women in all areas of life. Second, they face discrimination as Roma women in a country where Roma are marginalized and exposed to gender-specific stereotypes, including those relating to their education, personal hygiene and occupation. Third, Roma women are often discriminated against on account of their age both in the Roma community and in society in general. Young Roma women often have to try twice as hard to prove themselves in order to make any progress and to exert their influence on society.

Certain studies have found that gender plays a role in the withdrawal of Roma children from mandatory education in Bosnia and Herzegovina,¹³⁵ with large numbers of young Roma women not completing secondary or primary education. Although the percentage of Roma men that do not finish primary education is still large, it is nevertheless much smaller than the percentage of Roma women or girls who do not complete primary education.¹³⁶ In addition, Roma women are often economically dependent on male family members. Unemployment rates among Roma women are much higher than among the general population. Numerous studies, including in Bosnia and Herzegovina, have shown that Roma women are also subjected to many forms of violence.¹³⁷ In particular, Roma women are at a higher risk of domestic

133 "Sejdic and Finci v. Bosnia and Herzegovina", Council of Europe website, <http://www.coe.org.rs/eng/news_sr_eng/?conid=1545>.

134 "Election Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina" (Službeni glasnik BiH, broj 23/01), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Section 13A, p. 65, <<http://www.izbori.ba/documents/documents/zakoni/poizpw110508.pdf>>.

135 "Rodna dimenzija uzroka odustajanja romske djece od obaveznog školovanja u zemljama regije (Bosna i Hercegovina)", Roma Women's Association "Bolja budućnost", September 2011.

136 "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2011-2012", UNICEF, p. 84, <http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/PDF/djeca/MICS4_BiH_Roma_Survey_FinalReport_2011-12.pdf>.

137 "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2011-2012", UNICEF, Section XIX, <http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/PDF/djeca/MICS4_BiH_Roma_Survey_FinalReport_2011-12.pdf>.

violence.¹³⁸ At the same time, cases of domestic violence are often under-reported owing to patriarchal notions that condone such abuse.

In addition to the above, Roma youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina face inequalities in fulfilling their fundamental needs, including basic living conditions, access to education, health care and employment opportunities. In many cases, persistent discrimination against Roma in various aspects of life have made young Roma the most willing in their age cohort to leave the country permanently.¹³⁹

One good practice for overcoming all forms of violence and discrimination is to strengthen the capacity of Roma women to take an active role in shaping local communities. One such example of this practice was the regional project “Active inclusion and rights of Roma women in the Western Balkans”,¹⁴⁰ implemented by CARE International North West Balkans. As part of the project, young Roma women had the opportunity to participate in various political participation and capacity-building activities.

Assisted by the good practices and capacity-building initiatives of the Roma NGO sector, including non-formal education activities, young Roma can demonstrate their ability to generate change both in the wider community and at the local level. Through their dedication and hard work, they show that they are able to make progress and drive change.

Roma women and youth in public policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the “Decade for Roma Inclusion 2005-2015” in 2008, later than other countries in the region. The Roma Decade is an international initiative that brings together governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as Roma civil society, to end discrimination against Roma and to promote Roma inclusion. The Roma Decade focuses on the priority areas of education, employment, health and housing, and commits governments to take into account the oth-

138 Ibid.

139 For more detailed information on perceptions among youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina, see: “Voices of Youth: Survey on Youth in BiH Quantitative Research Findings”, February 2012, the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-Fund), <<http://www.mdgfund.org/publication/voices-youth-survey-youth-bih-quantitative-research-findings>>.

140 “Active inclusion and rights of Roma women in Western Balkans”, CARE International North West Balkans, 2011-2014, <<http://care-balkan.org/dok/1389604071.pdf>>.

er core issues of poverty, discrimination and gender mainstreaming.

As a member of the Roma Decade, Bosnia and Herzegovina has developed national action plans for Roma in the priority areas defined in the Roma Decade’s founding documents. The action plans were developed in 2008 and focused on the priority areas of housing, employment, healthcare and education.¹⁴¹

Because of the delay in its accession to the Roma Decade, Bosnia and Herzegovina rushed to develop action plans for Roma on employment, housing and health care. Representatives of Roma civil society assisted in preparing these documents, while many international, governmental and non-governmental organizations contributed their expertise and financial support for the development of these plans. Unfortunately, the action plans have been unrealistic in terms of the implementation of their goals, leading Bosnia and Herzegovina to develop a Revised Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Addressing Roma Issues in the Field of Employment, Housing and Healthcare in 2013.

Prior to its accession to the Roma Decade, an Action Plan on the Educational Needs of Roma and Other National Minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina was developed and came into force in 2004. This action plan guaranteed formal equality for Roma in the right to access education. A Revised Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Meeting the Educational Needs of Roma was then prepared in accordance with the recommendations and proposals agreed at the 16th meeting of the International Steering Committee of the Roma Decade of Roma Inclusion. This document, which the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina considered and adopted on 14 July 2010, defined four objectives and 47 measures to provide children of marginalized groups with equal access to quality education, as well as with opportunities to acquire the necessary knowledge for their integration into society. The revised action plan highlighted that quality education for Roma is key to breaking the vicious circle of marginalization and

141 “Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Addressing Roma Issues in the Field of Employment, Housing and Healthcare”, 2008, MHRR, <http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/ljudska_prava/Odbor_za_Rome/Akcioni%20plan%20za%20rje%C5%A1avanje%20problema%20Roma%20u%20oblastima%20zapo%C5%A1ljava%20stambenog%20brinjavanja%20i%20zdravstvene%20za%C5%A1tite.pdf>.

social isolation.¹⁴²The Working Group tasked with revising the action plan on the educational needs of Roma included representatives of relevant ministries and the Roma NGO sector. Of the ten members of the working group representing Roma, four were women; however, Roma youth were not represented in the working group. The working group included representatives of UNICEF and the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

While Roma women and youth organizations were consulted in developing the revised action plan, it is clear from the document that these consultations were not conducted in a meaningful way. In particular, recommendations made by Roma women were not incorporated into the new document. During research, the author of this background paper conducted a more detailed analysis of the revised national action plans for Roma, and found that Roma youth are mentioned only three times in the entire document.¹⁴³ In the context of employment, the document notes that “[y]oung Roma should work to strengthen the capacity of young people, should be included in the various programmes as mediators and should participate in educational activities related to the topics of reproductive health and sexually transmitted infections.”¹⁴⁴ On the implementation of educational programmes on general health, substance abuse, tuberculosis and other infectious and non-infectious diseases, including sexually transmitted diseases, the document states that “[d]ue to extreme poverty, high unemployment, poor living conditions and limited access to health care, Roma are exposed to an increased risk of contracting diseases. In addition, poverty leads to a high rate of substance abuse among men and young people, further threatening the already poor state of health of this population. Continued education is essential to increase the level of knowledge and to improving the general health of the population”. Roma women are mentioned just twice in the document:

142 “Revised Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Meeting the Educational Needs of Roma”, 2010, <http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/ljudska_prava/djeca_bih/Revidirani%20Akcioni%20plan%20Bosne%20i%20Hercegovine%20o%20obrazovnim%20potrebama%20Roma.pdf>.

143 “Revised Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Addressing Roma Issues in the Field of Employment, Housing and Healthcare, 2013-2016”, MHRR, 2014, <<http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/PDF/LjudskaPrava/bos-rom-eng.pdf>>.

144 “Revised Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Addressing Roma Issues in the Field of Employment, Housing and Healthcare, 2013-2016”, MHRR, 2014, pp. 156 and 187, <<http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/PDF/LjudskaPrava/bos-rom-eng.pdf>>.

with regards to the implementation of educational and prevention programmes for Roma women in the field of reproductive health, and as an indicator for data on the number of women participating in training and education programmes for Roma related to children’s health.¹⁴⁵

Despite revisions to the action plan on Roma educational needs,¹⁴⁶ its implementation remains beset by difficulties owing to the complicated structure of the state and of government. The Ministry of Civil Affairs is responsible for the implementation of the action plan on the national level, while the Ministries of Education in each canton are responsible for allocating and implementing the action plan on the local level. According to the cantonal Ministries for Education, the main obstacle to the action plan’s implementation is a lack of funding. Consequently, the delivery of grants and even education materials and equipment for Roma children and students is often delayed. Meanwhile, when young Roma do manage to complete their education, they often face greater difficulties in finding a job, regardless of their gender. This in turn reflects challenges in implementing the objectives of the revised action plan in the field of Roma employment,¹⁴⁷ with implementation of the action plan on employment one of the least successful, in part because young Roma do not apply for self-employment grants.

As such, the implementation of the action plan progresses slowly, while the main focus is on housing, the implementation of which has witnessed the most significant progress of the three action plan priorities. Less progress has been achieved in engaging Roma youth and women, although the numbers of Roma youth and women invited to events organized by the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR) has increased as a result of activities to empower them.

As suggested by the focus of the action plan, the future of local Roma communities lies in the hands

145 “Revised Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Addressing Roma Issues in the Field of Employment, Housing and Healthcare, 2013-2016”, MHRR, 2014, p. 157 <<http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/PDF/LjudskaPrava/bos-rom-eng.pdf>>.

146 “Revised Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Meeting the Educational Needs of Roma”, MHRR, 2010, <http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/ljudska_prava/djeca_bih/Revidirani%20Akcioni%20plan%20Bosne%20i%20Hercegovine%20o%20obrazovnim%20potrebama%20Roma.pdf>.

147 “Revised Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Addressing Roma Issues in the Field of Employment, Housing and Healthcare, 2013-2016”, MHRR, Section 1, p. 1, <<http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/PDF/LjudskaPrava/bos-rom-eng.pdf>>.

of young educated Roma. In Bosnia and Herzegovina there are currently around 50 Roma studying at university, a significant increase compared to five years ago. Unfortunately, the ethnicity of these students is not clear, since some of them do not want to state publicly that they are Roma, while others declare themselves as Roma in order to make use of some positive gains. In a positive development, it appears that the number of Roma women at university is increasing. Bosnia and Herzegovina held the presidency for the Roma Decade between July 2014 and September 2015. In this capacity, the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina organized meetings of the International Steering Committee, as well as conferences on topics related to the Roma Decade agenda. According to the 27th International Steering Committee meeting, held during Bosnia and Herzegovina's presidency, all meetings would focus on the priority areas of the Roma Decade, with three specific themes on "Education to Employment", "Integrated Programs for Housing and Employment" and "Roma Women Security and Health".¹⁴⁸

As of March 2015, two conferences had been organized that covered different topics. The first conference organized by the MHRR was titled "Do Roma Women Have the Right to Safe Life?"¹⁴⁹ This conference afforded comprehensive insight into the impact of the national action plans in improving reproductive health among Roma women and in combating gender-based violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in Montenegro. During the conference, one young Roma woman from Bosnia and Herzegovina presented information on activities in the field of Roma women's reproductive health implemented by the Roma Women's Network "Success" (Uspjeh). This activist invited the representatives of the MHRR present at the conference to take advantage of young people and their capacities by employing them in public institutions. The second conference, titled "Inclusive Education without Discrimination", identified various forms of discrimination against Roma in the education system. Participants then went on to discuss the significance of the problem and to present ideas and models for tackling discrimination against Roma in

education, including by promoting an inclusive education system and encouraging government officials to initiate and/or advance systemic responses to such discrimination.¹⁵⁰

Case study: the Roma Women's Network "Success"

The informal Roma Women's Network "Success" (Uspjeh)¹⁵¹ is the first network in Bosnia and Herzegovina dedicated to improving the position of Roma women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Owing to its numerous activities, seminars, events and projects, the network is an appropriate case study for analysing good practices in promoting activism among young Roma women.

The informal Roma Women's Network was established in 2010 as an initiative of the Roma women's organization "Bolja budućnost". The aim of the network is to promote the rights of Roma women, to support their activism and to fight discrimination on a larger scale and with the participation of a greater number of organizations. The network consists of nine organizations¹⁵² from across Bosnia and Herzegovina that work to promote the rights of Roma women. The network was founded as a non-profit, non-governmental, independent, voluntary and non-partisan body to bring together Roma women NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to implement projects in all regions of the country. The informal structure of the network allows members to implement a number of activities in co-operation with other members of the network. The network operates throughout the country and performs a number of regular activities, including workshops, campaigns and other projects. More than 20,000 Roma women and men benefit from the network's activities.

The network includes five organizations that are either youth organizations or are led by a young

148 "27th International Steering Committee meeting", 29-30 September 2014, Decade for Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 website, <http://www.romadecade.org/egy-cikk.php?hir_id=9767>.

149 "Do Roma Women Have the Right to Safe Life?"; Decade for Roma Inclusion conference, 16-17 October 2014, Sarajevo, MHRR, <http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9785_file11_recommendations-and-conclusions-of-sarajevo-conference.pdf>.

150 "Inclusive Education without Discrimination", Decade for Roma Inclusion conference, 17-18 November 2014, Sarajevo, MHRR,

<http://www.romadecade.org/egy-cikk.php?hir_id=9784>.

151 Roma Women's Network Success website,

<<http://zrmuspjeh.com.ba/>>.

152 The Roma Women's Network currently consists of nine NGOs, which are as follows: the Roma Women's Association "Bolja budućnost", Tuzla; the Youth Roma Initiative "Budi mi prijatelj", Visoko; the Centre for Mothers "Nada", Kakanj; the Centre for Mothers "Utjeha", Zenica; the Association of Roma "Romani čej", Prnjavor; the Centre for Mothers "Narcis", Donji Vakuf; the Association "Mladi Romi", Vitez; the Roma Women's Association "Romkinja", Bijeljina; and the Association of Roma "Karanfil", Bosanska Krupa.

Roma woman. Thanks to the activities carried out by the network and the financial support of its donors, young Roma women are given the opportunity to participate in various educational activities, strengthen their capacities and be recognized in the local community.

In the four years since it was founded, through its activities the network has empowered five Roma women, one of whom was younger than 25 years old, who went on to be nominated for local elections in five municipalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the run-up to the country's local elections in 2012, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) created a video¹⁵³ in which three Roma women candidates were interviewed and which presented some of the challenges facing Roma women.

In 2012, a total of eight Roma women were nominated for the post of local councillor in communities in which Roma live. Four of these women were successful in their candidacy and won a seat on their local councils. It is interesting to note that three of the women nominated were young women; however, none of them were selected. The eight candidates came from different municipalities covered by the Roma Women's Network "Success". The network has also conducted studies¹⁵⁴ and research papers¹⁵⁵ on the political and social position of Roma women

The impact of the OSCE/ODIHR in the development of Roma youth activism

In order to support the development of young Roma professionals, in 2013 the OSCE/ODIHR developed a special programme to empower 25 young Roma professionals throughout the Western Balkans as part of

its Best Practices for Roma Integration (BPRI) project.¹⁵⁶ Eight of the 25 young Roma professionals were from Bosnia and Herzegovina, while five were women. The aim of the programme was to compensate for the lack of young Roma who are able to take up leadership positions, as well as to promote the integration of Roma communities and to improve the quality of policy planning and implementation.

The eight young Roma who passed the selection process were given the opportunity to undertake a five-month internship at the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina in field offices across the country. During their internships, the young Roma took part in several workshops and training activities, including on Active Civil Participation for Young Roma Professionals, Fundamentals of Human Rights, European Integration for Young Roma Professionals and Hate Crimes Training for Roma NGOs. Through their work in the Mission, the young professionals also had the opportunity to learn about the work of the Mission and the key activities implemented, in particular those developed to improve the situation of Roma in the country.

For the second part of their internship, the young Roma professionals worked in public institutions, including the Municipality Department of Social Services, the Centre for Social Welfare and the Institute of Public Health. One young professional joined the Delegation of the European Commission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, while another spent time working at the Office of the Council of Europe in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The OSCE/ODIHR also works to strengthen democratic governance in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Currently, there are no Roma employed in public institutions on the national level, and no official representatives of the Roma community exist, with Roma NGOs acting as unofficial representatives working to raise awareness of Roma needs and issues. Therefore, the OSCE/ODIHR has supported the nomination of five highly educated Roma co-ordinators to two-year positions within the MHRR, with one of the co-ordinators working on the national level and the other four deployed in regional centres of the MHRR. This initiative is part of a project titled "Support to the Implementation of National Action Plans for Roma

153 Best Practices for Roma Integration, 2013, <<http://bpri-odihr.org/17/items/Roma-women-and-elections.html>>. The video is available at:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SE9JaHWDDv0>>.

154 "Political participation of Roma, with an emphasis on political participation of

Roma women", Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2011, Informal Roma Women's Network "Success",

<http://www.bolja-buducnost.com.ba/downloads.php?cat_id=4&file_id=26>.

155 "Analiza rodne ravnopravnosti u prijemu i radu Vijeća nacionalnih manjina Parlamentarne skupštine Bosne i Hercegovine, Savjeta nacionalnih manjina Narodne skupštine Republike Srpske i Vijeća nacionalnih manjina Narodne skupštine Parlamenta Federacije Bosne i Hercegovine", Sarajevo, December 2012, Roma Women's Network "Success".

156 Best Practices for Roma Integration, January 2012-March 2014, ODIHR, in co-operation with OSCE field operations, <<http://bpri-odihr.org/about-the-project.html>>.

Inclusion¹⁵⁷ implemented by CARE International in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the project's completion, the OSCE/ODIHR project will be extended in order to give the authorities sufficient time to find funding to make the co-ordinators' employment at the Ministry sustainable. Of the five Roma co-ordinators supported under the project, one was a woman and two were young Roma men. The task of the Roma co-ordinators was to "gather the representatives of the municipalities, social welfare centres and competent entity-level, and in the Federation BiH cantonal ministries with the aim to strengthen local co-ordination focused on the insurance of the implementation of the Action Plan for Roma."¹⁵⁸ Unfortunately, the co-ordinators' employment with the ministry lasted only until the end of the BPRI project, and no funding was allocated to further continue their employment. A lack of funding also prevented the continued employment of the young Roma professionals following the end of the BPRI project. Indeed, the main reason cited by the institutions for not employing these young people beyond the project timeframe despite their professional suitability for the positions was a lack of financial resources.

Research findings

In order to gauge the perception of young Roma women activists and of the activities they implement in their local communities, the results of this study are presented in four sections. The first section focuses on the findings gathered from surveys and interviews conducted among young Roma women activists. The second section looks at responses from non-governmental, international and intergovernmental organizations. The third section presents findings from among Roma associations, while the fourth and final section reviews the responses of local institutions.

Young Roma women activists

Questionnaires were sent by mail to 20 young Roma women activists in different regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the questionnaire, the women activ-

ists were asked about their education, how long they have been active in their communities, which areas they cover through their activism, whether they see any progress in the communities as a result of their activism, what challenges they face in their work and whether they co-operate with local institutions. In addition, interviews were conducted with 13 of the questionnaire respondents in order to provide them with the opportunity to explain some of their answers. Five interviews were done by telephone while eight were conducted via social media.

In response to the first question¹⁵⁹ on the length of time engaged in activism in their local communities, the majority (9 out of 20) stated that they have performed this work for more than five years. Considering the age of these activists, this finding indicates that many started at a very young age. Of the remaining 11 activists surveyed, five said that they have been active in their communities for one to three years, while six stated that they have been working on these issues for five years.

In the next question, the young Roma women activists were asked to define the main areas of their activism.¹⁶⁰ A number of response options were provided, including human rights, education, health care, housing and discrimination, violence and youth issues. Of these, education was found to be the most prevalent focus of activists' work, with 18 survey respondents working on education. The second most dominant issue was human rights, with 16 respondents stating that they work on human rights issues. In particular, their activities in this field are focused on awareness-raising and promoting human rights in their local communities. Meanwhile, 8 out of 20 respondents work on the issue of discrimination. A total of 12 young Roma women activists work in the areas of health care, violence and issues affecting youth. Just six activists stated that they are engaged in preserving Roma culture and traditions, in the regulation of health care and in the economic empowerment of women.

157 "Support to the Implementation of National Action Plans for Roma Inclusion", 1 January 2010-31 December 2012, CARE International in co-operation with EURO ROM Tuzla, <<http://care-balkan.org/index.php?otvori=novosti&prikazi=457>>.

158 "Special Report on Status of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina", Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2013, p. 17 <<https://www.osce.org/bih/110495?download=true>>.

159 1. How long have you been active within your local community? a) 1-3 years; b) 3-5 years; c) over 5 years.

160 2. Please mark the areas in which you are active (you can choose more than one answer): a) human rights; b) education; c) health / health protection; d) housing issues; e) discrimination; f) violence; g) youth; h) other (please list).

In terms of the outcomes¹⁶¹ of their local-level activities, almost all respondents agreed that, as a result of their work, the Roma community is now better aware of their human rights. In addition, the activists believe that their work has helped promote the visibility of the Roma community among the general public in their local communities. Fifteen activists confirmed that the problems facing Roma are now more visible than they were when there were no Roma women activists. In contrast, only ten young Roma women activists said that their personal recognition increased within the local community as a result of their activism.

The next question asked whether any of the activities or projects implemented by the young Roma women activist had been supported by local institutions, and whether their activism, and they themselves, had been recognized by the local authorities. Thirteen young Roma women activists responded positively to this question, stating that some of their activities had received some funding from the municipal budget. In other cases, public institutions had supported their work by sending a representative to attend an event or by contributing trainers or educators. In addition, the young Roma women mentioned that, during their time as activists, they had forged good relationship with the employees of these institutions.

In terms of the personal results of their activism, there appears to be a positive trend of young Roma women activists being recognized for their work by their local authorities. Indeed, 14 of the 20 activists surveyed had become a member of a commission within their local municipality. Of these, the following commissions were mentioned: the Commission for Education; the Commission for the Prevention of Violence; the Commission for Gender Equality; and the local community council. In addition, one young Roma woman activist mentioned that she is a member of the Roma Board within the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁶² In her opinion, her

commitment and hard work to improve the position of Roma in her local community have brought her recognition not only on the local level, but also on the national and international levels.

An interesting fact to note is that 19 young Roma women activists think that, owing to their activism, they have become role models for young people both in their local Roma communities and in other Roma communities in different municipalities. On the other hand, their activism has brought them recognition among the general public in their local communities, including among non-Roma, demonstrating how the local activism of young Roma women has an impact on the Roma community and on society in general.

The last two questions in the questionnaire touched on the main challenges facing the survey respondents, and the actions and programmes that are needed in order to make young Roma women activists more visible. In most cases, a lack of interest among public institutions in events organized by young Roma women was cited as a key challenge confronting their work. Moreover, a number of activists said that public institutions are often unwilling to listen to the needs of the Roma community, with the voices of young Roma in particular not taken seriously. Further, some activists cited discrimination as a key obstacle in their attempts to co-operate with local institutions, as not everyone employed in local institution behaves respectfully towards Roma. On the other hand, the young Roma women activists said that challenges also exist within the Roma community. Some mentioned that they received very limited support from local Roma communities. Patriarchal attitudes among Roma parents often poses serious challenges for young Roma women wanting to engage in the work of NGOs, for example. A lack of interest in community work among some young Roma women was also mentioned as a problem.

In order to overcome these obstacles and challenges, the survey respondents came up with some suggestions for future activities and initiatives. For them, the focus should be on promoting education and providing local communities with positive examples of educated Roma women. In addition, greater emphasis should be placed on how activism can empower young Roma women, while more young Roma women should be encouraged to join NGOs in order to gain skills and experiences. One important issue raised was that young Roma women activists must learn to respect themselves and their work, to be proud of

161 3. What were the results of the projects or activities that you implemented at the local level? (You can select more than one answer): a) improved protection of human rights; b) greater awareness of the problems; c) more recognition of your work in the local community.

162 "Odbor za Rome pri Vijeću ministara BiH (Roma Board within the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina)", MHRR website, 2012, <http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/ljudska_prava/Odbor_za_Rome/Default.aspx?langTag=bs-BA>.

what they have achieved and not to be shy and modest in situations when they need to demonstrate their impact and skills. Some of the respondents said that it sometimes seems that young women are scared of showing what they are capable of, even when the results of their work are proof enough of their positive impact.

One young woman who is currently the president of a local Roma NGO shared some of her thoughts in an interview. In answer to the question on how the local authorities in her municipality support the work of her NGO and the life of Roma in her community, she answered:

“I am involved in the working group for health care, and am also invited to meetings. There is definitely a degree of co-operation with the municipality and with all public services, as well as with other local institutions. However, the local authorities should be more active in solving the problems of the Roma population in the municipality.”

Another young woman, who is also the president of a local Roma NGO in her village, said that while she enjoys good co-operation with the local authorities, the main obstacle to her work is an older Roma activist who tries to prevent beneficiaries attending activities that she organizes by threatening that they will not receive any help from the older activist and her NGO if they attend the younger activist’s workshop. Such behaviour is common and, unfortunately, a frequent obstacle facing young women aspiring to bring about change in their local communities. The only and most secure way for young women to overcome such obstacles is to invest in their education.

Non-governmental, international and intergovernmental organizations

This study also drew on the opinions and perceptions of non-governmental, intergovernmental¹⁶³ and international organizations¹⁶⁴ towards the activism of young Roma women. The reason why these organi-

zations¹⁶⁵ were approached is that they conduct many activities related to Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In response to the question as to whether they are familiar with the activities of and know any Roma activists at the local level, it transpired that just some activists are visible owing to their activities and media appearances. In this vein, one organization stated the following:

“We believe that young Roma women are partly recognized in their local communities because we have positive experiences of working with these activists. However, we also think that they are not as visible as they could be, and we assume that has to do with the fact that they are Roma.”

Furthermore, these organizations were asked if they include young Roma women in their activities. As one organization explained:

“A very important focus of our work is placed on the education of young women about their human rights and gender equality, including through workshops, activities, training sessions, seminars, conferences and artistic and cultural programmes, for example.”

Another organization stated that it engaged young Roma women to assist them as mediators on the issue of documentation, an area in which the majority of Roma activists work since many Roma do not possess identity cards, birth certificates and other forms of documentation, and suffer often discrimination as a result. All the organizations questioned stated that they have experience in working with young Roma women through their projects, although none of them employs any Roma.

One international organization suggested that young Roma women can increase their visibility and

165 The questionnaires sent to non-governmental, international and intergovernmental organizations included the following questions: 1. Do you know of any Roma women’s associations or young Roma activists active in the field? 2. Do you think that Roma associations that work with women and young Roma women activists have an impact on the development of the local community? 3. Are you aware of any activities implemented by young Roma activists? 4. Do you think that more young Roma women need to be involved in their local communities? 5. Please assess the work of young Roma women activists in the field on a scale of 1-5 (1-very bad, 5- very good). 6. In your opinion, what do you consider the biggest problems facing Roma in your area of work? 7. Do you think that the greater involvement of young Roma women in the field would improve the situation in Roma settlements? 8. Do you think that there is a gender gap in the work of activists in local Roma communities? 9. Do you think that Roma women’s activism in local communities makes it easier to work with Roma women in those communities?

163 Namely, Foundation Cure (Sarajevo) and Association “Vaša prava” (Sarajevo).

164 Namely, CARE International (Sarajevo), the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo), and World Vision in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo).

the impact of their activities by making use of the capacity-building resources available to them and, thus, improving their competencies and making themselves more competitive. In response to the question as to how young Roma women might resolve problems in Roma communities, two respondents concluded that the engagement of women is extremely beneficial. First of all, women's engagement helps to change perceptions of their role in the community, thereby challenging prejudices and facilitating the work of activists in resolving problems. In addition, in order to resolve problems and build their own capacities, young Roma women can be encouraged to connect with others in the community, participate in activities, demonstrate support and solidarity and acquire new skills.

It is very important to mention that all international and intergovernmental organizations surveyed for this research have implemented or are implementing projects and programmes to improve the situation of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including projects and programmes focusing on Roma women.

Roma associations

In surveying Roma civil society organizations run by men, this research set out to examine the attitudes of Roma activists towards the activism of young Roma women in the local community. Questionnaires¹⁶⁶ were sent to five Roma organizations, although only three responded.

The survey found that some Roma leaders see younger activists, who are often better educated and skilled, as a threat because they must compete with them for resources. In addition, the survey found that, while some Roma NGOs do employ young Roma women, these women often work in administrative

roles or in the field. Young Roma women are rarely placed in a decision-making position in a Roma NGO and, when they are, they are usually also the president of an organization specializing in Roma youth or Roma women.

In answer to the question as to whether they know any young Roma women activists, the answers were surprisingly varied. One activist mentioned that he personally knows 30 young Roma women active in the field.

Regarding the question as to how young Roma women can contribute to the development of their communities, the responses were quite comprehensive. Respondents expressed the opinion that each activist working to develop their local community is valuable, regardless of gender or age. One male respondent said that one problem of Bosnia and Herzegovina's male-dominated society is that men's role in all spheres of society eclipses that of women. However, the respondent also noted that this is slowly changing, and that women in general, and young Roma women activists in particular, will eventually be given more space and will receive more recognition in society.

In answer to the question as to how Roma men include and strengthen the capacity of young Roma women, respondents stated that they involve young women in extracurricular actions, capacity-building programmes, lectures on human rights and NGO training sessions, while also providing educational support by providing scholarships and the necessary material resources.

The heads of Roma associations were also asked if they have experienced difficulties or misunderstandings when co-operating with young Roma women activists. In this vein, one respondent emphasized the need for young Roma women to be included in larger numbers in all spheres, as this enables them to earn the trust of the Roma community and of Roma leaders when working in the field.

Similarly, another respondent recommended that young Roma women take the initiative to engage themselves in larger numbers in order to overcome the challenges they face in working with the Roma community and with society in general. As the respondent explained, this is necessary owing to the simple fact that Roma women are less represented in society in general, and in particular in Roma communities, where women are not given a voice.

166 The questionnaires sent to Roma associations included the following questions: 1. Do you know of any Roma women associations or young Roma women activists active in the field? 2. Do you think that Roma associations that work with women and young Roma women activists have an impact on the development of the local community? 3. Have you ever heard of or recognized activities implemented by young Roma activists? 4. Do you think that young women need to be more involved in the local community? 5. Please assess the work of young Roma women activists in the field on a scale of 1 to 5 (1-very bad, 5- very good). 6. In your opinion, what do you consider the biggest problems facing Roma in your area of work? 7. Do you think that the greater involvement of young women in the field would improve the situation in Roma settlements? 8. Do you think that there is a gender gap in the work of activists in local Roma communities? 9. Do you think that Roma women's activism in local communities makes it easier to work with Roma women in those communities?

Finally, respondents were asked how they think young Roma women's activism has the potential to improve the situation of Roma. In response, one respondent stated that women's activism is insufficiently developed in Roma society, and to do so would require large numbers of women activists, a resource that is largely underutilized. By promoting activism among women, including those from vulnerable and marginalized groups, the quality of life of their family members and of the entire community can be improved as a result.

Local institutions

Questionnaires were sent to eight local institutions,¹⁶⁷ including two municipalities from the Republic of Srpska and six municipalities from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Only three institutions responded to the questionnaire, namely, the House of Representatives of the Federation Parliament, the Department for Local Economic Development and Social Affairs within the Municipal Administration of Prnjavor and the Department of Social Services of the Municipality of Visoko. Other institutions were contacted several times but did not manage to fill out the questionnaire. The answers provided by the institutions that took part are provided below.

The research results show that two out of three respondents think that young Roma women activists are recognized as potential generators of change at the local level. In addition, in two out of three cases, local-level institutions were reported to have supported the activities of young Roma women activists both financially and through their own participation. In answer to the question as to whether they recognized and co-operated with young Roma women activists, the institutions responded in the affirmative. The institutions were aware of certain individual young Roma women activists, usually those that are

the head of a Roma NGO. In other cases, the individual was recognized owing to their frequent media appearances.

Regarding the visibility of young Roma women activists in the local community, the institutions said that they were aware of their activities, including those awareness-raising campaigns and projects that have had a significant impact on the Roma community. They suggested that, in order to generate greater recognition of their work, young Roma women activists should work to develop their capacities and be more active in community work.

In answer to the question as to how young Roma women contribute to tackling problems facing their local communities, one respondent stated that Roma women activists should focus on "raising awareness of the problems faced by members of the Roma community, actively participating on the issues of education, housing, violence and human trafficking, and on conducting campaigns in their communities."

With regards to the need for greater engagement of young Roma women in their local communities and in society more generally, one respondent gave the following reply:

"It is necessary to increase the number of activists and to empower them through different programme activities so as to strengthen their skills and level of engagement in community work".

Although only a very limited number of institutions responded to the questionnaire, it is nevertheless clear that representatives of those institutions recognize the potential of young Roma activists, in particular young women activists, as agents of change in the Roma community at the local level.

Conclusions and recommendations

The aim of this research was to highlight the work of young Roma women activists in the local community. The numerous challenges facing Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina means that there is much potential for activists to contribute to resolving issues, including in the areas of education, employment, health care and housing. In particular, emphasis should be placed on education and employment.

This study has found that young Roma women in Bosnia and Herzegovina often have the will and determination to participate in political life and develop their capacities so that they can serve as role models for the next generation of Roma. This suggests that activism and an enhanced understanding of activism

¹⁶⁷ The questionnaires sent to local institutions included the following questions: 1. Do you know of any young Roma women activists active in your local community? 2. Do you think that young Roma women activists have an impact on the development of the local community, and do they contribute to solving the problems of the Roma community? 3. Are you aware of any of the activities implemented by young Roma women activists? 4. Do you think that the increased involvement of young Roma women in the local community would help to solve the problems of the Roma community? 5. Please assess the work of young Roma activists in the field on a scale of 1 to 5 (1-bad, 5-good)? 6. In your opinion, what do you consider the biggest problems facing Roma in your municipality? 7. Do you think that increased involvement of young Roma women in the field would improve the situation of local Roma communities?

are key to breaking the cycle of poverty and exclusion among Roma.

In particular, by surveying 20 young Roma activists, this study has shown that young activists and their work are recognized and visible at the local level. This finding is supported by the fact that most of the activities implemented by young Roma activists are supported by local authorities.

Nevertheless, in order to resolve the problems they face, Roma communities must still work to involve greater numbers of young Roma, including young Roma women, in local institutions.

By strengthening the capacities of young Roma women, including through formal and informal education programmes, and with the help of their local communities, the inclusion of Roma in mainstream public life will become a reality. Indeed, it is in the interests of both mainstream society and Roma communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina to do so. The power of the local community depends on the extent to which the power of the individual in that community is recognized.

In order to facilitate and improve the impact of local-level activism among young Roma women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this research has come up with the following recommendations, based on the answers provided by respondents:

- Organizations working to promote activism among Roma youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina should focus on strengthening the activism of young Roma women activists.
- Roma NGOs should work to increase the number of young Roma activists, including young women, working on different issues affecting Roma.
- More attention should be paid to improving the capacities of and opportunities for young Roma women since they are an especially vulnerable and under-represented group.
- Greater awareness of issues facing Roma youth should be generated in local communities in order to facilitate the creation of special programmes and activities to enhance their involvement in decision-making processes.
- Local communities should include more Roma in activities relating to the Roma community.
- The OSCE could provide more opportunities for Roma women to learn about political participation. This would result in young Roma women being more empowered and better able to participate in decision-making processes at the local level.

- The OSCE could contribute further by presenting local institutions with examples of good practices for involving young Roma women, including that of the OSCE internship programme. Local institutions should be persuaded to adopt such practices.
- It is recommended that all stakeholders in this study work to increase the number of Roma children at school and university.

The Importance of Role Models and Peer Education in Strengthening Childhood Development among Roma Children in Serbia

Dragana Jovanović Arias¹⁶⁸

This paper was written by the author, a young Roma activist, for the Roma and Sinti Youth Conference: Activism, Participation, Security, organized by the OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues. The opinions contained herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the OSCE, ODIHR, or any participating State.

Introduction

This paper will explore the potential of youth activism and peer education for strengthening the personal growth and community impact of young Roma. Its findings and conclusions are based on an analysis of the situation of Roma community members in Serbia. In researching this subject, this study has drawn on a number of different resources, including national legislation, specialist literature and research results. Special attention is devoted to young Roma and their rights in the area of education, public participation and social inclusion.

The concept of social inclusion is broader than the traditional understanding of the issue as rooted in wealth, and includes an individual's possibilities for interaction with her or his economic, political and social environment.¹⁶⁹ As such, social exclusion includes institutional obstacles (such as discrimination and an insufficient access to services), community barriers

(such as marginalization) and personal limitations (including a lack of education and skills).¹⁷⁰ Roma community members face all the above-mentioned barriers to their inclusion, with each barrier adding to their vulnerability and contributing to their overall social exclusion. Each of these barriers can be understood as reinforcing the cycle of exclusion.

In this way, if just one of the barriers to exclusion is lifted, this has a positive impact on an individual's ability to engage with their environment, thereby breaking the cycle of exclusion and bringing them one step closer to social inclusion. By building the capacities, self-confidence and self-reliance of young Roma, their personal limitations can be converted to strengths, assisting in their personal growth and contributing to the social inclusion of their peers.

This paper will address the importance of role models and peer educators in overcoming the obstacles and challenges that young Roma face, with a particular emphasis on education and social inclusion. In addition, the paper will emphasize the benefits of youth activism, including peer education, for the personal development of young Roma activists and the empowerment of their younger peers in the Roma community.

In doing so, this paper will present the experiences of young Roma who have received peer-to-peer support and who have gone on to provide support and encouragement to their peers in the Roma community. It will describe how unique and important this experience can be, and will also present guidelines for other young Roma who would like to contribute to the community in similar ways.

168 Dragana Jovanović Arias is a social worker and activist from Belgrade, Serbia. After completing her studies at the political science faculty in Belgrade, she attended the "Empower" program at the Pestalozzi Children's Foundation in Switzerland, in which she specialized in interculturality and political and citizen education. She has co-operated with international organizations (including UNICEF and Save the Children), with civil society organizations (including Centre E8, the Centre for Youth Integration, the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, Group 484 and the Serbian Association of Roma Students) and with international foundations (including the Open Society Institute in Hungary and the Pestalozzi Children's Foundation in Switzerland). She is dedicated to improving the rights of all children and young people, especially of those belonging to vulnerable groups such as the Roma community.

169 "Predlog za Nacionalnu strategiju za mlade za period od 2015 do 2025 godine (Proposal for a National Strategy for Youth, 2015-2025)" (unpublished), p. 32, <<http://www.mos.gov.rs/vesti/aktivnosti/javni-poziv-za-ucesce-u-javnoj-raspravi-o-predlogu-nacionalne-strategije-za-mlade-2015-2025-2/?lang=lat>>.

170 Ibid.

Methodology and key findings

It is very important to gain insight into perceptions of role models and peer educators among young Roma people. Therefore, their experiences, lessons learned and observations will be a central part of this paper. In order to gain a better understanding of this topic, young Roma peer educators, pedagogical assistants and mentors aged between 18 and 30 years old were interviewed for this study.

Interviews with young Roma peer educators

Interviews were conducted with two young Roma women and one young Roma man who are recognized as role models by other young people in their communities. These individuals were chosen owing to the fact that they have all benefited from role models who inspired them to make a positive impact on other young people in their communities. Interviews allowed the researcher to explore their experiences more deeply. The interviews focused on three key areas: 1. The interviewee's background; 2. The impact of role models on the interviewee; and 3. The interviewee's contribution to the community as role models for other young Roma.

All three of the interviewees were in their early twenties at the time of research, and all of them began volunteering as peer educators while attending secondary education, giving them between 2 and 5 years of voluntary experience. The interviewees all came from different backgrounds and grew up in different family settings and socio-economic conditions. One interviewee grew up in an informal settlement in Belgrade, the second is originally from Kosovo¹⁷¹ and Metohija but spent most of her/his adolescence in an institution for children without parental care in Belgrade, and the third was brought up in a community that was fully integrated into the rest of society. Each of them had received guidance from role models who contributed to their personal and professional development. All three interviewees are highly accomplished and motivated young people who are dedicated to the development of the Roma community.

In order to gain insight into the background of the interviewees, they were asked to provide information on the household in which they were brought up (including the number and roles of family members, their socio-economic situation and type of upbringing), as

well as on the surroundings in which they grew up (including information on the neighbourhood and the children and adults in their communities). The research hypothesis was that young Roma people can be role models and have a positive impact on young people in their communities regardless of their background. The next step was to explore how role models inspire young Roma to become role models for others. For that reason, interviewees were asked to reflect on who had influenced them the most and why, as well as how they had been influenced and in what kinds of situations. They were also asked to list the most important lessons that they had learned from their role models. These questions were asked in order to prove the hypothesis that role models are important to the personal development of Roma youth and help to empower them as community activists. Finally, interviewees were invited to describe how they see themselves as peer educators, what experiences their activism has given them and how they think they have influenced the Roma community, and in particular young Roma. The hypothesis behind these questions was that young Roma role models have a significant and positive influence on the self-perception and perspective of their younger peers.

Consultations with young Roma pedagogical assistants

Seventy young Roma aged between 20 and 30 with experience of working as pedagogical assistants in primary schools across Serbia were asked to share their experiences by email. The pedagogical assistants consulted provide structured peer support directly to Roma children in a formal educational setting. Their feedback is valuable because their professional experience is relevant to the research. Of the 70 pedagogical assistants contacted, five young Roma women and two young Roma men provided detailed feedback. The responses of these seven individuals reflected their commitment to peer education and their understanding of its benefits.

Pedagogical assistants are employed to provide support to pupils and students and help teachers to work with those children that require additional educational support. Pedagogical assistants also co-

171 All references to Kosovo refer to Kosovo under UNSCR 1244.

operate with parents, as well as with relevant institutions and organizations in the local community.¹⁷²

Pedagogical assistants were asked to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What is your advice to young Roma who would like to become peer educators?
2. Why has the role of peer educator been a positive experience for you?
3. What were the biggest challenges that you have faced as a peer educator?

The hypothesis behind these question was that peer education is beneficial for both young Roma and their Roma peer educators. In addition, it was assumed that Roma peer educators would contribute to improving the academic achievements of young Roma, while also building their capacities for social inclusion.

Group discussion with young Roma women activists

In its National Strategy for Youth 2015-2025, the Serbian Ministry of Youth and Sports cited low rates of school completion among Roma as a key challenge. According to data collected from among 1,800 young people between the ages of 15 and 30 from across Serbia, the principal reasons for not completing school are marriage and pregnancy (1.6 per cent).¹⁷³ Furthermore, illiteracy rates among Roma women are two times greater than among Roma men, while the percentage of young Roma women attending secondary school (6 per cent) is less than half that of young Roma men (14 per cent).¹⁷⁴ As such, it can be assumed that traditional gender roles are a major cause of illiteracy among Roma women and lead to their marginalization in the labour market later in life.¹⁷⁵ With this in mind, it was deemed important to study the experiences of young Roma women regarding the benefits of role models and of peer education in strengthening the social inclusion of the Roma community.

Therefore, a group discussion was held with the participation of 15 young Roma women between the

ages of 18 and 30 from Belgrade and Novi Sad. All of the women involved had participated in a 2014 project called “Roma Alice in Wonderland” that addressed gender issues and that was implemented by the Serbian Roma Youth Association and supported by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The discussion applied participatory learning action (PLA) techniques as a research methodology. Through a PLA technique known as body mapping, young Roma women expressed their perceptions of women role models who had influenced them. The young women were asked to use different objects symbolizing women in their families who had acted as role models and to consider the lessons learned from their experiences. The hypothesis behind this approach was that traditional gender roles influence young Roma women when choosing a role model.

Benefits and limitations of the methodology

The methodology applied was very useful in providing qualitative data for a number of reasons. In particular, the use of different communication channels, including person-to-person interviews, online written consultations and group discussions with participatory elements, meant that young Roma had the opportunity to express themselves in a relaxed and open manner, as well as to provide concrete conclusions and constructive advice.

However, the methodology was limited in its ability to provide quantitative data on the subject at hand, as the number of young Roma involved and their geographical distribution meant that the data was not statistically representative. Instead, the methodology allowed the researcher to explore individual experiences in depth, making the findings suitable for use as case studies. In fact, the open approach taken to communication and the implementation of diverse techniques demonstrated that there are limitations to comparing and correlating the findings. However, comparisons between the experiences of interviewees were not necessary for this paper. Rather, the purpose of this research was to emphasize individual examples that illustrate the issue and contribute to proving the hypothesis.

Background

The Roma community is the largest minority group in the Republic of Serbia. In 2011, during the country’s national census, 147,604 people, or just 2.05

172 “Zakon o osnovama sistema obrazovanja i vaspitanja (Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System)”, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of the Republic of Serbia, p. 74, <<http://www.mpn.gov.rs/propisi/zakoni/obrazovanje-i-vaspitanje/504-zakon-o-osnovama-sistema-obrazovanja>>.

173 “Predlog za Nacionalnu strategiju za mlade”, *op. cit.*, note 168, p. 19.

174 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

175 *Ibid.*

per cent of the total population,¹⁷⁶ identified themselves as Roma.¹⁷⁷ Of these, 75,042 are Roma men and 72,562 are Roma women.¹⁷⁸

However, studies have estimated that Roma in fact make up around 5 per cent of the total population of Serbia.¹⁷⁹ The reasons for the ambiguity surrounding the size of the Roma community in Serbia are numerous. One reason is that there are high levels of internal and external migration among Roma in Serbia. In addition, many Roma choose not to declare their ethnicity owing to prejudices against and stereotypes about the Roma community, and for fear of possible discrimination.

According to the 2011 census, the total number of Roma in northern Serbia (including the Vojvodina region and Belgrade, the capital city) is 69,716.¹⁸⁰ In southern Serbia (including the Šumadija region, western Serbia and south-eastern Serbia), the number of Roma is slightly greater, at 77,888 people.¹⁸¹ The census did not include data from Kosovo and Metohija.¹⁸² It is estimated that 50 per cent of Roma live in approximately 600 settlements, of which 40 per cent are unsanitary.¹⁸³ Roma are also among the most unprivileged groups in Serbian society, as they represent almost 67 per cent of the poorest 25 per cent of the population, while there are no Roma among the richest 25 per cent of the population.¹⁸⁴ In addition, 63 per cent of Roma live in insecure and unsanitary conditions.

Policy framework for the Roma minority in Serbia

The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 has been the most relevant and comprehensive international initiative for the establishment of a policy framework for combating Roma exclusion in central and

south-eastern Europe. The Declaration of the Roma Decade was signed by prime ministers of the participating countries in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 2005. In doing so, governments, international organizations and civil society associations committed to co-operate with one another towards closing the gap between the Roma community and the rest of society. Four priority areas were emphasized, namely housing, education, employment and health. The Roma Decade also devoted special attention to fighting discrimination, reducing poverty and improving the status of Roma women.

On 27 January 2005, the Government of the Republic of Serbia endorsed its first strategic framework for combating Roma exclusion. National action plans were drawn up for each of the four priority areas of the Roma Decade (education, housing, health and employment).¹⁸⁵ In 2009, two significant achievements were realized: the content of the Strategy for Improvement of the Status of Roma in the Republic of Serbia was revised and endorsed, and the National Action Plan for its implementation was established. The action plan covers 13 areas: education, housing, employment, health, culture, media and information, social welfare, access to personal documents, political participation, fighting discrimination, women's issues and the status of internally displaced persons and returnees according to the readmission agreement.¹⁸⁶

According to a report by the Serbian Ombudsman on the implementation of the strategy, although there have been improvements in certain areas, the strategy has not succeeded in eliminating barriers to the social and economic integration of Roma in Serbia.¹⁸⁷ The Ombudsman's report was based on detailed policy analysis, consultations with relevant ministries, institutions and civil society organizations, as well as findings from 500 members of the Roma community from 47 settlements in 30 municipalities in Serbia. The research data showed that 81.2 per cent of Roma felt that their situation had not improved since 2005 when the action plans were first established.¹⁸⁸ On the other hand, two thirds of the Roma questioned

176 2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, (Belgrade: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2012), p. 24.

177 Ibid., p. 22

178 Ibid., p. 26

179 Vitomir Jovanović, Danijela Petrović, Zdenka Milivojević, Julija Jeremić and Predrag Lažetić, *Obrazovna inkluzija dece romske nacionalnosti* (Educational Inclusion of Roma Children), (Belgrade: Centre for Inclusive Policies, 2013), p. 20.

180 2011 Census, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, *op. cit.*, note 174, p. 26.

181 Ibid., p. 50.

182 Ibid., p. 90.

183 Jovanović et al., *op. cit.*, note 177, p. 20.

184 Aleksandra Pejatović, "External evaluation of Equal chances for secondary education project" (unpublished), Belgrade, 2010.

185 Ljuan Koko, Anne-Maria Ćuković, Slavica Vasić, Đurđica Ergić, "Strategy for Improvement of the Status of Roma in the Republic of Serbia", (Belgrade: Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, 2010), p. 5.

186 Ibid.

187 "Izveštaj o sprovođenju strategije za unapređenje položaja Roma sa preporukama", (Belgrade: Office of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Serbia, 2013), p. 4.

188 Ibid., p. 55.

stressed that discrimination is still very much present in private and public life.¹⁸⁹ The report concluded by emphasizing that challenges in the economy cannot be cited as an excuse for not realizing the goals of the strategy. The report also noted the lack of transparency regarding the way financial resources were used for the strategy's implementation, as well as the absence of clear mechanisms to establish the impact of measures implemented under the strategy. Therefore, the planning and implementation of future measures should be based on precise data, a detailed public policy on Roma integration and the clear division of the roles and responsibilities of local governments.¹⁹⁰

Young Roma as a minority group in Serbia

According to data from the 2011 census, there are 36,905 Roma between the ages of 15 and 29, 18,985 of which are young Roma men and 17,920 are young Roma women.¹⁹¹ There are 47,478 Roma children under the age of 15,¹⁹² which means that, according to the census, almost 38 per cent of Roma are younger than 30. The average age of the Roma community is 28.31 (28 for Roma men; 28.63 for Roma women).¹⁹³

In the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for Improvement of the Status of Roma in the Republic of Serbia, young Roma are recognized as an important target group in a number of areas. In particular, the action plan promotes the political participation and representation of young Roma through intensive awareness-raising, as well as through internships in public institutions and municipalities.¹⁹⁴ In education, the action plan includes a programme to support 80 per cent of Roma children and youth to continue their education.¹⁹⁵ Supporting the education of young Roma, especially young Roma wom-

en, is another focus of the action plan.¹⁹⁶ In addition, one of the priorities of the action plan is to build the capacities of and promote employment among Roma, with a special emphasis on Roma women.¹⁹⁷

In terms of the National Strategy for Youth, the document recognizes young Roma as one of the groups that is most at risk of social exclusion. Indeed, the strategy found that most young people in Serbia believe that their peers from vulnerable groups are not sufficiently integrated (52 per cent) and that they do not have equal chances in society (56 per cent).¹⁹⁸ Unfortunately, when asked about specific vulnerable groups, 70 per cent of secondary school students were found to have highly discriminatory attitudes towards Roma.¹⁹⁹ In order to address this issue, one of the goals of the strategy was to develop and implement programmes in formal and non-formal educational settings that promote human and minority rights, diversity and non-violent communication.²⁰⁰

Roma education in Serbia

Formal education is a tool for social inclusion, while the failure to complete education contributes to marginalization, increases poverty rates and limits an individual's possibilities for personal development. According to data from a multiple indicator cluster survey undertaken by the Serbian Statistical Office and UNICEF, 96.5 per cent of Roma children complete primary education.²⁰¹ It is also very encouraging to note that the same survey shows that 51.2 per cent of secondary age Roma youth attend secondary school.²⁰² However, access to secondary education is still limited for the most vulnerable members of the Roma community. It is estimated that only 10 per cent of young Roma living in settlements attend secondary education, compared to 84 per cent of the general population.²⁰³ Accordingly, equal access to education

189 Ibid., p. 56.

190 Ibid., p. 212.

191 "Stanovništvo prema nacionalnoj pripadnosti, starosti i polu po opštinama i gradovima", Census 2011, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia website, 13 December 2014, <http://popis2011.stat.rs/?page_id=2162>.

192 Ibid.

193 Ibid.

194 "Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Improvement of the Status of Roma in the Republic of Serbia", Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of the Republic of Serbia, 2010, p. 4, <<http://www.inkluzija.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Strategija-EN-web-FINAL.pdf>>.

195 Ibid., p. 8.

196 Ibid., p. 65.

197 Ibid., p. 37.

198 "Predlog za Nacionalnu strategiju za mlade", *op. cit.*, note 168, p. 33.

199 Ibid., p. 37.

200 Ibid.

201 "The 2014 Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) and 2014 Serbia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)", Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, Belgrade 2014, p. 18.

202 Ibid.

203 "Predlog za Nacionalnu strategiju za mlade", *op. cit.*, note 168, p. 22.

for young people, and in particular those from vulnerable groups, has been defined as one of the main goals of the National Strategy for Youth 2015-2025.²⁰⁴

Although there is progress in terms of primary school attendance (85 per cent for both Roma boys and girls) and completion rates (65 per cent of Roma boys and 63 per cent of Roma girls), the differences between genders in terms of the rates of transition to secondary school (72 per cent of Roma boys and 39 per cent of Roma girls) and of secondary school attendance (28 per cent of Roma boys and 15 per cent of Roma girls) are alarming.²⁰⁵ This is reflected in illiteracy rates among Roma women, with more than 80 per cent illiteracy rates among Roma women who did not receive an education.²⁰⁶ Wealth status has also been found to play a key role in literacy, as only half of Roma women in the poorest households are literate compared to 90 per cent of the richest.²⁰⁷ Literacy is crucial for Roma women: it defines their role in society, is essential for their survival and even affects the prospects and development of their children.²⁰⁸

The group discussion involving young Roma women showed that they are aware of the gap between their education prospects and those of other women in society, as well as those of young men in the Roma community. They described how traditional gender roles have affected the education, professional aspirations and overall quality of life of their grandmothers and mothers, as well as how gender roles place significant pressures on their own lives. Within their communities, there is still the perception that higher education and professional accomplishments can distance young Roma women from the community and affect their potential for marriage and family life. On the other hand, wider society is not always happy to embrace young Roma women as potential colleagues and/or life partners, and as a result they often struggle to find their place. Nevertheless, the women reported that they feel their current position is slightly better than that of previous generations of Roma women, as the choices, opportunities and support available to

them in the educational and professional spheres are expanding.

The responsibility for obtaining an education should not be placed only on students and their families, as educational accomplishments are also determined by the social and educational contexts in which children live. Therefore, additional and individualized support should be provided to those children, young people and adults who have not benefited from the same opportunities as their peers. By assuming responsibility for the educational accomplishments of children, young people and adults from vulnerable groups, educators also work to decrease social differences. On the other hand, if educators see the deprived position of a student as an educational setback, have low expectations of the student's potential and provide poor quality education, then they are enabling social exclusion and harming the development of the student. This is known as cultural reproduction, and refers to the ways in which educators and/or educational institutions help to reinforce social and economic inequalities from generation to generation.²⁰⁹ Meanwhile, positive experiences of the education process help students to develop ways of thinking and competences that can have beneficial consequences later in life, making their full social inclusion possible.²¹⁰

Peer education

A peer group has been defined as “any collectivity in which the members share some common characteristics, such as age or ethnicity.”²¹¹ Peer group education, as defined by Brammer and Walker, is a “method of information transference or role modeling where a particular type of behaviour is promoted or information transferred.”²¹² Therefore, peer education is based on the reality that many people make changes not only based on what they know, but on the opinions and actions of those close to them and whom they trust. As such, peer educators can communicate and understand the situation of those they assist in a way that the best-intentioned adults cannot, and can serve as role models for change.²¹³

204 Ibid.

205 “The 2014 Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey”, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, *op. cit.*, note 199, p. 20.

206 “Insights: Child rights in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia”, UNICEF, Issue 2, 2014, p. 16.

207 Ibid.

208 Ibid.

209 Jovanović et al., *op. cit.*, note 177, p. 15.

210 Ibid., p. 14

211 “What is peer group education?”, Domino website, <<http://eycb.coe.int/domino/02.html>>.

212 Ibid.

213 “Peer education”, UNICEF website, 25 May 2012, <http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_12078.html>.

According to the “zone of proximal development” concept,²¹⁴ social interaction improves the educational achievements of disadvantaged children, since what they can do today with the support of and in co-operation with their peers, tomorrow they will be able to do alone.²¹⁵ The zone of proximal development refers to all situations in which a child, by participating in an activity, develops a skill or an understanding of a particular topic. In addition, by interacting with a peer, the child is not only gaining knowledge but is also being positively influenced by a role model, allowing the child to receive affirmation and develop social skills.

In Serbia, the profession of youth worker is currently in the process of receiving licensing, as are organizations and institutions that perform youth work in the country. As a leader in the licensing process, the National Association of Practitioners/Youth Workers requires that an individual obtain two levels of education to qualify as a youth worker. The first of these provides knowledge and skills appropriate to the role of peer educator. After completing the first level of education, a person can provide support to youth through projects and activities in the community, according to the social, behavioural, developmental, security and health-related needs of the young people concerned. He/she cannot work or co-ordinate activities independently, but only with the supervision of a superior. The second level of education builds the youth worker’s capacities in developing and co-ordinating different projects and activities, while also training them to act independently and to supervise others.²¹⁶

Peer education is a very valuable tool for providing quality education to members of the Roma community, whose right to quality education has been neglected and violated in the Serbian education system in recent years. Data from 2004 show that 50 per cent of Roma students in the third grade of primary school were unable to per-

form basic mathematics and literacy exercises.²¹⁷ At that time, Roma students received less attention from their teachers, while the curriculum was often simplified for Roma students as expectations of their potential were very low, causing them to develop three times slower than their non-Roma peers. In the 2007/2008 school year, 30 per cent of students at schools for children with learning difficulties were Roma, while 38 per cent of students attending special classes in regular schools for students with learning difficulties were Roma. Such practices effectively amount to the segregation of Roma students and are a direct violation of the right to a quality education, since the curriculum in schools and classes for students with learning difficulties does not equip them for secondary education and, as such, negatively affects their chances of finding work later in life.

Since 2009, Serbia has included in its policy framework on education several recommendations for schools on how to support Roma students and create an inclusive educational environment, including by allowing for one-to-one teaching, additional classes, extracurricular activities and after school programmes. A report on the implementation of these recommendations found that the individual approach of one-to-one teaching is very important for the intellectual development of Roma students, as it provides them with the encouragement and additional support that they require.²¹⁸ Parents are also reported to appreciate after school programmes, as it provides their children with the educational support that they cannot receive at home.²¹⁹

On the other hand, when additional classes are provided they are not always organized appropriately, and Roma students often find they cannot attend them owing to a lack of transportation between school and home or because the classes are held at inconvenient times.²²⁰ The same goes for extracurricular activities, in which Roma students almost never take part despite the potential benefits such activities can have for their self-confidence and social inclusion.²²¹ These findings demonstrate how peers are not sufficiently utilized as a source of educational support, despite the fact that their voluntary contribution in

214 “Readings on the Development of Children”, psy.cmu.edu, 1997, <http://www.psy.cmu.edu/~siegler/vygotsky78.pdf>, p 33.

215 Alex Kozulin, Boris Gindis, Vladimir S. Ageyev and Suzanne M. Miller, *Vygotsky’s educational theory and practice in cultural context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 2.

216 “Another step towards licensing of youth workers”, napor.net, May 2011, p. 12, <http://napor.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10&Itemid=11>.

217 Jovanović et al., *op. cit.*, note 177, p. 15.

218 *Ibid.*, p. 91.

219 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

220 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

221 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

supporting Roma students could be extremely beneficial.²²²

A peer educator is a person who provides informal or organized support to a peer. Usually, peer educators receiving training in peer education for a specific project. They also often start out as beneficiaries of a specific project or activity, and then go on to become peer educators themselves. They are sometimes more informed, experienced and/or skilled than others in their peer group, and as such are willing to share their knowledge. Peer educators should be slightly older than the child or children they support, and usually come from similar social, cultural and economic backgrounds. Children should be able to identify with their peer educator and feel secure and confident in her/his company. Peer educators may work alongside the teacher, run educational activities of their own or even take the lead in organizing and implementing activities.²²³ Qualitative evaluations of school-based peer education programmes have shown that children and young people are positively influenced by peer-led interventions so long as they are well-designed and properly supervised. It has also been shown that serving as a peer educator provides a challenging and rewarding opportunity for young people to develop their leadership skills, gain the respect of their peers and improve their own knowledge base and skills.²²⁴

Peer education: beneficial for Roma students

One important benefit of peer education is that it involves people who belong to the same group. As such, the individuals involved usually share many similar needs, interests and problems. They also “speak the same language,” both literally and figuratively, and can communicate with and understand one another much more easily than with people from outside of their group. Pedagogical assistants consulted as part of this study emphasized that it is very important that peer educators are informed about a child’s background, living conditions, everyday activities, responsibilities, family relations and learning preferences and capacities. This information is very useful for selecting the most adequate learning approach and for creating a safe and encouraging environment for the child.

One of the most important benefits of peer education for Roma students are the knowledge, skills and

self-confidence they gain, all of which allow them to keep up with other children and to successfully integrate in their peer group and school environment. Integration is a very challenging task for many reasons, some of which are related to the unequal starting positions that Roma children face, including difficult living conditions, having Serbian as a second language and a lack of stimuli for their intellectual development. Instead of receiving encouragement and support, Roma students are often told that they are less capable, worthy or intelligent than their non-Roma peers. Even those who defy these negative messages and develop self-confidence are still more likely to conclude that, for others, they will always be under-achievers and that it does not make much sense to try to prove otherwise. Peer educators can transform these messages and empower young Roma to overcome the obstacles themselves:

“Peer educators can provide very valuable assistance in overcoming the difficulties that Roma students face. They can help with the language barrier and encourage Roma girls to continue with their studies. They can also help in overcoming prejudice against and stereotypes about Roma in the majority population and vice versa. Roma students need help with the school curriculum, but also in solving other problems at school and at home. It is important to build their self-confidence and motivate them to continue their education.” (From online correspondence with a 26-year-old Roma woman from Niš, 5 September 2011).

Through the peer education process, Roma students can receive quality support from a motivated and approachable peer. The peer educator is able to communicate with the student appropriately, and has valuable learning tools and experiences to offer:

“This means that we have to be very good students, so that we are able to transfer knowledge properly to others. As a peer educator, you must be patient and must not become agitated if the student cannot understand you immediately. The point is to help the student to develop working habits and to learn how to learn.” (From online correspondence with a 25-year-old Roma man from Kragujevac, 6 September 2011). In addition, peer educators provide important support to young Roma in understanding and accepting their identity. They can share their own experiences and encourage peers not to feel ashamed of their ethnic, cultural and/or religious background. It is very important for the development and self-confidence of

222 Ibid., p. 99.

223 “Peer education”, UNICEF website, *op. cit.*, note 211.

224 Ibid.

young Roma to understand that it is not acceptable to treat people differently or exclude them because they are different. One peer educator included in this study strongly recommended this type of reassurance:

“It is very important to show children from marginalized groups that they are not alone and that they have somebody who will help them. It is also important to let them know that they should not give up, that they should stand up to any discrimination in school and study hard so that they can achieve what they want in life.” (From online correspondence with a 26-year-old Roma woman from Belgrade, 15 September 2011).

The pedagogical assistants consulted for this study stated that peer education demands a lot of patience, persistence and personal motivation. A peer educator needs to be a role model in every situation and at all times in order to maintain the student’s confidence and have a long-term impact on her or him. Through peer education, pedagogical assistance can empower young Roma boys and girls and encourage them to strive for a better life by providing them with a personal and relevant example.

Peer education: beneficial for peer educators

One particular advantage of peer education is that it is mutually beneficial, and provides peer educators themselves with opportunities to gain deeper insights and experiences. As such, peer education can provoke personal and behavioural changes in both the student and in the peer educator. The young Roma interviewed for this study see the role of peer educator as stimulating and fulfilling, but also as demanding a great deal of responsibility. For them, peer education is the most efficient way to give back to their communities and to show appreciation for the support they received from their own role models.

By actively contributing to the Roma community, peer educators develop communication and co-operation skills, while also gaining valuable work experience and respect for their competences both at work and among the Roma community. The peer educators interviewed for this study also emphasized the benefits of being able to support children in overcoming the challenges they face, including language barriers, access to quality education and prejudice towards and stereotypes about the Roma community.

The role of peer educator brings with it a sense of great satisfaction and personal accomplishment in making a valuable contribution to the development of peers and the community. As one peer educators em-

phasized, it is also an experience that provides ample opportunities to advocate for education:

“I would strongly recommend that young people become peer educators, as it is humanitarian work and very important for improving the education of Roma students. It is a great experience to be a voluntary peer educator. It is also very satisfying, as through my own example I can demonstrate the importance of education to young Roma. As a result, they treat me as a role model.” (From online correspondence with a 30-year-old Roma woman from Jagodina, 5 September 2011).

By providing educational support, peer educators also develop their own knowledge and skills, including their ability to communicate and co-operate with their peers and with other actors, such as teachers and parents. Some of those interviewed even reported discovering and/or fulfilling their professional ambitions through peer education:

“By helping these children, we gain work experience and a new ‘school’ for ourselves. My biggest satisfaction was when education professionals noticed and appreciated the improvements that my students and I had achieved.” (From online correspondence with a 27-year-old Roma woman from Leskovac, 4 September 2011).

It is also important to mention that peer education can be beneficial for peer educators as a way to spend their free time in a meaningful manner doing something they enjoy. Peer education is a constructive, useful and age-appropriate expression of civic activism. This is how one peer educator described the experience:

“I feel great working with them. Children are spontaneous and when they make a mistake they don’t do it on purpose. I enjoy every moment of my experience as a peer educator.” (From online correspondence with a 25-year-old Roma woman from Valjevo, 5 September 2011).

Challenges of peer education

Being a peer educator can be very challenging, as it demands strong motivation and a specific set of skills. First of all, peer education requires time, and the results are not immediately visible. Some peer educators find it challenging to invest a significant amount of time and energy in their work without seeing the desired results right away. It can also be challenging to establish a mutual understanding with the student of the roles and boundaries of their relationship. As

peers, the peer educator and student should be close and be able to trust each other. At the same time, the peer educator is responsible for the process of peer education and needs to have a certain amount of authority.

As a young person, the student is in a specific phase of development and, as such, is likely to be searching for her or his place while processing a range of different influences and experiences and trying to integrate these into her or his own life. The peer educator should make sure that the student has space in which to safely express and explore all the dilemmas that he or she faces. The student requires support not only in improving school grades, but also in finding her or his own path in life and in making decisions about the future. That is why it is so important to really get to know the student and to be approachable, as one peer educator explained:

“Young people who want to work with children from marginalized groups must have a lot of understanding. They have to know the conditions in which the students live and the details of their daily life. You can achieve good results if you include time for playing in your activities, as these children often don't have time to play at home. Outdoor activities are also very important, because these children usually assume adult responsibilities at home.” (From online correspondence with a 25-year-old Roma woman from Valjevo, 5 September 2011).

Peer educators must also gain the trust of parents/guardians and teachers and co-operate with them. This demands good communication skills and the ability to develop mutual understanding since, as mentioned, adults might feel that the peer educator is interfering in their role. In this regard, parents/guardians and teachers might interpret the peer educator's involvement as criticism of their own performance as a parent/guardian or teacher. In addition, since the peer educator is in direct contact with the child, he or she might face challenges with regard to the child's age, level of knowledge and ability to focus and combine education with other extracurricular responsibilities. Such challenges can make the relationship between a peer educator and student difficult, but it can also make it very interesting, as it helps the peer educator to learn. That is why it is always good for peer educators to continuously develop their capacities through informal education. Their peer education experience is always more efficient and effective

if they have their own mentor or supervisor to consult while performing the role of peer educator.

Through the challenges they face, peer educators can learn a lot of valuable lessons for the future. Such challenges also allow them to develop their self-confidence, communication skills and creativity. The following statement is a very good illustration of the value of challenges:

“I gave classes in Serbian and English and had to be very creative to keep the children's attention. Therefore, I invented different games, songs and role plays to engage their interest and motivate them. With some students I had to work on very basic elements, even though they were 16 and 17 years old.” (From online correspondence with a 26-year-old Roma woman from Belgrade, 15 September 2011).

Indeed, there are as many challenges as there are situations, but in terms of peer education some of the most significant challenges relate to teaching approaches, as described in the previous statement. Peer educators need to tailor their approach, expectations and methods to each child based on the child's current position. In doing so, the peer educator will be able to select the most appropriate teaching tools: “In order to know how to teach, it is important to find out what kinds of difficulties the students face when learning. This can be done in co-operation with a professional from the school (including pedagogues, psychologists and teachers). Depending on the difficulties they face, some students might learn better in a particular space or with particular learning tools.” (From online correspondence with a 24-year-old Roma man from Novi Sad, 1 September 2011).

As mentioned above, by interacting with the student and trying to have a positive impact on her or his life, a peer educator is also often in a position to communicate and co-operate with the student's parents/guardians and teachers. Since peer education is fairly uncommon, and because adults feel responsible for students' well-being, they might not always be entirely supportive of the work of the peer educator in the beginning. Therefore, contact with the child's parents/guardians and teachers should be understood as part of the peer education process, and something that also requires time and effort. The following is the experience of one peer educator in this regard:

“It is also important to have good contact with the family and to keep them informed about the student's achievements. In the very beginning I had many difficulties. Parents did not want the child to learn, and

would say to me: ‘Why are you talking about education, what is the purpose of education when there is no work!?’ The teacher was confused about my role: ‘I am an educated professional: I don’t need your help, I can manage alone.’ In time, I co-operated well with both parties. Peer educators should show an understanding of the difficult work that parents and teachers do in educating and bringing up a child. Students need love and a little bit of attention. My biggest reward was seeing their smiles and good grades.” (From online correspondence with a 26-year-old Roma woman from Niš, 5 September 2011).

Role models

Robert Merton has defined a role model as a person who serves as an example of a positive outcome.²²⁵ Role models are important sources of support, empowerment and development for young Roma. As mentioned above, for the purpose of this paper, preparation interviews were conducted with young Roma who have been recognized as role models by their peers. When asked who their role models are, young Roma mentioned family members, school teachers and youth workers from civil society organizations. Family members and local activists seem to be the most influential people for young Roma and the people from whom they learn the most. Role models are seen as especially important at three crucial points in a young person’s life: during significant changes in life circumstances (for example, the separation of parents, internal/external migration and when there is a risk that the young person will leave school prematurely), when the young person is considering her/his professional future, and when he or she is faced with identity issues (such as accepting her/his Roma identity, facing prejudices and stereotypes and advocating for the Roma community). Receiving support at these junctures builds the self-confidence of young Roma and motivates them to support their peers in the Roma community. One quality that all young Roma stressed as important for being a good role model is personal integrity. Role models have to be able to follow their principles at all times and in all situations, and must lead by example and not only by talking about their values. It is also important for them to be accomplished, have achievements and actively

contribute to their community. As one of the young Roma interviewed described, a role model is a person you can identify with and who you wish to become:

“When I came to Belgrade, I began volunteering and met a Roma girl who had finished university. That was the first time I had come across a Roma person who had been educated to that level. She was involved in multiple jobs and activities, and managed to handle everything successfully while still being very devoted to her family. I also felt like we had a lot in common. That is why she is my role model”. (From an interview with a 23-year-old Roma man from Belgrade, 18 November 2014).

A good role model offers constructive criticism, knows the young person very well and provides her or him with the encouragement to realize their potential. A good role model offers support and advice, but also leaves the final decision to the person whose life is at stake:

“It is not always easy to be a role model. You have to be careful with your promises and be sure that you want the role and know what advice to give. You have to do it with your heart, because if you don’t, you will not succeed. I wish that more people would become role models.” (From an interview with a 23-year-old Roma man from Belgrade, 18 November 2014).

A good role model makes her or his peer feel safe and develops a relationship based on confidence. Without such a relationship, it is difficult to establish goals and to achieve results. As a role model, it is crucial to show confidence in one’s peers by sharing responsibilities with them that are appropriate to their capacities and age. This is important because it influences their self-confidence and self-perception. It also changes the way they are perceived within their peer group. Good role models also need to communicate on the same level with their peers, show respect for their personality and demonstrate plenty of understanding.

“I always felt the pressure to do the best and be the best. Therefore, I really needed somebody who could guide me objectively according to my abilities and age. This is what I now call internal and external motivation. Internal motivation you provide yourself, and external motivation is what others provide you when you are not happy.” (From an interview with a 23-year-old Roma man from Belgrade, 18 November 2014).

Young Roma role models often face their own challenges, as they are expected to share their personal

225 Ann Cartwright and Amanda Solloway, *Emotional intelligence: Activities for developing you and your business* (Ashgate, 2015), <https://www.ashgate.com/pdf/SamplePages/Emotional_Intelligence_Cartwright_Solloway_Act_19.pdf>.

stories, provide examples and encouragement to other community members. In doing so, it is important for role models not to create the expectation among peers that by following in their footsteps they will achieve the exact same outcome. It is often challenging to provide encouragement based on personal experience while also coming up with guidance that is tailored to each person.

Moreover, young Roma role models do not always follow the traditional way of life. Therefore, they might create a personal conflict for their peers regarding how to develop their full potential while staying part of the community. Similarly, Roma community members might see Roma role models as outsiders, while the general population might perceive them as the beneficiaries of positive discrimination. As such, young Roma role models must constantly prove their worth within the Roma community and among the general population. They need to try to be seen as role models first and as young Roma second, and to be appreciated for the positive examples they provide and for their accomplishments. Only in that way they will others recognize them as individuals instead of labeling and stereotyping them.

The contribution of role models to the social inclusion of young Roma

Young Roma who are surrounded by successful people with whom they can identify are already one step closer to social inclusion. This is because they have direct access to the role model and can learn by interacting with her or him. When asked who their role models are, almost all the young Roma interviewed first mentioned family members. This is perhaps only natural, as we tend to first think about who and how we want to be at a very early age, when most of us are surrounded by our parents and other family members. For many people, family is the first source of security and confidence. The following statement provides a good illustration of this:

“My mum is my primary role model. She has always given me unconditional support. Also, looking back, it seems that I always ended up in the same place as my older sister. I followed her path because I trusted her decisions.” (From an interview with a 23-year-old Roma woman from Belgrade, 21 November 2014).

When asked about their grandmothers and mothers, young Roma women reported that they saw them as a source of resilience despite their difficult life circumstances. They also mentioned that their

grandmothers had fewer opportunities for personal development and faced more barriers in making their own choices in life. Although they acknowledged that their mothers’ generation experienced some positive changes and enjoyed more liberties, young Roma women still feel that traditional expectations and gender roles inhibited their mothers’ ability to realize their goals.

Role models can contribute to the social inclusion of young Roma by encouraging them to strengthen their personal capacities. They also empower them to choose their own path regardless of expectations coming from within or from outside the community. Self-confidence and self-reliance are very valuable lessons to learn:

“The most important person in my upbringing was my mother. She is my role model. I will never forget when she told me that I learn for myself and not for her. I used to ask her to do my homework for me, and she used to say that she finished school a long time ago. She would help, but would not do my homework for me because she knew I would need the knowledge one day.” (From an interview with a 20-year-old Roma woman from Belgrade, 20 November 2014).

Access to institutions and services in the community can also determine the level of social inclusion. Many young Roma find accessing institutions and services a challenge, and role models can help to overcome this. Schools should be supportive and provide lessons on life and personal development. Unfortunately, schools do not always do so, but one young Roma was fortunate to find a role model in his first school:

“I had an excellent teacher in primary school in Kosovo, but unfortunately over the years we lost contact. I was once a bit angry with her because she told me that I don’t read well in front of others. However, this criticism made me try harder and I became stronger. I wish I could call her now and let her know I am a university student. She used to tell us that it is not important what we wear to school as long as it is clean. She said it is important to study and forge our own futures and have a better life.” (From an interview with a 23-year-old Roma man from Belgrade, 18 November 2014).

The contribution of role models to Roma youth activism

Role models are also activists in the community. The support and positive examples they provide have a

domino effect on other community members. The young Roma interviewed described sharing the skills, encouragement and self-confidence that they had received from their role models with their peers in the Roma community. This was done through peer education activities aimed at young Roma, including by providing additional classes on the school curriculum, by leading interactive workshops on important topics, by providing peer-to-peer counselling and by volunteering for different projects and centres.

This experience made them more aware of their peers and brought them closer to the Roma community. They also got to witness the positive impact of their support and active participation:

“I volunteered in a day care centre for children who live and/or work on the street. Most of them were from the Roma community. They could relate to me better, saw me as closer to them and expected me to have more understanding than other volunteers. The experience also defied many of my own stereotypes. The children came from loving and supportive families, despite their difficult living conditions and circumstances.” (From an interview with a 24-year-old Roma woman from Belgrade, 21 November 2014).

The positive impact of role models does not stop there: through their good examples, role models provide inspiration and indirectly positively influence their peers in the Roma community. Young Roma who make the first brave steps towards personal fulfilment show that it can be done and provide examples for others to follow. The following statement describes how one role model perceives this role:

“I am the only one from my generation who finished secondary school. Now everybody finishes secondary school. Children tell me that they also want to become teachers. I tell them to take one step at the time. Some of them I advised directly, others observed me meeting other children from outside the community, including non-Roma, and started to do the same.” (From an interview with a 20-year-old Roma woman from Belgrade, 20 November 2014).

Another respondent described how role models give young Roma the opportunity to explore their Roma identity, learn more about the Roma community and integrate this understanding into their personality:

“Thanks to my own role model and my work as a peer educator, I have learned a lot about Roma identity and my community. I used to be prejudiced against

my own people.” (From an interview with a 20-year-old Roma woman from Belgrade, 20 November 2014).

Conclusions

The current education system in Serbia is much improved compared to previous years. Roma students are now recognized as a vulnerable group in need of affirmative measures owing to their unequal starting positions in education compared to their non-Roma peers. Nevertheless, statistical data show that affirmative measures are not always used effectively and are not implemented for all Roma students. Data also confirm that the current policy framework does not reflect the actual situation facing Roma children. Therefore, it is crucial that transparent mechanisms are established for implementing and monitoring the implementation of these affirmative measures so that they are available for all Roma students. Peer educators can help to make affirmative measures more accessible to their peers, and can play a significant role in supporting their peers to become beneficiaries of affirmative measures. This paper has found that peer education programmes work best when supervised by responsible adults (including teachers and the school administration) and with the participation of students’ parents or guardians.

There is limited data on young Roma, and there is currently no policy framework that is specifically aimed at improving their social inclusion. Young Roma are mentioned in the national policy framework for youth as a vulnerable group, but not in policies targeting the Roma community. A specific policy framework should be created with the full participation of young Roma. In many ways, the Roma community’s potential for improvement rests with young Roma, who represent both the current and future work force and who, through their activism, can generate the necessary policy changes. By investing in the formal and non-formal education of youth and by building their capacities for political and civic participation, Roma youth can take the lead in strengthening the social inclusion and development of the Roma community. It is of crucial importance that Roma youth are provided with a quality education, as well as with opportunities to gain work experience through internships and volunteering.

Cultural reproduction is a particular problem for the Roma community, with forces both within and without the community exacerbating its social exclu-

sion. Long-term social exclusion has made generations of Roma and non-Roma believe that Roma are and always will be second-class citizens. That is why it is very important to promote positive examples of successful Roma through affirmative measures. At the same time, potential Roma role models should be encouraged to reach out to the Roma community and to lobby and represent the Roma community among the general public.

Peer education and the promotion of positive role models encourage young Roma to overcome obstacles and challenges and to take control of their own lives. It gives them the opportunity to bring about change in the world around them and to feel good about who they are. This paper has shown that the experience of being or having a peer educator and/or role model is not only about gaining knowledge and improving one's skills: it is also about discovering and appreciating one's self-worth. It empowers both the beneficiaries and the people around them. Providing role models and peer education to young Roma is a valuable way of generating positive attitudes both in and towards the Roma community. It is a powerful tool that can decrease the social divide between Roma and non-Roma, while simultaneously strengthening the equal treatment, human rights and social inclusion of Roma.

The Political Participation of Roma Youth: What Is It and Why Do We Need It?

Tudorel Taba²²⁶

This paper was written by the author, a young Roma activist, for the Roma and Sinti Youth Conference: Activism, Participation, Security, organized by the OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues. The opinions contained herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the OSCE, ODIHR, or any participating State.

Introduction

This paper addresses the role of youth political participation in advancing the social inclusion of Roma and the representation of their political interests. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the factors that hinder the political participation of Roma youth in Romania and to propose policy recommendations in order to improve the levels of their political involvement. It will be argued that the absence of efficient policies to enable youth participation, low levels of political knowledge and a lack of motivation and willingness to participate hinder the political involvement of Roma youth and further undermine the equal representation of their interests. Further, this paper explains the relationship between political participation and representation. Although these two terms are used almost interchangeably when discussing the concept of democracy, the distinction between them is not as obvious as it might at first seem. In order to discuss why we need political participation, we must first understand what it entails. One of the most ambitious aims of this paper is to provide an incipient narrative of political participation among Roma youth.

Political participation is a tool used by citizens of a country to engage in decision-making processes. Verba and Nie define political participation as “those activities by private citizens that are more or less direct-

ly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take.”²²⁷

Political participation does not only refer to the right of every citizen in a democracy to vote and be elected to public office; it can also be defined as active participation in all aspects of community and social life. Political participation can be institutionalized and non-institutionalized. Institutionalized forms of participation include voting and running for office, whereas non-institutionalized forms include demonstrating, political consumerism, signing petitions and other forms of civic activism. As such, political participation includes everything from getting involved in the choice of a policy to defending and promoting human rights. However, all these forms of political participation have the same purpose: the equal representation of interests. Although participation does not equal representation, they are mutually dependent: one cannot achieve representation without participation, while increased participation leads to better representation. This paper addresses institutionalized forms of political participation – namely, running for public office and voting in elections – with a particular focus on youth participation.

Methodology

The methodology carried out in preparation for this paper was mixed, and included a meta-analysis of political participation frameworks and the literature on youth political participation, as well as the results of a survey distributed among Roma youth.

The purpose of the survey was to establish a narrative of political participation among Roma youth, with a special focus on Roma in Romania. The survey

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227 Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 2.

sample was composed of 40 young Roma students and activists from Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Moldova and Romania, with the majority (25 out of 40) coming from Romania. Respondents were aged between 18 and 30 years old. Roma from different countries were included in the sample in order to analyse the Roma youth narrative across different country contexts, and to gain a comparative perspective of Roma youth political participation.

Surveys were conducted via telephone, Internet and face-to-face meetings. Due to a lack of resources for travel and the mass distribution of the survey, the convenience sampling method was applied, with respondents selected owing to their availability and proximity.

The survey was semi-structured to allow for better interaction between respondents and the interviewer. The survey questions assessed respondents' understanding of political representation, as well as the importance they place on political participation. Respondents were also asked questions regarding their willingness to engage in political participation and the reasons for their response in this regard. Towards the end of the survey, respondents were asked whether they think that Roma youth and women have enough opportunities to participate in politics, and were invited to make recommendations on how to increase political participation among Roma youth and women.

One limitation of the research was the small data sample applied, as it was not representative of all Roma young people. In recognition of this limitation, the research results are not meant to generalize, but rather to provide an incipient narrative of Roma youth political participation. One of the most important aims of this paper is to raise awareness of youth participation and to generate discussions on possible solutions to increasing the presence of Roma youth in politics, both as candidates for public office and as informed voters.

The empirical value of this paper rests on establishing a narrative of Roma youth based on their perceptions and attitudes towards political participation. To this end, the survey was intended to explore how Roma youth perceive political participation. More specifically, this paper looks at whether Roma youth are willing to formally participate as voters and candidates, and reviews the obstacles preventing them from doing so.

Why is political participation important for Roma youth and women?

I came across the issue of the perception of political participation among young Roma as a youth trainer in summer camps organized by two non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Romani CRISS and ADIS, from Romania. When discussing Roma political participation in Romania with other young Roma, I very often received the same response: "Sorry, I am not interested in politics; I am more concerned about the active participation of Roma youth in our community life". My assumption is that a better understanding of the purpose of political participation among Roma youth could in fact increase their involvement in decision-making processes. By providing Roma youth with sufficient information about the uses of political participation and raising awareness of its benefits, more of them will be inspired to run for office. What many young Roma are not aware of is that political participation will enable them to access decision-making processes. Simply put, political participation gives Roma youth and women control over their decisions, since decisions will no longer be made **for them**, but rather **with them**. Political participation affords every individual the possibility to actively participate in democratic decision-making processes. A generally understood answer to why we need political participation is that participating in decision-making processes allows us to choose a government that acts in our interests. It is widely acknowledged that high levels of political participation lead to the equal representation of different interests, thereby enhancing the democratic process.

Democracy is often described as government by the people, for the people. As such, democracy is predicated on broad public participation in decision-making processes based on the principles of equality and consensus. Democratic systems are also defined by their respect for human rights and civil liberties, as well as the support provided to all citizens. In this way, democracy should ensure the rights of all, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups. The status of a minority within a democracy is directly linked to the quality of that democracy, with minorities' access to decision-making processes signalling a healthy democracy in which minority interests

are represented.²²⁸ The fulfilment of minority rights, including political rights, is essential for the functioning of a fully democratic state and society.

The question that many young people struggle with is: how do we become engaged in politics? The answers are surprisingly simple: get involved in the life of your community, be informed about the electoral process, vote in elections, become a candidate for public office and participate in policy making. Political participation is a complex activity and includes any involvement in community life, civil society and politics. This functional definition will be used in this paper to assess the narrative of political participation among Roma youth in 2014.

An overview of Roma political participation in Europe

The Roma minority is one of the largest minorities in Europe, with an estimated population of between 10 and 12 million scattered throughout the continent. In general, the socio-economic status of Roma is lower than that of the general population of any European country, and is the major concern of many transnational and national entities that deal with Roma issues, including NGOs, EU institutions and state institutions. The issues facing the Roma community include discrimination in accessing education, health and housing services, as well as a lack of political participation and representation.

In general, Roma political participation in elections has increased in recent years, especially at the local level.²²⁹ For example, in Hungary, local minority self-governments have acted as liaisons between Roma communities and the municipal government, providing local Roma communities with the opportunity to participate in public affairs. However, the political power that the local self-governments possess

is very limited.²³⁰ In Romania, offices of the local expert on Roma issues have been established that, similar to the Hungarian local minority self-governments, provide an institutional bridge between the Roma community and the local government. The offices have become more effective, but the limited political power of the experts impedes their ability to generate changes that benefit Roma communities.

In 2009, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) published a Roma assessment study that included information on the political participation of Roma in Romania. Roma interviewed for the study reported that their interactions with political party representatives outside of elections are rare and mostly negative.²³¹ In the majority of European countries, the percentage of Roma politicians in parliament does not allow for the interests of the Roma population to be represented in an efficient and effective way. Very often, Roma politicians lack the necessary influence to make substantial improvements to their communities, and they are frequently used by mainstream parties as tokens in order to generate votes. As a result, Roma are under-represented even in those countries that provide mechanisms to ensure their political representation.

Furthermore, there is insufficient statistical and qualitative data regarding the participation of Roma youth and women in decision-making processes, including the rates at which they vote in elections and run for public office. There is also insufficient aggregate data on the political participation of Roma youth and women in Europe as a whole.

Factors that hinder the political participation of Roma youth in Romania

According to the 2012 census in Romania, there are 621,600²³² Roma living in the country, making Roma the second largest national minority in Romania.

228 OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), *The Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life & Explanatory Note* (The Hague: HCNM, 1999), p. 7, <<http://www.osce.org/hcnm/32240?download=true>>.

229 See Székely István Gergő, *The political representation of Roma in Romania* (Cluj-Napoca: Institutul pentru Studierea Problemelor Minoritatilor Nationale (ISPMN), 2009); and “Reflections on the 2014 European Parliament Election”, Decade for Roma Inclusion website, 2014, <<http://www.romadecade.org/contributions-from-decade-partners/reflections-on-the-2014-european-parliament-elections/9755>>.

230 Kai A. Schafft and David L. Brown, “Social Capital and Grassroots Development: The case of Roma Self-Governance in Hungary”, *Social Problems*, Vol. 47, No.2, 2000, pp. 201-214.

231 “Appendix IV: NDI’s Roma Assessment Study 2009: The analysis of Focus Groups – Main Results”, Center for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS), 2009, pp. 5-6, in: “Assessment of barriers to Roma political participation in Romania”, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), <https://www.ndi.org/Assessment_of_Barriers_to_Roma_Political_Participation_in_Romania_09_09>.

232 This number is based on the 2011 census in Romania, available at: <<http://www.recensamantromania.ro/>>.

However, the number of Roma in Romania is estimated by several researchers to be as much as 2 million people.²³³ Despite being one of the largest minorities in Europe, levels of political participation among Roma are much lower than the national average in the countries in which they live. In Romania, as elsewhere, poor socio-economic status and low levels of political awareness among Roma mean that the use of their vote can be easily influenced, further hindering all aspects of their political participation. However, there are significant differences between the political participation of the Hungarian minority and the political participation of Roma in Romania. In 2012, 315 representatives of the Hungarian minority ran for the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the Romanian parliament, and another 137 ran for the Senate,²³⁴ while a total of just seven Roma representatives ran for both houses. Such differences in the political representation of two minorities reflect their different levels of political organization, as political representatives of the Hungarian minority are well organized and enjoy better communication than their Roma counterparts. In addition, Roma political parties have not formed a joint working platform and are often un-supportive of each other's activities. Moreover, Roma leaders tend to find themselves in rather conflictual situations and do not undertake joint efforts to support policies meant to improve the political participation of Roma. The tense relationship between Roma political representatives can be observed in their public discourses, in which they often criticize other Roma leaders.

Other factors affecting Roma political participation are a general lack of willingness among Roma to participate, as well as insufficient incentives for them to do so. This disposition is caused both by the absence of effective policies to enable their political participation, as well as the unsatisfactory performance of the major Roma party in Romania. Despite having seats in the Romanian Parliament, the poor performance of the Roma party has caused Roma to lose

faith in their leaders. As result, Roma in Romania do not trust the political system to have a positive impact on their socio-economic situation and, as a result, do not engage in politics.

Political participation is also a relatively new activity among Roma communities at the local level and, consequently, many Roma do not pay sufficient attention to political and decision-making processes, thereby allowing mainstream parties to use Roma voters as a means to achieve their own ends.

A lack of incentives to participate in politics together with low levels of political awareness result in low rates of voter turnout and the problem of vote buying. Low levels of political awareness prevent Roma representatives from being elected and Roma interests from being represented in politics. Very often, Roma are not informed of the actual voting process and of the importance of participation. As such, there is low awareness among Roma of the voting process at the municipal and local council levels and, as a result, Roma assume that voting and participating in politics are not important.

Due to the above-mentioned factors, the majority of Roma do not participate in politics. Possibly the most serious issue concerning Roma political participation is the problem of vote buying, which effectively transforms a channel of political participation into a means to manipulate the Roma population.²³⁵ Many incidents of vote buying have been recorded in the media, with political parties offering Roma material goods or small amounts of money in exchange for their votes. This phenomenon is more widespread in rural areas, where the low socio-economic status of Roma allows political candidates to manipulate voters without having to expend substantial resources and effort.²³⁶

However, perhaps the most significant obstacle to Roma political participation is the electoral law itself. Despite the fact that Romania is a democratic state, the possibility of establishing a political party – a key political and constitutional right – is limited by

233 Grigoras Badescu et al., "Roma Inclusion Barometer", Open Society Foundation, 2007, p. 12.

234 Eliana Radulescu, "Alegeri Parlamentare 2012: Câți candidați are UDMR la Camera Deputaților și Senat. Cât la sută dintre aceștia sunt femei și reprezentanți ai organizației de tineret", mediafax.ro, 31 October 2012, <<http://www.mediafax.ro/politic/alegeri-parlamentare-2012-cati-candidati-are-udmr-la-camera-deputatilor-si-senat-cat-la-suta-dintre-acestia-sunt-femei-si-reprezentanti-ai-organizatiei-de-tineret-10268326>>.

235 See, for example, Andreea Tobias and Diana Stancovici, "Daniel Cioabă: Romii nu-și mai dau votul pentru un litru de ulei, așteptăm programe pentru etnie", mediafax.ro, 7 October 2014, <<http://www.mediafax.ro/social/daniel-cioaba-romii-nu-si-mai-dau-votul-pentru-un-litru-de-ulei-asteptam-programe-pentru-etnie-13369554>>.

236 "Romania Parliamentary Elections 9 December 2012", OSCE/ODIHR Election Expert Team Final Report, 16 January 2013, pp. 18-20, <<http://www.osce.org/odihr/98757?download=true>>.

certain laws that are in effect unconstitutional. According to Romania's constitution, national minorities have the right to be represented in parliament. However, legislation passed in 2011 demands that potential ethnic minority parties fulfil excessively onerous requirements in order to register. Thus, the legislation requires that such organizations wishing to submit a candidature present a list of members to the Central Electoral Bureau within a 30 day deadline showing that at least 15 per cent of the total population belong to a certain ethnicity.²³⁷ Known as the "public utility certificate", this document is granted by the Romanian Government according to Law no. 26/2000 on associations and foundations.²³⁸ According to this law, the government indirectly regulates the process of parliamentary elections, which constitutes an interference with the legislative, making the law unconstitutional since matters related to political participation should be ruled by the legislative power (parliament), not by the executive power (the government). In addition, the public utility certificate cannot be obtained by organizations that "conduct political activities or support political formations",²³⁹ despite the fact that obtaining the certificate is a requirement for establishing a political party. As such, Roma political participation is restricted by legislative measures that prevent the formation of parties due to the intervention of the executive power over the legislative.²⁴⁰

Creating an incipient narrative of political participation among Roma youth

Will Kymlicka has argued that national minorities should be allowed to engage in nation building in order to maintain their distinct societal cultures.²⁴¹ In relation to Roma political participation, this argument can be applied when considering whether it is more

beneficial for Roma to create their own parties or to place Roma candidates on mainstream party lists. While mainstream parties are responsible for representing Roma citizens regardless of the ethnic composition of the party, relying on mainstream parties to do so has not led to notable improvements in the political and socio-economic status of Roma. Meanwhile, the communication barriers between Roma voters and non-Roma politicians can be overcome by introducing Roma candidates into mainstream parties. As described above, strict requirements in the electoral regulations and the poor functioning of the legislative apparatus in Romania make it difficult to establish minority parties. In order to change this, Roma youth must study the electoral laws and regulations and apply pressure on the responsible state institutions to amend these.

When it comes to increasing political participation among Roma, young Roma are an underutilized force. Indeed, Roma youth are not specifically referred to in any legislative measure regarding political participation. The majority of young Roma interviewed expressed concerns regarding the lack of policies to enable their political participation. Roma youth encounter serious obstacles when engaging in politics, and political actors should take much greater interest in increasing their participation.

Roma women are especially marginalized in Romania and have some of the lowest rates of participation in politics. One young Roma woman interviewed stated that, in her case, participation is practically impossible owing to the lack of support from community leaders and the total absence of measures in Romanian legislation that specifically address the political participation of women. The vast majority of those interviewed agreed that it is of utmost importance that Roma women engage in politics, and noted that gender discrimination in political participation is especially pronounced. The interviewees argued that women do not have sufficient opportunities to participate in politics and that those wishing to do so are not treated seriously.

"As a young Roma woman, I encounter a lot of obstacles when it comes to participation. I wanted to run as a candidate for a local councillor office in my home town but I didn't receive any support from the local leader. He told me that there is no place for a young inexperienced girl like me in politics and that I need to gain more experience and knowledge about the 'mayoralty businesses' if I want to get elected. But

237 Romanian Constitution, Law No. 35/2008 (2011), article 9, para. 3, <[www.becparlamentare2012.ro/.../Legislatie/legea%2035%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.becparlamentare2012.ro/.../Legislatie/legea%2035%20(1).pdf)>.

238 Government of Romania, Government Ordinance No. 26/2000, regarding associations and foundations (2000), <<http://legislatie.resurse-pentru-democratie.org/legea/OG-26-2000.php>>.

239 Law on organizations of public utility, regarding instructions for obtaining a public utility certificate, <www.fdsc.ro/documente/85.doc>.

240 "Romania Parliamentary Elections 9 December 2012", OSCE/ODIHR, *op. cit.*, note 234.

241 Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

how can I gain experience if I am not allowed to participate?” (Interview with a Roma woman from Albania).

When asked about the importance of the political participation of Roma women, most respondents (both male and female) argued that more women are needed in politics in order to bring about systemic change and to achieve equal representation.

“[We need more women in politics] because of the patriarchal society which we live in, where women are not valued equally compared to men, but also simply because women can and do bring about the change too.” (Interview with a Roma woman from Serbia).

According to the Roma interviewed for this study, more senior members of the Roma community who are involved in politics do not act as role models for Roma youth and are often reluctant to involve them in politics at the local level. In fact, young Roma see “older Roma politicians” as obstacles when trying to run for elections or a position of power within the community. Many young Roma believe that senior members of the Roma community are against their involvement in politics because young Roma are more educated and bring a fresh approach to community issues and, as such, threaten the authority of existing community leaders.

“I have a BA and an MA in public administration, but I don’t have any work experience within a state institution. I ran for a local councillor office in my home town but I didn’t get elected because I had a conflict with the incumbent candidate. I searched for support within the city hall but the man who already had several mandates as a local councillor already gathered the people to work with him and against me. I believe that he was afraid that I am more educated and I might get his office.” (Interview with a Roma man from Romania).

Although there are a small number of young Roma with knowledge of politics and the willingness to participate, the majority are uninformed of political processes and the importance of voting. Most of the Roma youth interviewed were unaware of their right to be elected and the concept of political pluralism. Political participation among Roma youth is limited due to low levels of political awareness, the absence of effective policies for their participation and discrimination against Roma. Many young Roma also reported that they do not vote on a regular basis because they feel that their votes do not count towards the result. They also stated that, if given the possibility, they

would vote for a young candidate in place of an older candidate, because, as one interviewee put it, they are “tired of politicians promising to improve their situation when in fact nothing happens”. However, so far very few young Roma have managed to run for elections. The young Roma interviewed also argued that they need a representative who is willing to listen to them and to help them when in need.

Meanwhile, when asked if they would be willing to run for public office, 3 out of 40 responded positively, with the majority indicating that they would not do so owing to a lack of resources and political party support, as this would limit their chances of getting elected.

“These old people (Roma politicians at the local level) do not listen to us, they say we are too young to know how things are. But I know what I want and I need him to help me, this is why he is there for, right? I would like us to have a young representative, strong and smart who can fight for us...I want to candidate, but who will support me? I don’t have money for campaigning and I also don’t have someone to teach me how to deal with the other politicians.” (Interview with a Roma man from Macedonia).²⁴²

According to those interviewed, Roma already in public office do not have the necessary political influence to develop and implement policies to improve youth participation, or lack the incentives to do so. They also argued that when Roma representatives become involved in politics they tend to forget about the Roma community.

“I do not trust the (Roma) vice-mayor to do anything for us. I didn’t even vote for him and most of the people I asked said the same, so I don’t know how he got elected. He has been vice-mayor for at least three years and hasn’t done a thing for us. Look at the dirt we are standing on, we pay taxes but we live in mud!” (Interview with a Roma man from Romania).

Perhaps the most alarming finding in this study concerns trust in politicians among Roma youth: every single respondent stated that they do not trust their political leaders to represent their interests. These young people argued that leaders are interested only in their personal affairs and spare no thought for the interests of the community. As a result, Roma youth feel indignation and anger towards their leaders, and some do not recognize them as leaders of the community.

242 The quotes taken from conversations conducted in English are given in the paper in their original form, without editing.

“Roma leader? He is not my leader! We went to him years ago to ask for a sewage system to be installed in our neighbourhood and he laughed in our faces. He yelled ‘why do you need a sewage system, where do you think you live?’ The Romanians had sewers, electricity and gas, while we had to make food using bottled water. He lives in a fancy neighbourhood and we live in a slum.” (Interview with a Roma woman from Romania).

Towards the end of the interview, young Roma were asked if they would rather vote for a representative from a mainstream party or from a Roma party. The vast majority stated that a Roma representative would be preferable, as he or she would be better acquainted with the community, while it would be easier to communicate their needs to a “fellow Roma”. They also complained that the offices of non-Roma mayors or councillors do not receive them, and that, when they do manage to get an audience with them, their requests are ignored.

“It would be better to have a Roma mayor. But he has to be smart and strong, and he has to remember that he is there because we voted him. The Romanian mayor does not listen to our problems, and when we manage to talk to him he is just promising stuff, but never gets them done. I think a Roma major would be more understanding and we could discuss better with him.” (Interview with a Roma man from Romania).

Conclusions and recommendations

This paper has discussed the numerous obstacles to Roma youth political participation, including legislative measures that hinder the creation of ethnic minority parties, low awareness of politics and voting, a lack of policies to enable youth participation, insufficient support and resources among young Roma candidates and the problem of vote buying. In short, the government must do more to secure the political rights of all groups and not just of the titular majority. Therefore, this paper offers a number of recommendations. First and foremost, it is recommended that Roma youth create their own organizations to improve their political participation and representation. In particular, organizations should be created to provide support to young Roma running for public office and to inform the public of the importance of voting. In addition, such organizations can also address the problem of ethnic tokenism in politics by undercutting the influence of mainstream parties on Roma youth. Such youth empowerment can also address

more factors impeding the political participation of Roma youth and women.

To improve voter turnout, young Roma voters should be given more information on the electoral process and the importance of voting. The problem of vote buying should be addressed through campaigns that explain to young Roma that by selling their vote they are selling their right to hold politicians accountable. Therefore, it is recommended that national and international institutions working to promote democratic principles and human rights enhance their efforts to educate Roma voters. As such, it is recommended that the OSCE/ODIHR engages with national authorities to create political education campaigns in OSCE participating States. Campaigns should be directed specifically at Roma youth and should be tailored according to each country’s electoral process. In addition, it is recommended that the OSCE/ODIHR act as a bridge between Roma politicians and Roma youth, providing the necessary resources with which to establish a constructive dialogue. In order to improve the political participation of Roma women, the OSCE/ODIHR should provide OSCE participating States with recommendations on creating and implementing affirmative action policies to enable women’s access to decision-making processes, both as voters and as candidates for public office.

Roma youth encounter many obstacles when trying to run for public office, including a lack of resources to get started on a political career. Roma political parties do not promote political participation among Roma youth, nor do they provide guidance for young Roma wishing to run for public office. In addition, the inter-generational conflict between young Roma candidates and more senior candidates and incumbents needs to be addressed in order to improve political participation among Roma youth. Therefore, in order to equip young Roma with the necessary skills and experience to run for political office, it is recommended that Roma politicians create internship programmes in their offices. In this way, Roma politicians should act as role models, providing guidance and support to Roma youth candidates.

Finally, young Roma are encouraged to support their charismatic and capable peers who wish to run for public offices. Young Roma must realize that it is only through political participation that macro-level changes can be achieved, and that the political and socio-economic status of Roma can only be improved if young Roma are politically active.

The Political Empowerment of Roma Youth in Bulgaria: Challenges and Perspectives

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This paper was written by the author, a young Roma activist, for the Roma and Sinti Youth Conference: Activism, Participation, Security, organized by the OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues. The opinions contained herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the OSCE, ODIHR, or any participating State.

Introduction

Bulgaria is the country with the highest percentage of Roma in Europe. Although not reflected in official statistics, numerous international organizations and studies estimate that Roma make up approximately 10 per cent of the total population of Bulgaria.²⁴⁴ Over the past twenty years, the country has witnessed a series of efforts to improve the living standards of Roma. Since the fall of communism, organizations such as the Open Society Institute in Sofia and the Human Rights Project, among others, have been established with the aim of improving the situation of Roma and of promoting democratic values more broadly. To this end, the focus of such work has been to combat the social exclusion and marginalization of Roma, including by improving literacy and school attendance rates, ensuring the provision of adequate housing and health care and preventing ethnic discrimination. Consequently, Roma issues have been made part of the government agenda. In 1999, strategic documents such as the “Framework Program for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society” were adopted for the very first time.²⁴⁵ In 2005, Sofia hosted the launch of the Decade for Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, signalling the country’s commitment to improve the situation of Roma.

Despite these efforts, a number of reports published by local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) suggest that these and other integration strategies remain ineffective.²⁴⁶ A particular problem with such strategies is that they are often developed without the full participation of Roma. This paper is premised on the view that the only way to assist Roma in dealing with the challenges they face is to provide for their political empowerment; Roma must be afforded a place at the decision-making table in order to shape their own future. The political participation of Roma in Bulgaria has been neglected for many years and continues to limit the capacity of Roma to realize their full potential.

This paper analyses the main barriers to the active political participation of Roma in Bulgaria from the standpoint of Roma youth. It applies the definition of “political participation” used by the Roma scholar and researcher, Dr. Iulius Rostas, who defines the term as “participation in electoral processes for local decision-making institutions”.²⁴⁷ In the main, the paper considers traditional forms of political participation, including running for election as a politician and voting as a citizen. From the outset, the paper studies the overall picture regarding the political participation of Roma in Bulgaria, and presents data on their political representation at the local and national levels. The paper includes data on Roma political participation collected following the local elections held in 2003, 2007 and 2011, as well as data on Roma representation in the Bulgarian Parliament. In addition, the paper ex-

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244 “EU Platform for Roma Inclusion – frequently asked questions”, European Commission website, Memo 11/795, 17 November 2011, <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-11-795_en.htm>.

245 “Roma Political Participation in Bulgaria – National Democratic Institute”, ndi.org, 2003, <http://www.ndi.org/files/1611_romaassess_020803.pdf>.

246 “Millions don’t help Roma integration in Bulgaria”, dw.de, 21 March 2013, <<http://www.dw.de/millions-dont-help-roma-integration-in-bulgaria/a-16691459>>.

247 Iulius Rostas, “Roma and Sinti political participation: Opportunities and risks of local-level engagement” (unpublished), 2014.

plores two case studies presenting the experiences of young Roma who have been elected at the national and municipal levels. Focusing on Roma youth, the report also examines the number of young educated Roma in Bulgaria who could in future come to represent any political party. Finally, based on interviews with young Roma, the report concludes with recommendations for the Bulgarian government, for the country's political parties and for international, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, including the OSCE/ODIHR.

Roma political participation in Bulgaria

Ethnicity in Bulgaria and the 2011 National Census

In order to obtain a more accurate measure of the political participation of Roma in Bulgaria, it is necessary to establish the number of Roma as a percentage of the country's population. Data collected by the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria (NSI) in the most recent national census from 2011 puts Bulgaria's population at 7,364,570. Of these, the number of people who self-identify as Roma is 325,343, or 4.7 per cent of the total population of Bulgaria.²⁴⁸

However, this data is highly disputed for a number of reasons. According to Article 21, paragraph 2, of the Bulgarian Act on Statistics, individuals cannot be required to provide the statistical office with any information on their race, ethnicity and religion.²⁴⁹ In accordance with this legal norm, in the censuses of 2001 and 2011, questions on ethnic origin, religion and mother tongue were answered on a voluntary basis. As such, the ethnicity of many individuals was not recorded. In 2001, 1.1 per cent of respondents did not answer questions on ethnicity. In 2011 census, however, the total number of respondents

who skipped the questions related to ethnicity²⁵⁰ was 683,590, or 9.3 per cent of the total population. In addition, the number of those who responded but preferred not to indicate their ethnicity was 53,391. In total, 736,981 respondents, or 10 per cent of the total population, did not answer the question on ethnicity. It is perhaps unlikely that ethnic Bulgarians would not indicate their ethnicity on the census. It is more likely that those who do not self-identify do so because they belong to an ethnic minority. Thus, it would appear that the Council of Europe estimate of approximately 700,000 Roma is reasonable. Based on this figure, 24 members of parliament, 517 municipal councillors and 530 mayors or deputy mayors should, ideally, be Roma. This paper explores the extent to which the political participation of Roma falls short of this projection.

Roma political representation in Bulgaria in the 2011 local elections

The voluntary nature of questions pertaining to ethnicity also make it difficult to obtain comprehensive information on Roma political representation.²⁵¹ However, during the 2003 and 2007 local elections, organizations such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI)²⁵² and the Centre for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance "Amalipe"²⁵³ collected data in order to analyse the Roma political representation. Research into the local elections of 2011 was conducted by the author of this paper.

By comparing data from these three election years, it is evident that the number of locally-elected councillors nominated by "Roma parties" (i.e., those parties

248 "2011 Population Census: Main Results," National Statistical Institute Bulgaria, 2011, p. 23, <http://www.nsi.bg/census2011/PDOCS2/Census2011final_en.pdf>.

249 Bulgarian Law on Statistics, Article 21, para. 2: "Individuals cannot be required to provide statistical data on race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, health, privacy, party affiliation, committed legal offenses, philosophical and political beliefs." The Bulgarian original is available at: <<http://www.lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2134668297>>.

250 In the census, respondents were asked four questions relating to ethnicity (questions 10 to 13), namely: "10. Your ethnic group is: 1) Bulgarian; 2) Turkish; 3) Roma; 4) Other: (please state); 5) I don't self-identify. 11. Your mother tongue is: 1) Bulgarian; 2) Turkish; 3) Roma; 4) Other: (please state). 5) I don't self-identify. 12. Are you religious? 1) Yes; 2) No; 3) I don't self-identify. 13. Your religion is: 1) Orthodox; 2) Catholic; 3) Protestant; 4) Muslim Sunni; 5) Muslim Shia; 6) Other: (please state); 7) I don't have a religion; 8) I don't self-identify. See: 2011 National Census form, National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, <http://www.nsi.bg/census2011/PDOCS2/karta_Census2011.pdf>.

251 "Law on Protection of Personal Data," lex.bg, Article 5, para. 1, item 1 para. 2, <<http://www.lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2135426048>>.

252 "Roma Political Participation in Bulgaria," NDI, *op. cit.*, note 242.

253 Teodora Krumova, "Местни избори 2007: някои факти" (Roma after local elections 2007), Center Amalipe, 2007, <http://amalipe.com/files/bulletin/091207_newsletter_No8_2007_bg.pdf>.

whose leaders openly self-identify as Roma) has seen a drastic decline in numbers, from 126²⁵⁴ in 2003 to 96²⁵⁵ in 2007 and 17 in 2011. These results are alarming, especially when compared to the total number of municipal councillors elected in 2011 (5,174).

The results of the Roma parties in the 2011 local elections are as follows:²⁵⁶

- Euroroma: elected a total of eight municipal councillors, receiving 3,659 votes;
- Solidarnost: elected a total of five municipal councillors, receiving 3,402 votes;
- Drom: elected a total of two municipal councillors, receiving 643 votes; and
- European Security and Integration (ESI): elected two municipal councillors, receiving 1,726 votes.

The total number of votes received by these parties was 16,174. In comparison, the turnout for the local and presidential elections of 2011 was 51.8 per cent.²⁵⁷ Therefore, out of 6.52 million eligible voters in the local elections, approximately 3.38 million went to the polls on election day. Thus, only about 0.5 per cent of the total votes cast went to Roma parties.

Meanwhile, the 2011 local elections did not lead to an increase in the number of Roma included on the party lists of left, right and centre parties. Roma were elected as councillors from the lists of some non-Roma parties on the left and the right. However, it is still difficult to determine the number of Roma councillors elected from the lists of mainstream (non-Roma) parties, although the available data does indicate a decline in numbers since the 2007 local elections. The data on Roma councillors elected from mainstream parties is as follows:

- Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP): one Roma councillor elected in Polski Trumbesh;
- Local Coalition Liberal Democratic Union: two Roma councillors elected in Kaspichan;
- Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB): three Roma councillors elected in Sliven and one in Tervel;

254 "Roma Political Participation in Bulgaria", NDI, *op. cit.*, note 242.

255 Teodora Krumova, *op. cit.*, note 250.

256 "Candidate Lists for the Local and Presidential Elections", Central Election Commission of Bulgaria website, 2011, <<http://results.cik.bg/tur1/listi/index.html>>.

257 "Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions", OSCE Limited Election Observation Mission to the Republic of Bulgaria – Presidential and Municipal Elections, Second Round, 30 October 2011, p. 2, <<http://www.osce.org/bg/node/84602?download=true>>.

- Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS): 15 Roma councillors elected in total (one in Dubnik, one in Zavet, two in Levski, two in Pavlikeni, two in Strazhitsa, two in Plovdiv, two in Ugarchin and three in Kneja);
- Agrarian Union "Aleksandar Stamboliyski": one Roma councillor elected in Lom and one in Valchedram;
- Order, Law and Justice (RZS): two Roma councillors elected in Pleven and one in Strazhitsa;
- New Time (Novoto Vreme): one Roma councillor elected in Peshtera; and
- Political Club "Trakia": one Roma councillor elected in Kuklen.

Therefore, the total number of Roma councillors elected from mainstream parties in the 2011 local elections was 29. Together with the 17 elected representatives from Roma parties, the total number of Roma municipal councillors elected in the 2011 local elections was 46. As such, only 0.88 per cent of the total number of 5,174 councillors elected were Roma. This percentage is considerably lower than the 4.7 per cent figure in the country provided by official government statistics, and much lower than other, more realistic measures of the size of the country's Roma population. This demonstrates the under-representation of Roma in politics at the local level.

If the number of elected Roma councillors was proportional to the size of the Roma population, then according to official statistics there should be 243 Roma municipal councillors. Of course, this figure would more than double if the Council of Europe estimate of the size of the Roma population were applied. Therefore, according to official statistics, Roma are under-represented both in local government and in the national parliament by a factor of six. In order to understand the issue, it is necessary to examine the various barriers to Roma political representation.

Barriers to the effective participation of Roma in elections

Higher votes cast but fewer mandates: the voting system matters

This section will examine the legal obstacles that prevent Roma parties from performing more successfully in elections. These obstacles in part explain the declining number of Roma representatives, as discussed below.

Despite the increase in the number of votes cast for Roma parties in the 2007 local elections compared to the 2005 parliamentary elections, there was a decline in the number of elected Roma representatives. Thus, the number of votes cast for Roma parties in the 2007 local elections was 76,236, while in the 2005 parliamentary elections this figure was 45,637.²⁵⁸ However, this increase in votes did not translate into an increase in the number of Roma representatives elected in local elections. This was due to the introduction of a new method of calculating the electoral threshold that was adopted three months before the 2007 local elections. The new threshold was made equal to the municipal electoral quota, which is calculated by dividing the total number of valid votes cast by the number of councillors. The resulting figure is the percentage threshold. This method of calculating the electoral threshold – known as the Hare-Niemeyer method – has the effect of pre-screening the political forces that will succeed in electing municipal councillors. Consequently, parties that fall below that figure are automatically disqualified and will not receive any seats in the local city council. This meant that, for the smallest municipalities (those with eleven councillors), the electoral threshold shot up to nine per cent, thereby dooming smaller parties to failure. Meanwhile, independent candidates found the nine per cent threshold even harder to meet. Although the electoral threshold was lower in larger communities, it still posed a barrier to smaller parties, including Roma parties.

In addition, Roma parties tend to struggle to form coalitions that would enable them to gain more votes and mandates. There are two primary reasons for this. The first is owing to the fact that more than one Roma candidate can be nominated for parliamentary or local elections in a given region or municipality. As a result, the large number of Roma candidates scatters the votes. The second reason is that leaders are often unable to reach a consensus on which candidate to support. Parliamentary elections provide Roma with a better opportunity to unite behind the candidates of a particular Roma party or Roma candidate from a mainstream party. Again, for this to work, however, there must be just one Roma party in the region. Meanwhile, Roma from mainstream parties must be in the first five to ten places on party lists. Only then can the system of preferential voting work in their fa-

vour. Thus far, however, Roma parties and candidates have struggled to overcome these hurdles.

From this, we might conclude that, in order to succeed in elections, a candidate for public office must represent a strong party that is well-funded, well-structured and expected to gain the majority of the votes. Otherwise, votes that do not contribute to the formation of a mandate will be allocated equally to other parties and candidates that are able to overcome the electoral threshold. In reality, Roma political structures are usually newly established and poorly funded. Therefore, the best way for Roma candidates to win a mandate is to become part of a well-funded, well-structured mainstream party.

The inclusion of ethnic Roma in mainstream parties presents its own risks, however. Roma candidates should be wary of the incentives for mainstream political parties to have them on board. Very often Roma are used for the purpose of ethnic tokenism, with some parties including Roma candidates in the last positions on party lists in order to feature them on campaign posters and other promotional materials in order to attract Roma voters. Moreover, mention of their “concern for minorities” is often used to boost a mainstream party’s credentials when co-operating with European Parliament parties and western donors. Such deceptive forms of Roma political representation are a serious issue as they can deter young Roma from becoming politically active.

The problem of vote buying

Vote buying has traditionally been a key topic during the local elections for both media and politicians. Unfortunately, the sale of thousands and even tens of thousands of votes during elections in Bulgaria is no novelty, but has been practiced by all major parties for many years as a way to boost their votes.²⁵⁹ During the 2011 local elections, candidates from across the political spectrum were engaged in vote buying. There were two unusual developments in vote buying in 2011, however. Firstly, vote buying did not only affect Roma votes, but also influenced the votes of thousands of ethnic Bulgarians, primarily young people who were alienated from the main political parties. According to Zhivko Georgiev, a leading Bulgarian sociologist, nearly half of the votes bought in

259 “OSCE observers assess Bulgarian elections positively, but raise concerns about vote-buying, media coverage”, *osce.org*, 24 October 2011, <<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/84274>>.

258 Teodora Krumova, *op. cit.*, note 250.

the 2007 local elections belonged to young ethnic Bulgarians.²⁶⁰ Indeed, research has shown that young people, including Roma, are more likely to participate in vote-buying and selling than any other age group.²⁶¹

The other new development in the 2011 local elections was the public campaigns against this dishonest practice, with media and Roma NGOs condemning vote buying. For example, the Alumni Club of the Internship Program for Young Roma to the National Assembly (ACIPYNA) campaigned in Roma and non-Roma communities across the country with the motto “I will not sell my vote”. This campaign began as an initiative of the Amalipe Centre in 2007, and was then adopted by the ACIPYNA, NDI-Bulgaria and the Open Society Institute in Sofia.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from Bulgaria’s vote buying problem is that those who are most likely to sell their votes are those that are most neglected by political parties, namely Roma and youth. The problems of these groups are often not adequately addressed by politics and, as a result, the only advantage for them in voting is the money they can make on election day. In general, there appears to be an immense gap between young people and political parties in Bulgaria, resulting in high levels of apathy among young people towards politics.

Research conducted in 2013 into the quality of democracy in Bulgaria compared the three largest political parties in Bulgaria to analyse their support base.²⁶² The parties included in the research were Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS). The research revealed that approximately 20.8 per cent of 18 to 30-year-olds support one of these parties. In other words, only one in five young people in Bulgaria back a political party. Information on the ethnic identity of the young people surveyed was not included in the research. It should also be noted that the study defined “support for a party” not as active involvement in party activi-

260 “От урните чезнат хиляди гласове” (Thousands of votes disappear from ballot boxes), vesti.bg, 2 November 2007, <<http://www.vesti.bg/novini/zashto-bylgarite-prodavat-glasa-si-tyrsi-otgovor-v-sega-1119018>>.

261 “Ефектът „Катуница” върху президентските и местните избори в България през 2011 г. Преход от популизъм към националпопулизъм”, Сдружение „Гражданско общество в действие”, София 2012.

262 “Защо GERB запазва политическата си хегемония?” (Why does GERB keep its political hegemony?), Antony Todorov blog on wordpress.com, 19 July 2014, <<https://antonytodorov.wordpress.com/>>.

ties, but as sharing the party’s values. Information on the numbers of young people actively participating in political parties in Bulgaria can be found at the parties’ central offices. The present paper would like to examine further whether there are young and educated Roma who can become the future political leaders of the Roma community.

The political participation of young and educated Roma in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, the number of young Roma who hold university degrees increases every year.²⁶³ Although there is no data available on the number of Roma students graduating each year, if one looks at the numbers of students applying for scholarships at the Roma Education Fund (REF) and the Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program (RMUSP), a limited picture of the number of Roma graduates in the country emerges.

Every year, the number of applications to the RMUSP by Roma from Bulgaria is between 300 and 500, of which around 200 are successful. The number of scholarship beneficiaries from Bulgaria for the academic year 2012/2013 was 202. For the year 2013/2014, the number of Roma students applying for RMUSP was 352, of which 209 received funding.²⁶⁴ For the year 2014/2015, the REF received 507 applications and accepted 220 of them.²⁶⁵ Between 2001, when the RMUSP was founded, and 2012, the RMUSP provided more than 1,400 scholarships to Roma students from Bulgaria.²⁶⁶ Therefore, including an estimate for the 2014/15 academic year, the total number of scholarships awarded between 2001 and 2015 exceeds 2,000. In other words, bearing in mind that bachelor degrees last around four years, at least 500 Roma students have already graduated university.

263 Each academic year, the Roma Education Fund supports more than 200 Bulgarian Roma students and receives many more applications.

264 “REF Hosts Bulgarian Roma University Students in Sofia”, Romaeducationfund.hu, 15 November 2013, <<http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/news/ref/news-and-events/ref-hosts-bulgarian-roma-university-students-sofia>>.

265 “Study! Grow! Inspire! Unite! REF Applauds 2014 RMUSP Finalists in Bulgaria”, romaeducationfund.hu, 21 November 2014, <<http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/news/ref/news-and-events/study-grow-inspire-unite-ref-applauds-2014-rmusp-finalists-bulgari>>.

266 “RMUSP Scholarship Gala, Sofia 2012”, Romaeducationfund.hu, 4 December 2012, <<http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/news/ref/ref-media/rmusp-scholarship-gala-sofia-2012>>.

Moreover, data from the Student Society for Development of Intercultural Dialogue (SORMD) show that 2,163 Roma students completed university degrees before 2010.²⁶⁷

However, it appears that young educated Roma are not going into politics. Indeed, only five out of the 46 Roma municipal councillors elected in 2011 are below the age of 29. Two of the five hold a university degree. The remaining councillors are aged 35 and over, and none of them have completed higher education. The question remains as to why young and educated Roma do not want to engage in politics. This issue is further discussed below.

The participation of Roma women

The number of Roma women engaged in politics is another issue of concern. According to current data, there are no records of Roma women being elected to the posts of municipal councillor or mayor in the 2011 local elections. Following the 2007 elections, 87 of the Roma elected as municipal councillors were men and nine were women (nine per cent). This is despite the fact that 25 per cent of Roma candidates running for the mayor's office were women. Meanwhile, no research has been conducted into the number of Roma women who ran or were elected in the 2007 local elections.

In general, women are under-represented in politics in Bulgaria. A 2013 report by the European Institute for Gender Equality put Bulgaria in the penultimate place in the EU.²⁶⁸ The same report found that

267 "Статистика за студентите от ромски произход в България" (Statistics of students of Roma origin in Bulgaria), Student Study for the Development of Interethnic Dialogue (SSDID) website (undated), <<http://www.ssdid.org>>.

268 In the report, Bulgaria was shown to have a gender equality coefficient of 37, while with the EU average was 54. The gender equality coefficient consists of six core domains: work, money, knowledge, time, power, health and two satellite domains (intersecting inequalities and violence). The satellite domains are conceptually related to the Index but cannot be included in the core index because they measure an illustrative phenomenon. Specifically, the domain of violence measures gender-based violence against women, and the domain of intersecting inequalities considers specific population groups such as lone parents, carers or people with disabilities. The Index provides results at the domain and sub-domain level for the EU overall and for each Member State. It provides a measure of how far (or close) each Member State was from achieving gender equality. See: European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), Gender Equality Index – Country Profiles (Italy: EIGE, 2013), <20150514 Roma Youth Activism conference papers_compiled.docx>.

women's representation in parliament in Bulgaria is around 23 per cent, despite the EU goal of 40 per cent. Women's representation in public administration varies between 20 and 40 per cent, with women better represented at lower levels of public administration, including in local municipalities. According to a 2014 report, only 11 per cent of women who run for local elections in Bulgaria are successful.²⁶⁹

Therefore, in terms of their involvement in local politics, it seems that both Roma and non-Roma women are under-represented. However, Roma women are comparatively more disadvantaged, as there are no Roma women in the Bulgarian parliament, compared to 23 per cent non-Roma women, and no Roma women running in local elections, while non-Roma women make up 11 per cent of local government leaders. Thus, Roma women are especially disadvantaged in politics, and an elaborate set of measures must be implemented to achieve gender equality in all aspects of social and political life.

Case studies: success stories

In order to find out more about the work of and difficulties facing those young Roma who have been active in politics and succeeded in being elected, this section will look at two case studies. The first case study is of a young Roma woman who became a member of parliament, and the second is of a young Roma man from a rural area who succeeded in being elected as a municipal councillor.

A Roma woman in the Bulgarian Parliament

Since 1990, just one Roma woman has managed to become a member of parliament (MP) in Bulgaria. Milena Hristova became an MP in 2009 at the age of 29 and was the only Roma MP in the 41st National Assembly. She entered the parliament with the Euro-roma party under the leadership of Tsvetelin Kanchev. The local Roma community was proud of her achievements, rewarding her with strong electoral support.²⁷⁰

269 "Проучване-анализ относно участието на жените в политиката-ситуацията в България" (Research-analysis on the participation of women in politics – the situation in Bulgaria), Balkan Assist Report, 2014, p. 2, <http://www.balkanassist.bg/files/11_12_13%20More%20women%20Baseline%20Resume%20Bg.pdf>.

270 "Милена Христова: С циганска каруца към парламента" (Milena Hristova: with a gypsy caravan to the parliament), trud.bg, 18 July, 2009, <<http://www.trud.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=181494>>.

Two years after the elections, however, Hristova decided to break connections with her party owing to “incompatible ideologies”. At the end of 2011, she joined the Coalition for Bulgaria. In 2011, as part of the Parliamentary Legislation Committee, she proposed an amendment to the penal code to provide for prison sentences of one to four years for the crime of inciting hatred, discrimination or violence. However, the Coalition for Bulgaria was opposed to the initiative and decided to refer the amendment to the Constitutional Court.²⁷¹

In spite of these successes, however, Milena Hristova struggled to forge a dialogue with Roma civil society organizations. In 2010, Hristova called on the Prime Minister Borisov to order that investigations be carried out on all Roma organizations that receive funding from the Roma Education Fund, a private entity based in Budapest. As a result, widespread financial and police checks were conducted at the offices of a number of organizations. Although none of the organizations were found to have committed violations, Roma civil society representatives were treated as suspects.²⁷² In 2013, Hristova again ran in the parliamentary elections, from her home region of Plovdiv, this time as the member of a mainstream party. However, she was placed seventh in the party list and was not re-elected.

The success of Milena Hristova in the 2009 parliamentary elections can in part be explained by her high placement on the party list for the region in which she ran. As a result of constructive dialogue between the Euroroma party and the Coalition for Bulgaria, as well as the support she received from the Roma community in her district, Hristova managed to win a seat in the 2009-2013 parliamentary mandate.

The story of a young Roma running in the 2011 local elections²⁷³

Atanas Stoyanov is a young Roma who belongs to the “Burgudzhii” (smiths or knife makers), a Roma community in northern Bulgaria where traditions are very

well preserved, including those relating to early marriage, language and culture. Raised in a small village, Atanas was the first person in his community to obtain a university degree. In 2005, he became the first Burgudzhii Roma to be accepted to the University of Veliko Tarnovo to study a bachelor’s degree in public administration. In 2009, aged 19 and still in university, he ran for the first time in the local elections for the post of municipal councillor. Stoyanov was put in second place on the party list of the National Movement for Freedoms and Rights (NDPS) – a newly established and largely unknown party that lacked funding. In the elections he was only 30 votes short of being elected councillor. Although he lost the elections, he showed his gratitude for the support of those who voted for him by organizing a big celebration. Four years later, during the 2011 local elections, Stoyanov was once again a candidate for the post of municipal councillor, this time for the Order, Law and Justice (RZS) party, a centre-right mainstream party with local and regional structures and financial resources. He was again placed second on the party list, and succeeded in winning his seat and becoming a municipal councillor for the Municipality of Strazhitsa. He was the first Roma to be elected to this position.

Similar to the first case study, the success of Atanas Stoyanov was in part due to his being placed second on the party list. In addition, Stoyanov also benefited from his training and education, having graduated from a school for young Roma politicians in 2006 and having worked as an intern in the national parliament in 2007. These experiences helped him to develop his political campaign in a professional manner. Following his election as municipal councillor, he was pressured by party colleagues to resign in favour of the next candidate on the party list before being sworn in as councillor. In response, Stoyanov mobilized the support of the local Roma community and managed to retain his position.

This example demonstrates how Roma candidates are sometimes used as tokens with which to attract Roma votes; however, it also highlights the importance of mobilizing community support behind a strong leader. Meanwhile, Stoyanov’s education and training meant that he was well equipped to manage an election campaign and had acquired important skills to that end, including public speaking and campaign management.

271 “БСП дава на съд текст на депутат от левицата” (BSP gives the Court a text of MP from the Left), dariknews.bg, 26 April 2011, <http://dariknews.bg/view_article.php?article_id=706430>.

272 Elena Kodinova, “Прокуратурата търси 18 месеца дали са откраднати пари на Сорос и не откри нищо” (Prosecutors seek 18 months to find out if Soros’ money was stolen and find nothing), segabg.com, 13 May 2012, <<http://www.segabg.com/article.php?id=600492>>.

273 For the purposes of this research, the author was encouraged to share his own story.

Analysing the barriers to political office facing young Roma

Considering the fact that a growing number of Roma youth in Bulgaria have a university education, it is unclear why more of them do not stand for political office. To answer this question, the author interviewed three representatives of the Alumni Club of an internship programme for young Roma to the Bulgarian National Assembly.

Over the course of five internship programmes in the National Assembly organized for Roma youth between 2006 and 2011, a total of 50 young Roma had the opportunity to participate in and get acquainted with parliamentary work. As a result of the programmes, an Alumni Club was created that aimed to provide programme participants with ongoing opportunities to network and formulate common positions on processes and policies for Roma integration, as well as to discuss other topical and socially relevant issues. The largest campaign organized by the Alumni Club was titled “I will not sell my vote” and was implemented from 2007 to 2013 to deter vote buying during elections. The campaign succeeded in reaching thousands of voters, including both Roma and non-Roma.²⁷⁴ In addition, the Club organized numerous press conferences and round tables on Roma issues that were attended by state officials and diplomats.²⁷⁵ The Club even managed to bring Roma issues to the attention of the then US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, who met in person with the Club’s members in 2012.²⁷⁶ Unfortunately, the Club was forced to suspend its activities owing to a lack of funding.

During the interviews, members of the Club were asked what obstacles young and educated Roma faced when attempting to engage in politics. A wide range of responses were given, and these are provided in the following paragraphs.

One of the challenges cited was the desire of young and educated Roma to practice in the professional

field in which they gained a degree. Many young people, including Roma, are less interested in politics and are more interested in the fields that they have chosen to study or in which they have experience. Therefore, young Roma graduates are more likely to obtain work in the private sector or to start their own business than to embark on a political career.

The free movement of capital, services and labour that Bulgaria has benefited from following its EU accession in 2007 is another factor deterring young Roma from entering politics. Many young Bulgarians, including young Roma, prefer to find work as skilled or non-skilled workers in wealthier EU member states, where they can often earn twice as much as what they would earn if they stayed in Bulgaria.

Moreover, political office is not thought of as rewarding, as elected positions are perceived as too demanding and poorly paid. Although political representatives at both the local and national levels jointly agree on their own salaries, the money they earn is less than the average monthly salary and often insufficient as the sole source of income. At the same time, those in public office are prohibited by law from being part of any for-profit organizations. As a result, this leads them to break the law by transferring any business activities that could amount to a conflict of interest to a relative or friend, while continuing to engage in and profit from the activities themselves. Furthermore, a councillor cannot in theory be unemployed, as they cannot receive social benefits.²⁷⁷ Once they take public office, social benefits must be stopped, and in their place the councillor will receive a smaller amount. Therefore, if a municipal councillor loses her/his permanent job – a common occurrence owing to political reasons and pressure – they cannot then register as unemployed and cannot receive social benefits until they give up the elected post. The only way around this is to violate the law by accepting bribes and other illegal acts.

Another deterrent for young Roma is the negative public image of politics and politicians. Many young people, including young Roma, do not want to engage in a profession that is often considered to be

274 “Млади роми иницираха национална кампания ‘Не продавам гласа си’” (Young Roma initiated campaign “I will not sell my vote”), *agencia.bg*, 10 May 2013.

275 “Конференция ‘Перспективи пред младите роми в България’ ще се проведе в София” (Conference on “The perspectives of young Roma” will be held in Sofia), *etnosi.wordpress.com*, March 2012.

276 “Хилари Клинтън: Интеграцията на ромите е незавършеното дело на България” (Hillary Clinton: Roma integration is the unfinished work of Bulgaria), *osi.bg*, 6 February 2012, <http://www.osi.bg/?cy=10&lang=1&program=1&action=2&news_id=519>.

277 Указание относно парично обезщетение за безработица на лица, упражняващи дейност като общински съветници, съдебни заседатели и членове на избирателни комисии (Guideline on unemployment benefits to persons engaged in business as municipal councillors, jurors and members of electoral commissions), *noi.bg*, 29 May 2012, <<http://www.noi.bg/images/bg/legislation/ukazania/91-01-130-29-05-2012.pdf>>.

dishonest and corrupt. In Bulgaria, politicians often have a bad reputation owing to corruption scandals that result in their arrest during or after the execution of their duties. In this regard, many view the work of politicians as risky.

Finally, some of those interviewed expressed the concern that, although they would like to be a member of a party or to run for elections, their chances of success would be low because they are too poor or because they do not have any relatives or friends in politics. In other words, running for public office is perceived as a “family” privilege that only well-connected or rich young people can enjoy.

Conclusions and recommendations

What can be done to foster Roma political empowerment?

This paper has revealed that the level of political representation among Roma in Bulgaria is very low, with Roma comprising just 0.88 per cent of municipal councillors in the country. Meanwhile, recent changes to the electoral threshold have overwhelmingly affected small Roma parties, leading to a further decline in Roma political representation. As of early 2015, Roma in Bulgaria are under-represented in politics by a factor of six to one, as calculated according to data from the National Statistical Institute. This ratio decreases further when we apply estimates of the size of the Roma community in Bulgaria provided by international organizations.

The level of interest in politics among youth (those aged between 18 and 30) in Bulgaria, including Roma, is five times less than that of other age groups, at only 0.2 per cent.²⁷⁸ Interviews conducted as part of this research found that Roma youth do not think that politics is important and are not motivated to become politically active. Those young Roma who are interested in politics do not have institutionalized opportunities in which to engage their interests, such as through internship programmes in parties, in the parliament or in other executive branches of government. In Bulgaria, no organization exists that is focused on training young Roma on how to be politically active, further discouraging young Roma from entering politics. Many young Roma believe that it is not education but personal or family connections that are essential to becoming a party member. Combined

with high rates of youth emigration, these problems pose a serious barrier to the political participation of young people and, in particular, Roma youth.

The number of young and educated Roma with university degrees in Bulgaria is steadily growing. This paper has found that more than 2,000 Roma students have graduated in different disciplines in recent years, representing a potential resource for both Roma and non-Roma parties, although one that is currently not utilized by political parties.

Roma women are often particularly disadvantaged when it comes to running for and being elected to public office, and as a result are the least likely to engage in politics. While only 11 per cent of women who run for public office at the local level succeed, there is no information available on the number of Roma women elected to local government.

Many mainstream political parties use Roma as tokens, as was seen in the case of Atanas Stoyanov. They do not include Roma candidates in their party lists, or only include an insignificant number, as they do not consider this to be a priority. When elected through mainstream parties, Roma are often prevented from working in the interests of the Roma community, as Milena Hristova found out when she tried to introduce changes to hate crime legislation. Thus, Roma candidates succeed only when they are afforded a primary position in the party list of a mainstream party or coalition, and when they have the backing of the local community. Meanwhile, Roma candidates from Roma parties can only succeed if there is sufficient co-operation among local Roma leaders. In general, political parties led by ethnic Roma have weak local structures and lack funding, while the current legislation on electoral thresholds sets them up for failure. In order to run for the position of municipal councillor, candidates must have sufficient financial backing with which to organize an electoral campaign. This effectively excludes most young people, including Roma, from running. Meanwhile, it is practically impossible for unemployed people to become councillors owing to the current legislation framework.

278 Antony Todorov blog, *op. cit.*, note 259.

Recommendations

The recommendations developed as a result of this research are aimed at three different groups in Bulgaria: Roma youth and their communities; the government, political parties and state institutions; and other stakeholders, including national and international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The main recommendation to young and educated Roma in Bulgaria is that they realize the importance of Roma political participation. Young and educated Roma should understand that the lack of political participation among Roma is a key obstacle to their socio-economic development. Over the years, decision makers have ignored the problems of the Roma population and have not treated them as Bulgarian citizens. As a result, the government does not respond to the basic needs of Roma communities, such as paved streets, refuse management, street lighting, schools and hospitals. Despite the fact that Roma make up a sizable portion of the population, the Roma culture and language are not taught in Bulgarian schools. If more young Roma entered politics, then they would be in a position to tackle such issues. Moreover, the non-participation of Roma in the political life of the country arguably leads to the development of nationalist parties, such as the Ataka party, that openly spread ethnic hatred from the parliamentary rostrum. There are no Roma politicians to oppose incidents of hate speech that threaten interethnic relations and could potentially lead to ethnic conflicts.

Political parties should realize that it is damaging to society as a whole when one or another part of society does not participate in decision-making processes. The exclusion of ethnic groups leads to a deepening social divide and to problems that ultimately affect both ethnic Bulgarians and Roma. On the other hand, an increase in Roma involvement in politics would improve their sense of belonging and citizenship, thereby helping to make them more invested in their communities and in Bulgarian society. Political parties should think of young and educated Roma not just as Roma, but also as professionals who are able to contribute their expertise in all areas of public life, including education, healthcare and economics. The government and political parties should seek to amend the current legislation to make the position of municipal councillor more accessible to all members of society and not only to those with stable incomes.

Moreover, government and political parties should provide young Roma with opportunities for equal participation in public service, with a view to appointing them in permanent positions in the public sector. To this end, internships should be set up that aim to increase the number of young Roma in different areas of government, including in political parties, in parliament, in government ministries and national agencies, in local municipalities and in the judiciary. Young Roma women should be a particular focus of such internship programmes, since they are the least represented in government and political parties. These initiatives should be included as part of the implementation of the “National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020)”. International, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, including the OSCE/ODIHR, should be a leading force in ensuring that the state takes the appropriate steps towards increasing the participation of Roma youth in politics. They should provide assistance to the state in implementing the necessary measures and, at the same time, should help to create models and mechanisms for Roma integration. Needless to say, NGOs should not take on the primary role of the state, but should apply their knowledge and experience to developing pilot models that might help to shape national policies. Meanwhile, national and international organizations should focus on lobbying and advocacy to turn such proposals into national policies rather than on implementing one-off activities that are unsustainable. One initiative that would increase the participation of Roma youth in politics are internships offered to young Roma in the state apparatus, embassies and international organizations. These would ideally be implemented by national and international organizations, including the United Nations, the European Commission, the European Parliament and EU political parties, the European Council, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and NATO, among others. Since there are no organizations dealing with the political education of young Roma in Bulgaria, it is crucial that a special school is established to develop the political skills of young Roma, thereby improving their participation in upcoming local and parliamentary elections. Through such internships and training programmes, Roma youth will gain valuable skills that will not only increase their personal self-esteem but will make them a sought-after workforce for state institutions and political parties.

Training programmes on the importance of Roma inclusion should also be provided to representatives of political parties and the government in order to encourage mainstream political parties to ensure that their national and local structures are ethnically diverse.

Last but not least, those Roma who have already succeeded in being elected as municipal councillors should do more to share their experience and expertise with young Roma. For example, the establishment of associations of young politically active Roma would provide a suitable forum for the exchange of knowledge and experience, thereby helping to trigger the political inclusion of Roma at the local level.

**PART III:
ANNEXES**

Annex I: Conference Agenda

Sunday, 7 December 2014

19:00 – 20.00 Dinner

Monday, 8 December 2014

9:30 – 10:00 Registration of participants

10:00-11:00 **Opening session**

Moderator: Mirjam Karoly, Senior Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues/Chief of the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, OSCE/ODIHR

Ambassador Dejan Šahović, Head of the OSCE Chairmanship Task Force, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Nenad Borovčanin, State Secretary, Ministry of Youth and Sport

Suzana Paunović, Director, Office for Human and Minority Rights

Danijela Lakatoš, Roma activist, Serbia

Introduction

Mirjam Karoly, Senior Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues/Chief of the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, OSCE/ODIHR

11:00 – 12:30 **Setting the scene: How can Roma and Sinti youth trigger change?**

Moderator: Karolina Mirga, Project Assistant, OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues

Panelists:

Cristina Marian, ODIHR Junior Expert, Moldova

Tudorel Taba, ODIHR Junior Expert, Romania

Petr Torak, ODIHR Junior Expert, United Kingdom

Respondents:

Avni Mustafa, NGO Kosovo Agency for Advocacy and Development

Maria Demeova, NGO Club of Roma Activists in Slovakia

12:30 – 14:00 Lunch

14:00 – 15:30 **Youth perspectives: Identifying main issues, analyzing existing approaches, sharing experiences**

WG1: Empowerment and social inclusion of Roma and Sinti communities through youth activism

Moderator: Karolina Mirga, Project Assistant, OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues

Introducers:

Dragana Jovanović Arias, ODIHR Junior Expert, Serbia

Aldijana Dedić, ODIHR Junior Expert, Bosnia and Herzegovina

WG2: The participation of Roma and Sinti youth in politics and democratic processes

Moderator: David Mark, Officer on Roma and Sinti Issues, OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues

Introducers:

Atanas Stoyanov, ODIHR Junior Expert, Bulgaria
Dafina Savić, NGO Romanipe, Canada

WG3: Roma and Sinti youth and security

Moderator: Mirjam Karoly, Senior Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues, OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues

Introducers:

Patricia Caro Maya, ODIHR Junior Expert, Spain
Maksym Flora, NGO Nevo Drom, Ukraine

15:30 – 16:00 Coffee break

16:00 – 17:30 **Moving forward: Shaping our recommendations to the OSCE and its participating States**

WG1: Empowerment and social inclusion of Roma and Sinti communities through youth activism

Moderator: Karolina Mirga, Project Assistant, OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues

WG2: The participation of Roma and Sinti youth in politics and democratic processes

Moderator: David Mark, Officer on Roma and Sinti Issues, OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues

WG3: Roma and Sinti youth and security

Moderator: Mirjam Karoly, Senior Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues/Chief of the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, OSCE/ODIHR

18:30 – 20:00 Dinner

20:00 – 21:30 Documentary screening and guided discussion

Moderators: David Mark and Karolina Mirga, OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues

Tuesday, 9 December 2014

10:00 – 12:00 **Wrap up and next steps: Rapporteurs' presentations and discussion**

Moderators: David Mark and Karolina Mirga, OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues

Rapporteurs:

WG1: Cristina Marian, ODIHR Junior Expert, Moldova
WG2: Tudorel Taba, ODIHR Junior Expert, Romania
WG3: Petr Torak, ODIHR Junior Expert, United Kingdom

12:00 – 12:30 Coffee break

12:30 – 13:30 **Closing of the conference**

Tamara Rastovac Siamashvili, Deputy Head, OSCE Chairmanship Task Force,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Young Roma/Sinti representatives: Jelena Savić, Dragan Radosavljević and
Maryana Borisova
Mirjam Karoly, Senior Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues/Chief of the Contact Point for
Roma and Sinti Issues, OSCE/ODIHR

13:30 – 15:00 Lunch

Annex 2: List of Participants

Anita Alić, Serbia
Brankica Alić, Serbia
Sanela Bahtijarević, Serbia
Maryana Borisova, Bulgaria
Tatiana Caldarari, Moldova
Antonio Rafael Carmona Fernández, Spain
Patricia Caro Maya, Spain
Ionut Cioarta, Romania
Mirsad Čuljandži, Serbia
Lukas Daněk, Czech Republic
Aldijana Dedić, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Mária Demeová, Slovakia
Stefka Dimitrova, Bulgaria
Denis Durmiš, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Vicente Rodriguez Fernandez, Spain
Maksym Flora, Ukraine
Melina Halilović, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Božidar Jovanović, Serbia
Tanja Jovanović, Serbia
Dragana Jovanović Arias, Serbia
Igor Kostić, Serbia
Sandra Kostić, Serbia
Peter Kotlar, United Kingdom
Ishtvan Kvik, Lithuania
Danijela Lakatoš, Serbia
Fridon Lala, Kosovo²⁷⁹
Ina Majko, Albania
Cristina Marian, Moldova
Michal Miko, Czech Republic
Jelena Miloradović, Serbia
Siniša-Senad Musić, Croatia
Avni Mustafa, Kosovo
Valeriu Nicolae, Romania
Mária Nyerges, Hungary
Csaba Oláh, Hungary
Viola Popenko, Ukraine
Denisa Pšeničková, Czech Republic/United Kingdom
Dragan Radosavljević, Serbia
Senad Sakipovski, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Senada Sali, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Dafina Savić, Canada
Jelena Savić, Serbia
Marina Simeunović, Serbia
Marija Stanković, Serbia
Atanas Stoyanov, Bulgaria

279 All references to Kosovo refer to Kosovo under UNSCR 1244.

Tudorel Taba, Romania
Čedo Todorović, Croatia
Petr Torak, Czech Republic/United Kingdom
Klaudia Veizaj, Albania

Representatives of the Republic of Serbia:

Nenad Borovčanin, State Secretary, Ministry of Youth and Sport, Government of the Republic of Serbia
Suzana Paunović, Director, Office for Human and Minority Rights, Government of the Republic of Serbia
Tamara Rastovac Siamashvili, Deputy Head of the OSCE Chairmanship Task Force, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the Republic of Serbia
Ambassador Dejan Šahović, Head of the OSCE Chairmanship Task Force, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the Republic of Serbia

OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues (CPRSI):

Mirjam Karoly, Senior Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues / Chief of CPRSI
David Mark, Officer on Roma and Sinti Issues
Karolina Mirga, Project Assistant
Tatjana Perić, Adviser on Roma and Sinti Issues / Deputy Chief of CPRSI

