



Roma in Serbia: Social Inclusion in and through Education

World Bank Initiatives in Europe & Central Asia



The World Bank

MEMORANDUM**To:** World Bank President Jim Yong Kim, ECA Country Director Muge Finkel**From:** Allison Reefer**Date:** December 1, 2014**Subject:** Social Inclusion of Serbian Roma in and through Education**Executive Summary**

Roma are one of the poorest, most marginalized groups in Europe. In Serbia, Roma are especially at a disadvantage, since national issues such as high unemployment and poverty have an even greater effect on Roma. Education for Roma children is a major issue, as Roma students rarely complete secondary school, are overrepresented in special schools, and are discriminated against by both teachers and classmates. The lack of education leads to greater poverty within Roma communities, as students who drop out miss chances to obtain better jobs and better access to social services.

As part of our mission to alleviate poverty and inequality, the World Bank should prioritize the education of Roma children in Serbia through achieving the goals of providing the capacity for Roma to access education and inclusion of Roma students in the classroom. These goals can be reached through scholarship programs for Roma students in secondary school and a reformed curriculum, including teaching Roma history and culture and hiring Roma teaching assistants for classrooms. These goals will help with discriminatory attitudes towards Roma in Serbia, as well as the provision of ways to make school completion a feasible goal for Roma students while feeling safe and included in the classroom.

Romani in Europe & Central Asia

The Romani remain one of the marginalized, misunderstood groups in the Europe and Central Asian (ECA) region. Often known as Roma, gypsies, or travellers, the groups face

discrimination, high poverty, and low access to much of society. Many Roma lack citizenship or any form of official documents, making it difficult for them to access important social services.

The chart below shows the poverty and unemployment in ECA countries, alongside the estimated number of Romani, whom these factors both affect significantly.

	Poverty Ratio (\$2/day)*	Poverty Ratio (\$5/day)*	Unemploy- ment**	Romani Avg. Est.+
<i>Albania</i>	3.0%	57.4%	13.5%	100,000
<i>Armenia</i>	15.5%	84.0%	17.8%	300
<i>Azerbaijan</i>	2.4% (2008)	44.3%	5.2%	2,000
<i>Belarus</i>	0.0%	1.2%	0.5%	40,000
<i>Bosnia & Hercegovina</i>	0.1%	8.4%	43.8%	40,000
<i>Bulgaria</i>	3.9%	17.6%	11.4%	650,000
<i>Croatia</i>	0.0%	0.5%	17.5%	35,000
<i>Czech Republic</i>	0.1%	1.0%	7.4%	225,000
<i>Estonia</i>	1.4%	21.4%	6.9%	1,250
<i>Georgia</i>	31.3%	80.1%	14.6%	2,000
<i>Hungary</i>	0.2%	5.7%	7.6%	600,000
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	0.8%	41.2%	5.1%	7,000
<i>Kyrgyz Republic</i>	21.1%	78.8%	2.3%	1,000
<i>Latvia</i>	2.0%	10.9%	11.9%	11,500
<i>Lithuania</i>	1.2%	9.4%	12.4%	3,287
<i>Macedonia</i>	4.2%	34.3%	28.4%	165,000
<i>Moldova</i>	2.8%	48.4%	5.1%	84,345
<i>Montenegro</i>	0.7%	11.6%	13.4%	20,000
<i>Poland</i>	0.1%	9.5%	11.7%	40,000
<i>Romania</i>	1.6%	33.8%	7.0%	1,850,000
<i>Russia</i>	0.3%	11.5%	4.8%	725,000
<i>Serbia</i>	0.5%	14.9%	20.3%	600,000
<i>Slovak Republic</i>	0.5%	2.7%	12.6%	420,000
<i>Slovenia</i>	0.0%	0.7%	12.7%	8,500
<i>Tajikistan</i>	27.4%	85.4%	2.6%	~2,000***
<i>Turkey</i>	2.6%	29.6%	9.1%	1,900,000
<i>Turkmenistan***</i>	49.7% (1998)	88.8% (1998)	2.6% (2004)	~200
<i>Ukraine</i>	0.0%	6.5%	8.6%	225,000
<i>Uzbekistan***</i>	76.7% (2003)**	—	4.8% (2012)	~16,000

Various colors break countries up into sub-regions: **Balkans**, **Caucases**, **Central Asia**, **Eastern Europe**, and **EU**.
+Council of Europe, 2007; Wikipedia, "Romani diaspora," 2014; Marushiakova, 2014.

*World Bank, "ECA," 2014.

**Trading Economics, 2014.

***Very little reliable recent data available.

Many countries in ECA struggle with poverty, particularly in Eurasia, but the Romani groups are often some of the poorest because of their exclusion from both society and the social services needed to live decent lives. While Romani live throughout the ECA region, they vary slightly from Europe to Central Asia. The groups most often referred to as Roma live primarily in Europe and the Caucasus region, while other similar groups such as Lyuli or Tsygane/Tzigane live in the Central Asian region. The Roma are probably the largest group in the region, with up to an estimated 12 million living in Europe, although official numbers of Roma are underreported (European Union, 2014).

Roma in Europe are one of the poorest groups, with an estimated 95 percent of households living below the national poverty lines of their respective countries. They lack access to adequate education, housing, health care, and employment opportunities. About one-third of Roma are unemployed, and a majority of those who are employed work in low or unskilled jobs. Only about 15 percent of Roma receive a high-school diploma, and Roma are much less likely to attend any sort of higher education. Even Roma with a university degree face problems, as twice as many as non-Roma with a degree are unemployed. About 45 percent of Roma houses lack some type of basic amenity, often including indoor plumbing or electricity. A lack of documents often makes it difficult for Roma to access medical services, and about 66 percent of Roma cannot afford prescription drugs, even with health insurance. Without access to employment or basic social services, Roma have a difficult time integrating into society and overcoming poverty (UNDP, 2012).

Some countries, such as Bulgaria, Hungary, and Macedonia, have developed many successful programs to help Roma deal with some of these issues. Social inclusion of Roma is goal throughout most European countries, and the European Union (EU) is working towards this

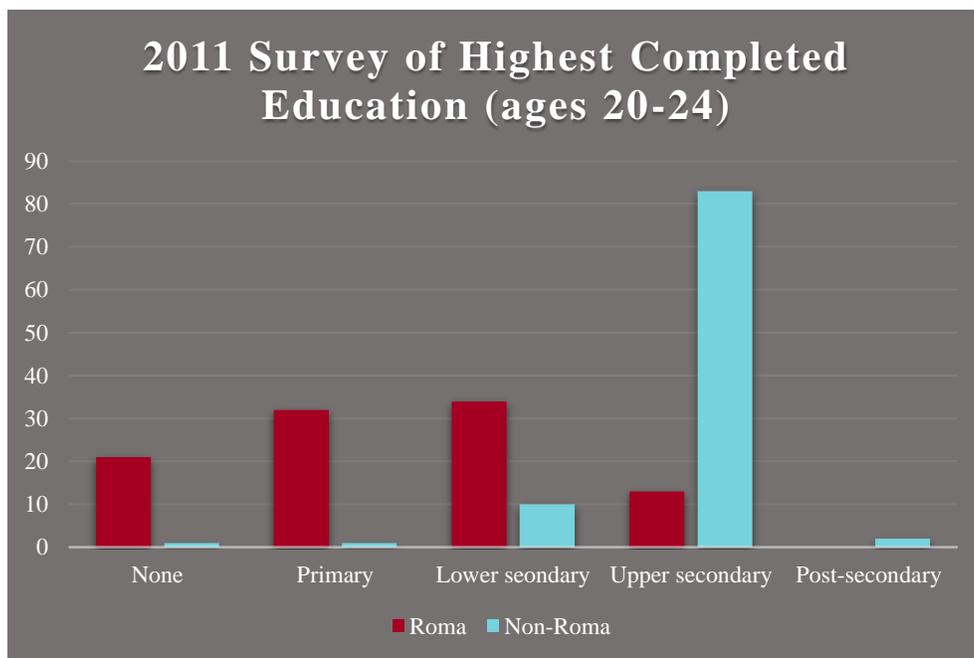
goal through projects and initiatives. Other countries, however, have struggled to create successful programs, largely due to non-Roma attitudes and stereotypes. Serbia is one of these countries; faced with high unemployment and relatively high national poverty (24.6 percent) in the nation as a whole, Roma are especially marginalized in Serbian society (World Bank, “Serbia,” 2014).

Roma in Serbia

Roma are the second largest minority group in Serbia, after Hungarians. Officially, 147,604 people are registered as ethnically Roma in Serbia, making up about two percent of the population, but unofficial estimates go as high as 800,000 (Wikipedia, “Romani in Serbia,” 2014; Council of Europe, 2007). About 78 percent of Serbian Roma live in relative poverty, and around 10 percent live below \$2.15 per day (UNDP, 2012). Many Roma lack access to decent housing and health care services, and with already high unemployment rates, Roma struggle to find decent work as well. Education poses some of the biggest problems for Roma in Serbia, with around 12 percent of Roma students completing high school and almost none moving on to higher education (UNDP, 2012). The education system marginalizes Roma through overrepresentation in special education schools and by allowing discrimination within the classroom. The government of Serbia has tried to work to fix some of these issues, but a lack of motivation and the presence of prejudices often keep these initiatives from being effective and successful. Serbia has created and implemented several policies and programs targeting Roma, including the Strategy for the Improvement of the Status of Roma in the Republic of Serbia, the Decade of Roma Inclusion, and the Assistance to Roma Children in Education program, among others. These policies and programs have been deemed largely ineffective due to poor

implementation and a lack of commitment to change on behalf of the government. They also did not target issues of social inclusion of Roma children in education or other problems such as child begging and child marriage. Discrimination on behalf of the non-Roma population also made the success of these policies and programs difficult to achieve (DOL, 2013).

Education for Roma is one of the biggest issues the group faces in Serbia. Around 22 percent of Roma have never had any sort of formal education, and most only make it through primary or lower secondary grades. The following graph depicts the disparities between Roma and non-Roma in the Serbian education system (UNDP, 2012).



UNDP, 2012.

Roma children are typically underprepared for primary school, and many of them are eventually placed in special schools or classrooms. Around 30 percent of all children in special education are Roma. Non-Roma children are more likely to attend pre-school or be informally educated before they attend primary school. In 2011, only around 20 percent of Roma attend preschool, compared to 45 percent of non-Roma, even though preschool was made compulsory as of 2007 (UNDP, 2012). Additionally, Roma often live farther away from schools and, also do

not necessarily have access to the right materials. Textbooks are free for the first year of primary school but must be bought for the remainder of the years. Similarly, while public schools are free of charge, parents pay for lunches, school supplies, and even renovations that the budget often does not cover; other items such as food and adequate clothing are necessary for schoolchildren but not always obtainable for Roma. Around 67 percent of Roma struggle with malnutrition (UNDP, 2012). Private tutoring is also often used, with around 10 percent of students participating in primary school and around 30 percent participating in secondary school; tutoring is also paid for by parents (Roma Education Fund, 2007). Because of the Roma housing situations, their communities are often pushed to the outskirts of cities. These “ghettos,” as they are called, are typically much farther away from schools, creating another obstacle to accessing education (UNICEF, 2010).

Another issue is that Roma are generally excluded from Serbian school curriculum and face discrimination in the classroom, two factors that push Roma into the special schools. Roma-language schools, classes, and textbooks are not available, and although Roma take Serbian language classes before entering school, they are still challenged with learning in a secondary language. Roma are also disadvantaged in the standardized tests used to assess students. On a grading scale of one to five, Roma scored an average of 3.25, while non-Roma scored an average of 4.36. Roma also did much worse on the Serbian language portion, scoring an average of 2.79, compared to 4.01 for non-Roma (Open Society Institute, 2010). The tests have been criticized for being biased and outdated; many do not believe that the tests accurately assess students’ abilities, especially those of Roma students. These tests are also used to determine which students will be taken out of the mainstream classrooms and placed into special schooling. Some Roma students have reportedly done poorly on purpose, in order to be placed in the special schools. There,

Roma often feel safer and more included, even though their education might not be as academically challenging. About 47 percent of Roma students thought they were better off in the special schools than in the mainstream schools, even though 74 percent thought they would have an easier time finding jobs with a mainstream school education (ref Serbia). Students often feel discriminated against by both the teachers and students in the mainstream schools, including even some reports of physical abuse. Most Roma students realize the long-term negative effects of attending special schools, though, even though they often feel more comfortable there (Open Society Institute, 2010).

Roma education has several important implications for the students and the communities as a whole. For one, exclusion in the classroom perpetuates existing stereotypes and contributes to further discrimination by non-Roma. Inadequate education can make it difficult for Roma to obtain decent employment opportunities. In a survey of Roma who had completed secondary education through a special school, about 76 percent of them were unemployed (Open Society Institute, 2010). Unemployment rates are already high among Roma, primarily because of discrimination and a lack of education. In a 2011 survey, 49 percent of Roma were unemployed, as opposed to 27 percent of non-Roma, and about 70 percent of Roma had had informal employment experience, compared to 27 percent of non-Roma (UNDP, 2012). Lack of employment and income in Roma communities can lead to higher incidences of forced child begging or even child trafficking, both of which are perpetuated by insufficient education levels and can hinder Roma children from obtaining an adequate education (DOL, 2013). Roma parents often remove children from school in order to generate another source of income, rather than paying for the expenses of schooling. Girls are more affected by a lack of education than boys are, facing much higher rates of unemployment, as well as issues such as child marriage and

domestic abuse, which can be worsened by a lack of education (UNDP, 2012); however, both Roma girls and Roma boys fare far worse in terms of education than their non-Roma counterparts.

Without adequate education, Roma communities cannot expect to be able to improve economically or socially. These communities live mostly in poverty, lacking employment, decent housing if any at all, adequate food, and access to education. The discrimination by non-Roma makes it even more difficult for Roma to overcome these obstacles and integrate into Serbian society. If we work to improve educational inclusion and access for Roma children, we can help improve their chances to access the economy in the future and work towards the broader inclusion of Roma in Serbia. These efforts toward improving education for Roma in Serbia will go toward our broader World Bank efforts of Roma inclusion and poverty alleviation throughout Europe (World Bank, “Roma,” 2013).

Education Approaches

Roma education in Serbia requires a two-pronged approach that tackles both the lack of access to education and the exclusion and discrimination in the classroom. Programs that target these problems can take a number of forms, such as providing incentives, training teachers in anti-discrimination, providing native-language education components, and many other approaches.

Many programs use incentives, both monetary and non-monetary, in order to encourage students to stay in school and to encourage parents to allow their children to continue their education. One program like this aimed to provide incentives for schoolchildren in Guragon, India to stay in school. Conducted as a research study, incentives were offered in the forms of

money to the parents, money to the children, and a toy to the children. These incentives work to increase immediate benefits of education, decrease the costs of education, or both, since students in this part of India often miss up to a fourth of school throughout the year because of household obligations or high costs of education. Some children were given the incentive money. Some parents were given the choice of money or a toy for their child as a reward. In both cases, any incentive money was controlled by the parents. Both methods worked to improve the children's school attendance and performance, through motivating the student to do well or motivating the parent to encourage their child to do well (Barry, 2007).

Another similar program targeted girls in rural areas of Kenya. Only about one-third of children finish primary school in Kenya due to the high costs of education, including a tuition fee, textbooks, uniforms, and other school items. Merit-based scholarships were given to high achieving girls in 6th grade, which covered the costs of school fees and supplies and gave each girl recognition at a school awards ceremony for a total award of about \$20(USD) to each student. In general, the scholarships improved both attendance and performance of the girls who received the award. Test scores indicated that the program positively affected students as a whole, not just those who received the money. Even teachers' attendance and parents' participation improved significantly. The project faced some major challenges, though, as many schools refused to implement the program and many of the scholarships were given to girls from already advantaged homes (Center for Effective Global Action, 2002).

Programs with goals of social inclusion through education have been implemented in both Canada and the United States to target Aboriginal students and Native American students. Both groups face discrimination, exclusion, poverty, and other issues within the societies that they live in; and both projects aim to bring these groups' culture, language, and values into the

classroom. In the case of the Aboriginal students, history and values of the group were implemented into classroom curriculums. Various projects like this have been created throughout Canada in order to create a safer, more inclusive environment for Aboriginal students and to educate non-Aboriginal students about the group's culture, values, and people to help eliminate stereotypes, discrimination, and exclusion (Toulouse, 2008; Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, "Learning About Walking in Beauty"). In the United States, one program aimed to hire more Native American teachers and educators so that Native American students can be included in education. These teachers would help teach history and culture of Native Americans to all students, but they would also serve as mentors and tutors to the Native American students, able to know the cultures and languages firsthand. These educators would be able to encourage Native American students, as well as give them practical help with schoolwork. Additionally, they would create a greater presence in order to provide general education about Native American culture and people (Manuelito, 2003).

In addition to these programs, several Roma inclusion programs have been successfully implemented in other European countries. In Macedonia, USAID created the Roma Education Project, which provided scholarships to Roma students and is now working to set up after-school centers where Roma students can receive tutoring and advocate to their parents about the importance of education. Out of the 364 students who received scholarships, 298 completed secondary education. Scholarships were also given to Roma university students, of whom 77 percent progressed to the next level. Additionally, 400 teachers were given intercultural training and taught skills in how to teach interactively and how to teach diversity. Since then, the Ministry of Education and Science has taken over the scholarship portion of the project and continues to implement it in high schools (USAID, 2014).

The Roma Education Fund is an organization that the World Bank cofounded, which works to meet many of these goals and more. They work in several Central and Eastern European countries in order to promote Roma education. Many of their projects include providing free textbooks and school supplies, reforming curriculum, reintegrating Roma into mainstream schools, and providing scholarships, mentoring, and extracurricular classes to help Roma further their education. Their biggest goals are making education accessible and inclusive—ensuring that Roma can receive funding for high school and higher education, giving Roma children an early start through preschools and other early education programs, promoting education reforms to include Roma, and advocating for policies that will target the social well-being of Roma in education systems. In recent years, the Roma Education Fund has reached over 340,000 people, including Roma students, Roma parents, and teachers (Roma Education Fund, 2014).

In these programs and others like them, the most successful ones have aimed to help the target group, while also educating the general public in order to eliminate discrimination, stereotypes, and misunderstandings. For a successful program of social inclusion of Roma in the Serbian education system, both the elements of increased capacity to access education and inclusion within the classroom and curriculum must be present. Using examples from successful programs, with both of these goals in mind, the World Bank ECA can create an effective program that will not only increase education for Roma in Serbia but will also help decrease poverty in the long run.

Recommendation

In order to improve the situation of Roma in the education system, we must create a program that involves a two-pronged approach: education access capacity and classroom inclusion. These goals can be achieved through Roma-inclusive curriculum, the addition of Roma teaching assistants, and scholarships that specifically target Roma students in lower and upper secondary school.

For the first goal of education access capacity, scholarships will be given to promising students who are struggling to pay for school supplies and other necessary items such as food or even adequate clothing. Both academic standing and financial need should be taken into account when handing out these scholarships. Secondary school students are the target because Roma students are most likely to drop out during this time, especially due to the fact that they are of working and/or marrying age. These scholarships will be given to the students with the knowledge and understanding that most of the money will end up in the hands of the parents; however, this money provides a sort of income for the family and an incentive for parents to allow their students to continue their education and even encourage them to do well in order to stay eligible. Roma students ages 14 and will be the primary targets, but any Roma children in secondary school will be able to apply. This project will be similar to that of USAID's, which was largely successful and eventually taken over by the government, who provided scholarships for all Roma students in their first year of secondary school. The evaluations of the USAID program stressed the need for mentoring and tutoring of the scholarship recipients in order for this project to be truly successful, which can be achieved through portions of the second goal of classroom inclusion (Velkovski, 2009).

For the second goal of classroom inclusion, Roma teaching assistants would be hired and Roma history and culture would be taught in classroom curriculum. The teaching assistants

would be most useful in primary school, but the Roma-focused curriculum could be implemented at every level. This would look similar to the programs for Aboriginal and Native American students. Many Roma students, even if they are doing well in class, do not feel comfortable in the environment. Classmates, parents of non-Roma students, and even teachers often harbor discriminatory attitudes towards Roma students and families, which can create a hostile learning environment. Including Roma history and culture in mainstream school curriculum can help facilitate discussions about diversity, eliminate stereotypes, and make Roma students feel more a part of their education. Since discrimination is a broader issue in Serbia, students can learn anti-discrimination practices in school and then pass them on to peers and parents. Inclusive learning can help change students' and society's attitudes about the Roma community as a whole.

Another key element to including Roma students in the classroom is hiring Roma teaching assistants who can help both Roma students and teachers with ensuring that Roma feel safe and are free to learn. This element could, by hiring Roma TAs, also help with the employment situation that Roma communities face by providing jobs for educated Roma. Since these TAs would know the language and culture of the Roma students, they would be able to help with tutoring and making sure that the children understand the material. They would have a better grasp of learning styles of Roma students and understand the struggles that Roma communities face that might hinder a child's education. The TAs could also help the classroom teachers in understanding Roma culture and students so that they are able to better include them in their curriculum. Having a colleague of Roma ethnicity might help teachers with discriminatory attitudes, as they would be working closely with the TAs to develop lessons, evaluate students, and teach in the classroom.

Funding for this project could come from various sources including the Serbian government, the European Union and other entities, the United Nations, our own World Bank funding, or even organizations such as the Roma Education Fund. USAID's project cost \$4.5 million over the course of 10 years. Instead of teaching assistants, they hired tutors and mentors and created after-school programs and educational centers. The Roma Education Fund uses funds from the EU that are specifically allocated to Roma NGOs and local governments in order to provide grants to help with Roma education.

The overall goal of social inclusion in the classroom, as well as anti-discrimination education for non-Roma, is essential to ensuring that any access capacity projects are successful. Even if students can afford to continue their education, discrimination often leads to disadvantages in the classroom or even purposeful attempts to be transferred to special schools. Projects that have succeeded in helping to increase secondary school completion among Roma students have also worked to enforce anti-discrimination policies and make Roma history and culture a part of the classroom. The first goal is also important to achieving this one, as classroom inclusion would not be useful if most Roma students are dropping out in secondary school. Both of these goals are necessary and will work together in helping Roma children obtain a good education, which can help with the overall objective of alleviating poverty in Roma communities.

Conclusion

World Bank ECA needs to make poverty alleviation in Roma communities a priority for the region. One aspect of this goal can be ensuring quality education and completion of education for Roma students, especially in countries such as Serbia where education programs

are largely unsuccessful and discrimination against Roma is a major problem. Through inclusive curriculum, the presence of Roma teaching assistants, and scholarships for Roma students in secondary school, Roma will have better chances of completing and doing well in school. In turn, this will lead to more employment opportunities, broader societal attitude changes throughout Serbia, and a prioritization of Roma education for both educators and Serbian government entities, which will help in the larger goals of social inclusion and poverty alleviation for Roma communities.

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