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Early School Leaving: causes and consequences

*Survey conducted in lower secondary schools from Centre, North-East and South-Muntenia
Regions of Romania: data collected over two research waves in 2011 (Wave 1) and 2013 (Wave 2)*

RESEARCH REPORT

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2013



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Executive summary

General study data

The study was conducted among students enrolled in lower secondary schools (grades 5 to 8) and their parents from Centre, North-East and South-Muntenia Regions of Romania, in schools where the share of Roma children was at least 5-10%. In fact, they represented the target population of the study which was subdivided into 3 categories:

- Roma students (and their parents / guardians),
- non-Roma students (and their parents / guardians),
- early school leavers (students who have not been attending school over the past 4 weeks prior to the study) / students having at least 20 unmotivated absences (and their parents / guardians).

A sample of respondents was selected for each target group. The surveys were conducted as a panel (Wave 1 on the first year of implementation of the project, respectively Wave 2 in the third year of the project, resorting to the same sample of students) in order to have a longitudinal perspective on student progress and to compare school abandonment rates from one research wave to another among the sample of monitored students.

Data were collected during **April - May 2011** (for Wave 1), respectively **April - May 2013** (for Wave 2) by means of face-to-face questionnaires applied at school or at home.

Samples selected for Wave 1:

- Roma students (and their parents / guardians): 700 subjects, representative of the Roma students target population from the counties involved in the project (Centre, North-East and South-Muntenia regions);
- non-Roma students (and their parents / guardians): 632 subjects, representative of the non-Roma students target population from the counties involved in the project (Centre, North-East and South-Muntenia regions);
- early school leavers (who have not been attending school over the past 4 weeks prior to the study) or students gathering at least 20 unmotivated absences (and their parents / guardians): 299 subjects.

81% of the respondents from Wave 1 were also interviewed in Wave 2. Some of the initial respondents could no longer be identified (due to family emigration, change of residence etc.) or simply refused to follow up with the Wave 2 questionnaire, therefore they were replaced with other students



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meeting similar criteria.

The maximum acceptable error for each of the Roma / non-Roma students' samples is of + / - 3.9% at a 95% probability level. The sample of early school leavers (and their parents / guardians) can't be calculated, considering the fact that their choice was neither randomized, nor stratified because of lack of official data on socio-demographic categories for secondary level early school leavers. Moreover, there is no framework for field identification that would allow for a random selection. However, the sample allows benchmarking against the representative samples of Roma / non-Roma students selected throughout the research. The sample resulted during Wave 1 was post-stratified (weighted), taking into account the actual size of the Roma population/ other ethnicity according to the National Institute of Statistics (NIS). The share was calculated based on the stratification criterion (rural / urban residency and county), as a ratio between the actual population size, according to official data, and the sample in each stratum.

Summary results - Wave I

- ✓ The first conclusion that clearly emerges from the survey data is that school absenteeism and dropout rate are significantly higher among Roma students. The educational cumulative process of Roma students (evaluated throughout the research based on grades obtained in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature) is much weaker than that of non-Roma students, hence the educational opportunities for Roma students are definitely lower. According to our data 1 out of 3 Roma children (35.9%) has gathered more than 20 absences, as opposed to 1 out of 10 non-Roma students (11%). At the other end, 8 out of 10 non-Roma students (77.7%) had a maximum of 10 unmotivated absences, while only 1 out of 2 Roma students (49.6%) is in the same situation. In terms of class performance, a quarter of non-Roma students (25.4%) had grades above 8 in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature, as compared to only 5% of Roma students (1 in 20). 63.8% of the Roma students (6 out of 10) attained an average grade in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature of maxim 6, as compared to only 26.8% of the non-Roma students.
- ✓ The statistical analysis carried out showed that the gap between school absenteeism and school performance is maintained even when controlling the effect of certain fundamental variables such as level of parental education, residency, cultural capital of the family (operationalized throughout the research by the number of books owned by the family), pre-school preparation (the number of years attending kindergartens and nursery schools). In other words there is a gap between the educational



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opportunities for Roma and non-Roma students, despite similar social conditions (parents with identical level of education, similar cultural capital and preschool preparation, similar rural / urban residency), as observed in all counties involved in this project. Basically, one of the findings is that Roma children do not benefit in the same way from the Romanian educational system (including preschool education), despite identical attendance periods and similar family and social capital. Under the circumstances, the quality of the education received by a Roma student as compared to a non-Roma one (even when they study in the same classroom), the occurrence of covert discrimination mechanisms, the unequal treatment given by teachers as a manifestation of existing stereotypes against Roma students, all these matters become extremely relevant.

- ✓ Another significant finding was that 1 out of 50 Roma students (2.5%) declared not to know Romanian, while 3.9% stated that they were familiar with it enough to get by – and all these Roma students are enrolled in lower secondary education (grades 5-8). Only 3 out of 4 Roma children (72.6%) know Romanian very well, according to their own statements. Data also revealed that almost 1 out of 4 Roma children (22%) spoke the Romani language at home before going to school and the same proportion of Roma students stated to know their language very well.
- ✓ The results of the report confirm that school is not a friendly environment for all students, regardless of their ethnicity. The survey data show that many parents consider that the unequal treatment of Roma children is a school matter (15.2%) and the share of Roma parents who feel this way is significantly higher than that of non-Roma parents (17.3% vs. 12.5%). At the same time, at least 1 out of 10 interviewed parents (12%) thinks that Roma students are treated worse than the non-Roma ones in school - among Roma parents the share is significantly higher (16.7% as opposed to 3.9%).
- ✓ The research revealed that Roma children are usually seated in the last two desks rather than the first ones, compared to non-Roma students - 23.9% of non-Roma students occupy the last or penultimate desk (if there are at least 3 rows of desks in the classroom) compared to 34.9% Roma children, which might be an indicator of educational discrimination. There is also a tendency for Roma students to share a desk with another Roma student. Under the circumstances, it is recommended that the intervention planned to ensure equal opportunities to Roma children be aimed at fighting the negative attitudes against Roma among peers or teachers and increasing their empathy towards the unfavourable social conditions Roma students are faced with and that are beyond their control. Also, monitoring,



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reporting and discouraging any ethnic-related discrimination case from non-Roma students and teachers are more than welcomed.

- ✓ Survey data confirm other issues related to Roma community and students that have already been perceived, but not yet supported by evidence. Thus, the scarcer and poorer family resources (material, educational and social resources, as well as values) play an important part as far as the existing gap in terms of equal access to education for Roma children is concerned. The income and material resources are clearly lower among Roma children and the percentage of Roma students who come from families that can't provide a minimal standard of living and welfare is significantly higher, clearly impacting on their educational process. It is disturbing that in the schools where the study was conducted almost every third Roma student (29.2%) has lived, at least once over the past month, the experience of going to school feeling hungry because there was nothing to eat at home - according to their own statements. The share of non-Roma students living the same experience is three times smaller (10%). The main income source for a quarter (25.5%) of the interviewed Roma families is represented by child benefits, as compared to only 11.1% of non-Roma families. For 1 out of 3 families of Roma students (32.4%) the main source of revenue is the social support, a situation faced by only 5.7% of the non-Roma families! The focus group part of the research revealed that presently, in Romania, there still are cases of students who refuse to attend school because of the shame felt when wearing their clothes. The quantitative data support this idea, as 1 out of 20 Roma students (5.5%) often or very often feels a sense of shame because of his / her clothes, in comparison with only 1.3% of the non-Roma students. There are other variables regarding the financial welfare of the student's family that clearly indicate the tremendous gap separating Roma and non-Roma children. The data and research-founded recommendation is that the intervention to support Roma students' education should take into consideration their financial living conditions as well, as a necessary measure in ensuring a normal educational process.
- ✓ The educational capital is also lower among Roma children families, as 29.1% of the parents of Roma students fall into the "no school or primary education, at most" category, as opposed to only 3.4% of the parents of non-Roma students (the analysis took into consideration the parent / guardian with the highest education level in the family). While nearly 6 out of 10 Roma parents (64.1%) had more than secondary education, only 1 out of 10 non-Roma parents (14.6%) has the same educational status. The difference is huge and clearly indicates the hiatus between the two categories of students in terms of



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family support throughout the educational process – in terms of guidance through the school system, helping with homework, understanding school difficulties, helping to develop the cognitive skills in the first years of life by enriching vocabulary, stimulating the associations of ideas etc. In this particular case the recommended intervention consists of compensatory measures such as after-school additional training in order to counterbalance the lack of family support, as one can easily imagine the kind of help a student enrolled in lower education may receive from parents with primary education, as compared with the assistance provided by a family where at least one of the parents has an upper secondary or faculty level education.

- ✓ The research also showed major differences as to the amount of formal pre-school education received by Roma children compared to non-Roma. In this respect, the data speak for themselves: only 4.9% of non-Roma children did not attend kindergartens, while the share of Roma children in the same situation is 26.7%. Moreover, among those who went to kindergarten, the ratio of non-Roma children who attended it for just one year is 8.2%, while that of Roma children is significantly higher, up to 26.4%. Unfortunately, there is no data available as to the quality of the preschool education received.
- ✓ The importance of pre-school training is essential to scholastic performance and success in adult life, a common fact to all experts in the sociology of education. In light of the findings set out in the present report, the huge gap separating Roma and non-Roma students in terms of school performance, school leaving rate and so on is hardly surprising. The difference in terms of preparation is present from the starting point (the 1st grade) and it will only be perpetuated throughout all subsequent classes and educational levels, hence largely affecting the student's length of school attendance and his accumulation of knowledge. Therefore, compensating the insufficient family support for Roma students with extensive and intensive pre-school education measures is highly recommended. Certain programs have already been implemented in this respect, but there should be a national-level comprehensive intervention aimed at all Roma children – a top priority for Romania.
- ✓ The cultural capital of Roma and non-Roma families presents significant differences, as revealed by the indicator we relied on throughout the research, namely the number of books (other than textbooks) in the student's household. Thus, almost three quarters (74.7%) of the Roma families owe maximum 10 books, while the percentage of non-Roma families with up to 10 books is 37.7%. The survey indicated that every 4 out of 10 households (39.2%) of non-Roma students have minimum 26 books, a situation encountered only in 1 out of 10 households (10.2%) of Roma students.



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- ✓ The values and aspirations that characterize Roma parents / guardians are less likely to prevent early school leaving (ESL), as 1 out of 10 Roma students (8%) was never encouraged with the famous dictum “knowledge is power” (while the share of non-Roma students in a similar situation is of 5%). Apparently 9 out of 10 parents of non-Roma students (90.9%) wish for their child to enrol in upper secondary education, while only 7 out of 10 Roma parents think the same way (71.9 %). Only 1 in 20 parents (5.6 %) of non-Roma students say that they want "a little", "very little" or "not at all" for their child to pursue the upper secondary education, as compared to 1 in 7 (15.9%) parents of Roma origin. Undoubtedly, parents' aspirations regarding their children's completion of studies are also reflected in the support they provide throughout schooling. Therefore, more efforts are required from mentors or advisors in order to improve Roma students' perspective on the value of education, which they do not fully grasp, due to family context.
- ✓ Throughout the surveys data were gathered both from Roma and non-Roma students, as well as from a sample of early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences (thus presenting a high risk of dropout). Naturally, the specific profile of teenagers in this situation also suggests the causes of the phenomenon. The research clearly shows that the profile of Roma students is definitely closer to that of early school leavers or teenagers at risk of dropout. All the differences between Roma and non-Roma students revealed in the present report - that support the idea of lower educational opportunities and increased risk of dropping out for the first category - are even more acute when comparing non-Roma students with early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences. The degree of marginalization is more severe as far as these teenagers are concerned (most of them are seated in the rear desks) and their family's financial, human, social and values capital is lower, when compared to the group of Roma students still attending school. It is worth mentioning that 77.7% of the young people selected among the sample of early school leavers or those gathering over 20 unmotivated absences are of Roma descent. These data support the conclusion that Roma students present a higher risk of dropping out of school.
- ✓ The research also analysed the correlation between the percentage of Roma children in schools and various aspects of school environment. Such data show that there is a higher concentration of Roma students in schools where the share of children who have attended three years of kindergarten is of maximum 10%. At the same time, the share of children who have attended kindergarten for less than a year is higher in schools with significant Roma children presence.



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- ✓ Moreover, the research revealed that schools with higher percentage of registered Roma students have fewer facilities – such as physics / chemistry laboratories, gyms, computer labs, computers, toilets inside the school or centralised heating system – based on the information provided by school headmasters / headmistresses.
- ✓ Schools with a high percentage of Roma students have fewer opportunities to benefit from the assistance of a school counsellor, but, on the other hand, they are more likely to have Roma teachers.
- ✓ The survey also tested the relationship between the percentage of Roma students enrolled and their motivation to further their education. The overall sample reveals that there is a greater propensity for continuing the upper secondary education in schools with maximum 10% Roma students – although in this case the statistical association is rather low.
- ✓ The survey data show major discrepancies in terms of family, institutional and social support (starting from birth and then throughout the educational process), as well as educational opportunities between Roma and non-Roma students. There are several explanations for this situation which is the result of a mix of factors. One of these is simply due to the fact that schools lack the effective mechanisms to facilitate school integration for Roma students. It should be noted that all Roma children included in the study were identified by their teachers as being of Roma origin (practically the Roma students were identified using the hetero-identification method). Therefore the student-teacher relation was always influenced by teachers' constant awareness of teaching to Roma children. The responses gathered from Roma students and their parents / guardians indicate they do not go through the scholar system hiding their ethnicity, as it so frequently happens in other cases identified through other programs and researches conducted in the field of Roma students' education. Based on these results a strategic recommendation emerges: there is an urgent need for an ample intervention in order to rebalance the educational opportunities between Roma and non-Roma students.

Summary results - Wave 2

A. School dropout

Collected data show that the proportion of students who left school over the two years elapsed from the completion of Wave 1 (2011-2013) was 19.7% (the percentage applies to the randomly selected students). Basically, about 1 out of 5 students surveyed in 2011 had left school by 2013. The present statistical analysis (as well as the results presented below) only includes the students who have been identified during both waves of research and whose school dropout was verifiable.



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Among the non-Roma students interviewed in both research waves only 1 out of 14 (7%) dropped out, while the same share among Roma students raises to 31% - almost 1 out of 3 Roma children left school only two years after being interviewed. From another point of view, over 80% of the students who dropped out between the two research waves (2011-2013) are of Roma origin. Therefore, the odds of dropping out of school in the next two years were 6 times higher for a Roma student enrolled in lower secondary education in 2011, as compared to a non-Roma student - in schools from South-Muntenia, Centre and North-East regions with a 5-10% share of Roma students enrolled (see Table 81. Dropout rate among sampled Roma and non-Roma students).

According to research results there is a significant correlation between school dropout and:

- *Limited family support* (low educational and cultural capital of parents / guardians);
- *Unfriendly , non-inclusive school environment* (the degree to which the student is pleased to go to school, the extent to which he / she feels integrated, the seating in the classroom, non-involvement or low participation in preschool education);
- *Low grades* (self-representation and education valuing);
- *The transition from one stage of education to another* (the highest dropout rate is registered after the completion of the 8th grade);
- *Pertaining to a vulnerable group.*

The strongest indicator explaining school dropout is the way students perceive school: 64.1% of the early school leavers did not like going to school, compared to 12.3% who dropped out despite the fact they perceived school as a friendly environment where they liked to go (see Table 93. Correlation between school attractiveness and risk of school dropout). Also, student academic performance influences the risk of dropout. Students with higher grades are less likely to drop out of school than those with lower grades (see Table 82. Correlation between average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature and school dropout).

When introducing the ethnic variable the correlation clearly indicates that Roma students with low grades present a higher risk of school abandonment than non-Roma students with similar grades. One possible explanation lies in the family support in continuing their education (see Table 83. Correlation between average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature and current school situation). At the same time, there is a correlation between school dropout and parents' level of education, namely the higher the level of education, the lesser the dropout risk (see Table 86. Correlation between



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level of education and risk of school dropout).

Moreover, the cultural capital of the family (represented by the number of books held at home) is also correlated with the school dropout rate, namely the greater the number of books the student was able to find at home, the smaller the dropout risk (see Table 90. Correlation between the number of books at home and risk of school dropout).

The inequality generated by family - school relation is also reflected by the positive correlation between the family's financial situation and the risk of dropping out. Basically, the ratio of students who tend to drop out of school are those coming from poorer families (see Table 88. Correlation between family financial capacity to support educational expenses and risk of school dropout).

Students' aspirational level or how much they want to attend high-school also influences the risk of school dropout (see Table 94 Correlation between level of aspiration to enrol in upper secondary education and risk of school dropout).

Another variable that is positively correlated with the dropout rate is the seat assigned in the classroom - an indicator of the degree of integration or non-inclusion at school (see Table 92. Correlation between classroom seating and school dropout rate). Pre-school education is another influencing factor as far as school abandonment is concerned, since the extent of school dropout among children who attended kindergarten is significantly lower (see Table 89. Correlation between kindergarten attendance and school dropout).

B. School performance

There were three cohorts of sampled students who sat the leaving examination, with the exception of students who were enrolled in the 5th grade during Wave 1 (see Table 98. Share of sampled students into categories defined by the National Capacity Examination). Data show a significant variation of national assessment results between 2011 and 2013 (see Table 99. Distribution of students based on scoring intervals), as the introduction of video surveillance in 2012 generated a significantly higher rate of students with grades below 5 in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature. In 2013 the proportion of students with grades below 5 was reduced compared to 2012, either as a consequence of decreasing the difficulty level or as a result of a higher non-participation rate (due to failing to pass the 8th grade etc.).

Since 2012 (the year when video surveillance was introduced) the rate of non-participation of youth in the national assessment examination (despite being enrolled in the 8th grade and meeting the age criterion) increased (see Table 100. Share of sampled students failing to sit the National Capacity



Examination in 2011, 2012 and 2013). It is a virtually ignored phenomenon for which there is no official data. The reasons why the rate of failure to graduate from lower secondary school rose sharply in 2012 and 2013 compared to 2011 remains a matter of debate. However, the students who do not sit the national leaving examination may enrol in upper secondary schools after resitting their class examinations and being declared promoted.

The survey data show that students who do not sit in the national leaving examination are at higher risk of dropping out than those who do (see Table 101. Correlation between sitting the National Capacity Examination and current school situation). It is difficult to say exactly whether non-sitting at the national leaving examination generates the school abandonment risk or if it is the latter that determines the student not to sit the examination. It is a matter worthy of a thorough investigation. Data also indicate that a higher ratio of students coming from higher educated families sit at the national leaving examination and that they also obtain better results (see Table 102. Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in categories defined by parental education).



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Introduction

The present research makes a significant contribution to the general understanding of the early school leaving phenomenon and, in particular, to the challenges faced by the Roma children in Romania. We strongly believe that the data gathered throughout the present study could turn out to be a useful tool in substantiating the need for future public programs and initiatives intended to improve the access to education for Roma children.

This study proposed an innovative research design by analysing the results of two representative samples of Roma and non-Roma students enrolled in lower secondary education, in a comparative "in the mirror" manner. The data were collected by means of questionnaires applied both to the students and their parents / guardians. At the same time, in order to increase the quality of the comparison, data were collected from a third sample of adolescents (unrepresentative) who have already left school or present a high risk of doing so, after gathering over 20 unmotivated absences throughout the previous semester (the survey was carried out from April to May 2011). For a better characterization of a possible weighting of Roma children in schools and in order to capture any situation of school segregation, headmasters were also interviewed. The selection area for the students participating in the study was represented by schools with secondary level education and a significant percentage of Roma students (at least 5 - 10%) from Centre, North-East and South-Muntenia. As a matter of fact, the samples of students were selected from a pool of similar social profiles, therefore the differences that resulted can be attributed to a range of factors other than the student's area of origin.

The samples constructed in the previous quantitative studies conducted in Romania that covered school attendance of Roma children were designed starting from the general population, resorting to data stratification based on the distribution of Roma population and Roma communities. This research complements these studies by focusing on the "arena" where the accumulation of knowledge occurs, namely in schools. The focus was both on the quality of education received by students from vulnerable groups and, even more importantly, on capturing the dropout risk among these categories of students. Therefore the samples used in this research were built upon the distribution of students in schools (the sampling universe comprised schools with a percentage of Roma students of at least 5 - 10%) by selecting children who are currently attending school. A sample of children who have left school or are at high risk of doing so and were registered as students in the sampled schools, was also selected (in a non-randomized manner). A team of experts applied the questionnaires to students and their parents / guardians (the child's legal



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representative). The data were also collected following a series of interviews with the headmasters / headmistresses.

Another matter of interest for this research was that of capturing the explanatory mechanisms for the early school leaving phenomenon from a comparative perspective among both Roma and non-Roma students. The decision was made considering the well-known status of Roma minority students as a vulnerable group subjected to educational exclusion, as statistical data clearly indicate their higher risk of leaving school, being more frequently absent from school, getting lower grades and so on. In addition, although some mechanisms explaining early school leaving have been highlighted (particularly in the Western area and less in Romania) however, it is not very clear whether these mechanisms function in a different way as far as Roma and non-Roma students are concerned. It should be pointed out that the insights on the early school leaving phenomenon provided by the present study apply not only to the Roma students, but also to other students included in the vulnerable groups category (students from families facing difficult financial situations, students from rural areas etc.).

The identification of Roma people was always one of the thorny issues in conducting studies focused on the vulnerable group of Roma people, as there is a well-known reluctance among Roma people to declare their ethnicity (due to multiple and complex matters that shall not be dwelled with presently, but mostly revolving around stigmatization, negative stereotyping, discrimination etc.). Therefore, the matter was handled by resorting to the hetero-identification method when selecting the Roma students with the help of their teachers; even though this option is not without risk (see Rughiniș, 2010), however, in this particular situation, it was the proper choice – all necessary arguments are provided within the report.

It should also be mentioned that the early school leaving phenomenon was given a specific operational understanding in accordance with the logic behind this study. Hence, all students who have not actually been attending school over the four weeks prior to the assessment of their situation were included in the category of students dropping out. This choice, along with the advantages and disadvantages of this definition – as compared to the EUROSTAT one and the other definitions put forward– was argued throughout the report. The same principle applies to the definition of school dropout and its understanding in the official Romanian documents (the annual evaluation of the education system drafted by the Ministry of National Education, The Rules of Organization and Functioning of Pre-University Educational Institutions - ROFPEI).

As a final remark, the theme of the present study - early school leaving - can be framed as a matter



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of analysis in the more general framework of problems associated with educational inequality of opportunity. In a nutshell, the educational inequality of opportunity manifests itself in the quality of education provided, the rate of school absenteeism and early school leaving. It is an essential aspect worth mentioning, as most of the analyses and researches that led to relevant results explaining ESL have originated in such a paradigmatic key. Practically all variables relevant to the analysis of educational inclusion inequalities equally apply to the ESL phenomenon.

The first part of the study focuses on ESL characteristics in Romania and summarizes (in accordance with the aim and purpose of this report) some of the "cornerstone" theories explaining the educational inequality of opportunity, relevant ESL studies and definitions, as well as some explanatory mechanisms regarding the phenomenon, according to the specialized literature. The next section of the report presents the research methodology, followed by an in-depth analysis of the survey, while the final section is dedicated to a summary of the results and, consequently, a set of recommendations to be taken into consideration in the light of the findings.



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Empirical and theoretical foundations of the study

The early school leaving phenomenon in Romania - specific aspects

In 2012 ESL reached 17.4% in Romania, thus placing our country on a disturbing 5th place among the 28 EU Member States¹. Moreover, the previous year the ESL percentage was similar (17.5%), indicating a stagnation in the process of reducing ESL in Romania. One of the main objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy is reducing ESL levels below 10% across EU and below 11.3% in Romania by 2020. Given the current level and the past years' trend, the 11% goal seems far from being achieved. Under the circumstances it is necessary to review the current national strategies to prevent and eradicate Romanian dropout and ESL.

Both concepts of abandonment and early school leaving originate in the same phenomenon (truancy, school non-attendance), but were given different definitions and understandings. Early school leaving is clearly defined by EUROSTAT and refers to people aged 18-24 who have not completed the compulsory education (10 classes) and are not enrolled in any form of education or "training". Therefore, in 2012, 17.4% of people aged 18-24 in Romania have not completed their 10 grades of compulsory education and were not receiving any form of education or training. Since early school leaving regards the adults' educational situation, school dropout refers to school non-attendance among younger people, prior to reaching the age of consent. Beyond this point, however, there is much confusion in Romania as far as the institutional approach to school dropout is concerned, from political decision-makers to school levels (school headmasters and teachers) and especially parents. It is precisely that lack of a uniform institutional definition (in official policy documents) of the dropout concept that renders the effective eradication of the phenomenon more difficult. The study "O școală pentru toți" conducted by Agenția Împreună with support from UNICEF² shows that in everyday practice school administrations evaluate dropout cases in different ways in accordance with: 1) the definition from the Rules of Organization and Functioning of Pre-University Educational Institutions (ROFPEI) – which refers to students who exceed by at least 2 years the corresponding age for the respective educational level without graduating it and without attending school; 2) another definition from a public official document (The Annual Report on the National Education drawn up by the Ministry of National Education) according to which school dropout is represented by the ratio between students enrolled at the beginning of the school year and those still registered at the end of the same

¹ Available at <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>

² Available at <http://www.unicef.ro/publicatii/o-scoala-pentru-toti>



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school year (thus an early school leaver is a student enrolled at the beginning of the school year who is no longer registered at the end of the school year); or 3) a personalised definition in accordance with a personal interpretation of school abandonment (e.g. sometimes students who have not attended school for a period of 30 consecutive days are considered early school leavers). The official definitions are ambiguous, thus having a negative impact on the system's ability to react quickly and appropriately to school abandonment situations (these aspects will not be argued here, as they are already mentioned in the aforementioned study). The lack of uniform and adequate definitions, that should act as benchmarks for the Romanian public policies, contributes in itself to the perpetuation of scarce approaches to the school abandonment phenomenon. Providing school representatives with the right tools for a proper identification of school dropout would undoubtedly increase their capacity to ensure an inclusive educational process and equal educational opportunities for the disadvantaged groups. From our viewpoint, an adequate definition of school dropout should allow for an easy *identification* of abandonment cases, prompt *reporting* of such cases and a tailored *intervention* to ensure the re-enrolment of the child in the educational system. From this perspective, we consider that a student who has not been attending school for a period of five consecutive days without notifying the institution about the objective motifs leading to absenteeism (such as illness and so on) could be considered as a dropout case.

In addition to the state of confusion and misinterpretation of school abandonment definition, there is an even higher state of perplexity among those who provide the educational services as to the causes and risk conditions generating the dropout. Up until now no monitoring and early warning system of students at risk of dropping out has been developed at school-level (there might be some exceptions that we have not yet identified, despite the numerous studies and the interactions we have had with dozens of schools). The ROFPEI definition recommending the declaration of abandonment only two years after the student has ceased to attend school leads to a delayed intervention at a tardy stage. The causes for school dropout originate in a mix of conditions such as³:

³ The causes were retrieved from several studies and analyses among which:

- 1) "Studiu-diagnostic privind situația abandonului școlar și părăsirea timpurie a școlii în mediul rural" (Translator's note "A diagnostic study of school dropout and early school leaving in rural areas"), conducted by Soros Foundation in 2012, available at http://www.soros.ro/ro/program_articol.php?articol=339
- 2) "STUDIU NATIONAL – ROMÂNIA. Analiza situației copiilor aflați în afara sistemului de educație în România" (Translator's Note "NATIONAL STUDY - ROMANIA. An analysis of the situation of children outside the education system in Romania"), conducted by the Institute of Educational Sciences in 2012 under the auspices of UNICEF.
- 3) <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/OOSCI%20Reports/romania-ossi-report-2012-rm.pdf>
- 4) "EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING. Lessons from research for policy makers" study conducted by the European Commission and available at <http://www.spd.dcu.ie/site/edc/documents/nesse2010early-school-leaving-report.pdf>



A. *Poor economic conditions* of the student's family that:

- a) require an early engagement of the student in remunerated activities, thus favouring school absenteeism,
- b) cause a sense of discomfort at school (because of the clothes, availability of food etc.) which turns into an unfriendly environment that predisposes to abandonment,
- c) increase the chances of frequent illnesses or inadequate treatments, which in turn have a direct impact on school absenteeism,
- d) do not ensure the minimum necessary conditions for home studying (electricity, heat, individual study table, quietness etc.).

B. *Family structure* in the sense that:

- a) students from families with many siblings are prone to poverty (hence, the risks previously described),
- b) older siblings are forced to take care of the younger ones, as parents do not have the time to do so because they have to work harder (hence the risk of truancy).

C. *The cultural capital* of the family understood as:

- a) a low level of education of the parents, sometimes associated with specific cultural norms, poorly credited education, incapacity to guide the child through the school maze, consequently an intergenerational mechanism perpetuating the lack of interest in school that predisposes to abandonment,
- b) the influence of the educational model provided by other siblings and family members who discourage the student's participation in school,
- c) early marriages, a cultural element that characterizes some of the Roma communities,
- d) the custom of leaving school at the end of the eighth grade - in rural areas.

D. *The Influence of the community* - early school leaving prevalent in the community, lack of safety at and on the way to school, great distance from home to school – these are also favoring causes of dropout.

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- 5) A communication study from the European Commission to the European Parliament, available at http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/earlycom_ro.pdf
 - 6) „O scoala pentru toti” (Translator's Note "One school for all"), study conducted by Agentia Impreuna with the support of UNICEF, available at <http://www.unicef.ro/publicatii/o-scoala-pentru-toti>.
 - 7) Voicu, B., (coord.) (2010), „Renunțarea timpurie la educație: posibile căi de prevenire”, Vanemonde, București.



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E. Unfriendly non-inclusive school environment – there are some schools that deliberately resort to ethnical / social segregation (despite the legislation banning it, such as the Ministerial Order No. 1540 from the July 19th, 2007 which does not include regulatory measures such as sanctions) and others that do so unintentionally, simply by non-reacting to abandonment situations and placing the entire responsibility on the family (although there is a legal procedure for handling cases of abandonment by contacting family, referring the case to the local Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection, which, in turn, must conduct an tailored analysis of each such case and so on).

It should be pointed out that the aforementioned mix of possible causes for school dropout varies from one case to another, depending on the personal situations of each of the students at risk of dropping out. Sometimes the cultural influence of the family is more important than the poverty factor, in certain cases it is the community that plays the predominant role or in other cases it is the school that leads to high dropout rates through non-response and negligence.

Above all, a proper management of students at risk of dropping out requires 1) the IDENTIFICATION of cases at risk of dropping out in due time, 2) the precise and tailored to the situation UNDERSTANDING of the causes that increase the risk of abandonment and 3) the early, tailored and adequate INTERVENTION to lower the risk and ensure the educational reintegration of the student. All these elements are currently missing from the Romanian school management - the statement is general and is supported by our preliminary analysis conducted in several schools and the studies cited above. School management and teachers are poorly trained to diagnose in a precise and custom manner the causes of school dropout, they do not possess comprehensive data on the situations of early school leavers, their reaction is often delayed by several months after the dropout occurred or sometimes even inexistent. This is one of the reasons why the dropout rate and the percentage of students outside the educational system increase one year after another in Romania. In this respect, the data is both eloquent and extremely worrying:

- during the 2005-2009 period the proportion of preschool-aged children (3 - 6 years) not enrolled in the education system represented 18 - 20% of the total number of children of that age;
- in 2009, 56 105 children of primary school age (7 - 10 years), representing 6.48% of the total number of children of this age, were not enrolled in the education system;
- in 2009, 48 188 secondary school age children (11 - 14 years), representing 5.45% of the total number of children of this age, were outside the education system;



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- the categories of children most likely to face school abandonment are the Roma children, boys in particular and children from disadvantaged families (families with low socioeconomic status, monoparental or broken families, children with disabilities or other illnesses). No significant differences between rural and urban dropout at primary / secondary levels have been registered;
- the evolution of the share of students outside the education system from 2005 / 2006 up to 2009 / 2010:

	2005 / 2006	2007 / 2008	2009 / 2010
Share of children of primary school age (7-10 years) outside the education system – no longer attending school	3,33%	5,43%	6,48%
Share of children of secondary school age (11-14 years) secondary school age children	3,84%	5,68%	5,45%

Source: Data processing of NIS data made by the Institute of Educational Sciences⁴.

The data indicate that the percentage of children outside the educational system is extremely high in Romania (namely that 1 out of 20 children of primary or secondary school age left the education system) and, moreover, the situation has been worsening over years. Even more disturbing is the rampant evolution course of dropout rates at primary education level - since 2006 and up to 2010 it nearly doubled (from 3.3% to 6.5%) -, while at secondary education level it seems to have reached a stable 5%, which is not the least reassuring.

The implications of the current situation are broad, so we shall only focus on some of them. The age pyramid is reversing, as the Romanian population is confronted with an accelerated aging process amid the declining birth rate and increasing emigration trend (see the 2011 national census data) and this will be a dramatic challenge for the pension system over the next decades, when entire cohorts of baby-boomers from the '60s and '70s (the result of the aggressive pro-natalist policies implemented by the Communist regime) will reach the retirement age. Meanwhile, the productive cohorts of working age population are getting “thinner” and, consequently, unable to sustain the growing number of pensioners (in 2009 there were already 5.7 million pensioners amid 5 million employees, as compared to 8.1 million employees vs. 3.5 million pensioners in 1989). As the trend will naturally continue, sustaining the cohorts of young people in

⁴ Fartușnic, Ciprian (coord.). (2012) "STUDIUL NAȚIONAL – ROMÂNIA. Analiza situației copiilor aflați în afara sistemului de educație în România" (Translator's Note: "*NATIONAL STUDY - ROMANIA. An analysis of the situation of children outside the education system in Romania*") conducted by the Institute of Educational Sciences in 2012 under the auspices of UNICEF, available at <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/OOSCI%20Reports/romania-ossai-report-2012-rm.pdf>



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perfecting their skills and competences to the highest possible level in order to become highly productive on the labour market and able to pay the increasingly high social contributions should be a national priority. However, in Romania, the situation is regarded with a certain indifference, as the quality of human resources is not properly increased and, in addition, there is a rising dropout rate which also translates in the loss of badly needed human capital. Cutting down on school abandonment requires a new reality-based strategy, which is also one of the conditions imposed by the European Commission in order to set up the next programming cycle funds. The situation was also acknowledged by the Minister of National Education (MNE), Remus Pricopie, who stated that:

*"At the present time Romania has a strategy to fight early school leaving, but it is an older one, and our country has an obligation to develop a new one by the end of this year (2013, SN), a condition imposed by Brussels before validating the use of Structural Funds for the 2014-2020 period (OSPFRD). The strategy currently in force is from 2008-2009 and both data and context have changed considerably"*⁵.

There is a major discrepancy in terms of capitalization of education between Roma and the majority population group in Romania. The RECI Overview Report for Romania (Bennett, 2010) shows that over 80% of unschooled children are Roma and that at least 18% of Roma children remain uneducated. The Presidential Commission Report from 2007 revealed that 28% of the Roma population is functionally illiterate. Fleck and Rughiniș (2008) estimated, based on a quantitative study they conducted, that only 9% of young Roma adults (18-30 years) are high school graduates and 2% have a university degree, compared with 41% of young non-Roma adults and 27% Roma. The 2007 EUMAP Report (quoted by Surdu, Vincze and Wamsiedel, 2011) pointed out that the participation rate at primary education level was 94% among the majority population, as opposed to 76% among the Roma population. The gap is even more prominent when referring to secondary education level (69% participation from the majority population, respectively only 17% from the Roma population) or higher education level (5% vs. 1%). The same study shows a striking discrepancy regarding the preschool education level participation registered at 66% among the majority of the population against 20% of the Roma population. A recent sociological survey revealed that school participation of Roma children aged 6 is about 5 times lower than the national average (Surdu, Vincze and Wamsiedel, 2011). All these data unambiguously support the inequality of access to education of Roma

⁵Statement available at http://adevarul.ro/educatie/scoala/raport-abandonul-scolar-romania-crestere-PRICOPIE-toamna-scolile-raportaze-internet-absentele-1_519a744f053c7dd83fb5d4fc/index.html



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children, compared to the non-Roma ones.

This study presents a set of results which are very well adapted to the context described above: an analysis of the causes of dropout / early school leaving, a highlight of the educational exclusion mechanisms of Roma children (one of the most vulnerable categories of students in terms of school dropout) and a series of solutions and recommended interventions to reduce further school dropout or early school leaving based on solid facts – all of them relevant elements that could contribute to improve the future national strategy for decreasing early school dropout.

In the following sections we will briefly present the explanatory mechanisms for early school leaving, as highlighted by various previous studies and advance our own research hypotheses in line with the analysis theme. However, first of all, a brief discussion regarding the operational definition of early school leaving is required.

Towards an operational definition of the ESL phenomenon

It is important to consider how early school leaving has been understood and defined by scholars or "policy makers", since the definition has a direct effect on the degree of efficiency and effectiveness of the intervention selected to fight the phenomenon and on grasping its extent. From the very beginning it should be clear that the present research did not approach ESL according to the official EUROSTAT or other public agencies' definition of the concept. We were essentially interested in analysing the phenomenon of non-participation in the education system with a special focus on its clearer manifestation among Roma children. Therefore the scope of this study goes beyond ESL according to a standard definition (e.g. the one given by EUROSTAT), broadening its meaning to other examples of non-participation, such as school dropout. Anyway, early school leaving and dropout are intimately related, since one could not leave school early without dropping out first; however, the main difference between the two phenomena is that someone who dropped out of school is not necessarily an early school leaver: on one hand, the meaning of "early" in terms of school abandonment has to be clarified, and on the other hand someone who dropped out of school can always re-enrol in the education system after a while, therefore it is imperative that the length of non-attendance period prior to becoming an early school leaver or a permanent dropout case be clearly defined. Essentially, the efforts to define the ESL phenomenon revolve around these considerations.

In Western specialized literature there is no unanimous definition of the "early school leavers" concept, but there are several operational definitions (Traag, van der Velden, 2006). One ESL understanding is that of a person who is walking away from any form of education without obtaining the qualifications



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such studies could have granted him, which is actually dropping out. Another way of defining ESL is leaving school before completing the compulsory education levels established by law. The level of education attained may be another way of defining ESL. In the Netherlands an early school leaver is someone who did not attain the minimal educational level necessary to get and keep a job. Still, all these definitions raise a series of issues as to the realistic and particular aspects of this phenomenon. Hence, a person leaving school at a certain point prior to the completion of compulsory education, but then re-enrolling in the education system, can be considered an early school leaver? Moreover, a person who left the formal school system, but continues his / hers apprenticeship at the workplace, can be registered as a school leaver?

In order to overcome these difficulties EUROSTAT resorts to a more specific definition. Thus, according to EUROSTAT⁶, the **rate of early school leaving** includes the share of a specific segment of the population⁷, aged 18-24, that meets both of the following requirements: (1) has completed one level of education ISCED 2 (in Romania ISCED 2 is equivalent to lower secondary education - grades 5-8) and (2), has not been attending any form of educational or training course (over the past 4 weeks preceding the survey EU LFS⁸). Education and professional training include initial education and continuing vocational training (CVT). CVT includes training within the company, apprenticeship, on the job training, seminars, distance learning, evening classes etc., as well as other, more general, courses: foreign language, data processing, management, art / culture, health / medicine.

According to the MNE and NIS, the dropout rate indicator represents the difference between the number of students enrolled at the beginning of the school year and that of students still attending school at the end of the same scholar year, expressed as a ratio to the number of students enrolled at the beginning. Although EUROSTAT does not use this indicator, it is useful to evaluate the effectiveness of the education system (since comprehensive educational inclusion is a central objective for all educational policies) and to provide a synthetic picture of the flows of students within the same educational level. According to this definition the ideal dropout rate is close to 0; a high drop-out rate indicates a low level of educational

⁶ <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&pcode=tsisc060&language=en>

⁷ Except when no answer is given to the survey questions related to "the highest level of education attained " and "participation in educational and training courses."

⁸ The European Union Labour Force Survey (EU LFS) is a statistical sampling, coordinated the 27 EU MS, two candidate countries and three EFTA States pursuant to Council Regulation (EEC) No. 577/98 of 9 March 1998. EU LFS provides quarterly data on the results of labor force participation of the population aged 15 years and persons outside the employment field. All definitions apply to persons aged over 15 years living in private households and refers individuals enrolled in the military / community or individuals included in the institutions / establishments collective welfare.



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inclusion. In 2010, the drop-out rate according to the definition given above reached 1.9% (a 2% decrease in 2009 - the first year since 2000 when a decrease of this particular indicator has been recorded) .

Another definition used in Romania is the one mentioned in the Rules of Organization and Functioning of Pre-University Educational Institutions (ROFPEI) which states that "*the student who does not attend the daily classes for the years of compulsory education, surpassing by more than two years the appropriate age class, is in the situation of dropping out.* "

All these definitions (ROFPEI, MNE and NIS) have major shortcomings that make them difficult to use. A recent paper (Duminică and Ivasiuc, 2010) presents these shortcomings and proposes an interesting exercise as to the extent to which they are being used in the de facto school management. A set of dilemmas arising when resorting to the ROFPEI definition are presented as follows, thus rendering it not only impossible to use, but even counterproductive for monitoring school non-attendance:

1. In order to properly estimate school drop-out, should the calculations be done for each class separately? For example, a 10 year old student may be in a state of abandonment as far as the 1st grade is concerned, but not in relation to the 2nd grade (as he exceeded by two years the 1st grade age criterion, but not the 2nd one). Should we calculate dropout by class and then try to calculate the overall dropout at the primary education level, the summing up would not be acceptable, as the groups of students who dropped out in relation to each class are not mutually exclusive. First, there should be an identification of a group of students common to all groups and to the specific ones in relation to each class and only afterwards add them up. Such a procedure would be very difficult and subjected to error in practice.

2. According to the definition only students are taken into consideration; can a child still be considered student if he used to be enrolled in school, but hasn't been attending school over the past two years? Since the school only provides primary education level, how can we know the situation of students from lower secondary education, which is necessary when calculating 4th grade abandonment? An integrated monitoring system of all these data would be required to tackle similar situation and presently there is no such thing in Romania.

3. When does the age criterion stop being relevant? The definition states that are to be taken into account students who have exceeded the two year-limit corresponding to the age class, but an ad literam interpretation would also include a 50 year-old person, registered at the respective school, that ceased to attend school when enrolled in the 2nd grade, as a drop-out case to be taken into consideration. Obviously, identifying all such persons would be an impossible endeavour.



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4. How should dropout rate be calculated? The definition states that a student should be included in the school abandonment category (with the insurmountable ambiguities already highlighted), without actually indicating how to calculate the dropout rate. In this case, all students at risk of dropping out should be balanced with respect to the students still attending school. Still, by including all students who were enrolled at least once in the education system and have reached the age of 20 by now, but only attended school for 2 years, dropout rate increases because it includes a very large cohort of adults. In such case are they to be balanced to the number of students currently attending school? If so, at which level (primary, secondary or tertiary)? This kind of ambiguity is not acceptable.

5. Which is the source for calculating school dropout: the responses provided by headmasters' or other school decision makers' or independent findings and calculations made by other monitoring instances, based on school reported data? A recent research report (Duminică and Ivăsiuc, 2010) shows that school decision-makers hardly ever apply the MNE or ROFPEI definitions – out of 81 interviews with school representatives, there were only two cases indicating the ROFPEI definition as a benchmark and none that of MNE.

It should be noted that the lack of an operational definition for monitoring school non-attendance does not allow for an adequately substantiated intervention to fight these undesirable phenomena. Complying with the ROFPEI definition would mean waiting for two years after a student has ceased to attend school before introducing him / her into the dropout category and, consequently, become part of the priority target group suitable for intervention. The studies conducted so far resorted to the ESL definitions that suited their specificity and met the objectives of the research.

In our view, given the utility and on-time capacity to intervene for preventing and correcting early school leaving, we consider that an appropriate **ESL definition should refer to someone who has not completed the compulsory education level and has not been attending school for the four weeks prior to the moment of the assessment.** According to the definition we are putting forward the student who has not yet completed the compulsory education cycle, but is enrolled in school (recorded in the catalogue) and has registered an interrupted string of absences over the 4 weeks prior to the assessment is considered an early school leaver, thus becoming the subject of a corrective intervention. We believe that this definition would be both desirable and operational for policy makers in charge with government policies in the field of education, but has its limitations. One of these is that someone in the situation presented above could easily re-enrol a year later, thus leaving the early school leavers category, another one refers to the fact that it does



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include people who are following other forms of professional training, such as apprenticeship in a workshop. in order to practice a profession. However such cases of re-enrolment in school are rare enough not to infringe upon the intervention for correcting early school leaving. In this framework we consider that the definition we have put forward is more appropriate to be used as a monitoring tool for the early school leaving phenomenon and its correction. Basically, continuous monitoring of the ESL evolution in accordance with the proposed definition would lead to a prompt response from the public authorities.

Theoretical perspectives on equal opportunities in education

Education is actually the main vehicle providing or blocking the expression of equal opportunities as a social phenomenon (in this respect see Hatos , 2006 , chapter VII). The concept of equality of opportunity has its origins in the concept of "life chances" and refers to the opportunities that individuals with a certain position, in a certain cultural area, have at a given time to obtain a certain social position From a functional point of view the equality of educational opportunity can be perceived as the degree to which children from a specific population cohort manage to gain a certain educational status The educational status is acquired by an individual on the basis of certain social criteria that have to be met - the entire educational process that the individual has to go through to and the constant evaluations in terms of school performance he is being subjected to. In our research the equal educational opportunity matter will be approach from one specific aspect of education, namely the early school leaving phenomenon.

Cultural capital theory

One of the most popular explanatory theories on equality of educational opportunity is that of cultural capital that was first put forward by Bourdieu and Passeron (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977 Dimaggio, 1982, Blossfeld and Shavit, 1993, p.6). According to this theory parents with a higher level of cultural capital (also measured by means of the education level) provide their children with the necessary skills for social integration and academic success - language skills, attitudes or integration styles – to a higher degree than parents with lower cultural capital. This creates, from the very beginning, a disadvantage for children from families with low educational status, which decreases the chances of academic and life success for the latter. It should be noted that according to this theory the advantages of children coming from families with a higher cultural capital have nothing to do with the genetic inheritance. On the contrary, several relevant studies have demonstrated the negligible influence of genetic inheritance in passing on the cultural heritage, academic performance of students having little to do with the genetic inheritance (Erikson



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and Jonsson, 1996, p.10-13). This shows that the persistent gap between academic performance - as a prerequisite for later success and expression of equal opportunities - among children from families with different parental status can be more accurately attributed to social factors.

Economic constraints theory

A complementary theory to the previously presented one was formulated by Boudon in 1974 and refers to economic constraints (Blossfeld and Shavit, 1993, p.7). According to this theory a good education requires substantial financial resources, which means that children's academic success depends on the financial resources of their family. The family is the one deciding on whether the child should continue his education from one educational cycle to another and the economic cost / benefit calculation – involved costs and estimated benefits from the transition to a new stage in the education process. For parents with scarce financial resources investing in their children continuing education can easily turn out to be unprofitable as compared to families with sufficient material resources. What should be emphasized is that each of the perspectives presented so far brings its own contribution to explaining the educational opportunity phenomenon. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary to one another.

Modernization theory

It is important to note that educational mobility can be explained by other factors besides family characteristics. There are other elements - part of the social structure - which limit this phenomenon, such as the education system or, more precisely, the extent of its coverage. Similarly, the level of industrialization can be another important factor. Starting from these factors and taking into consideration the *modernization theory* (Blossfeld and Shavit, 1993, p.7) some authors suggested that the industrial revolution that characterized the 19th century entailed the need to increase the amount of highly-skilled labour force and generated the extension of the coverage of the education system. The new society influenced by industrialization changed the criteria for access to education based on the central idea of personal merit. Hence, the assumption that educational mobility increases following the expansion of industrialization and strengthening of modern society.

A corollary of this conclusion would be that the higher the level of industrialization and modernization the higher the educational mobility (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1993, p.13-23). However, this conclusion was undermined both by academics and by the results of empirical studies. First, there are at least two other important variables that can influence the effect of industrialization on social mobility:



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culture and the political system.

Culture understood as a system of values, norms, beliefs is an element that conditions parents' support for their children's education and young people's intention as to continuing their education or not!

In order to somehow justify the failure of the industrialization / social mobility theory, the idea of "national exceptionality" was invoked. It refers precisely to country-specific cultural elements that block or stimulate the social flow from one layer to another. Political factors have been cited as decisive as far as social mobility is concerned, particularly in the context of Eastern European countries where Communist governments stimulated the vertical social mobility of the members of the working class (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1993, p.13-17).

Cultural reproduction thesis

According to the *cultural reproduction thesis* the education system has the role of maintaining the hegemony and privileges of dominant social groups: "The education system reflects the class structure and helps legitimize the inequality in access to job opportunities" (Blossfeld and Shavit, 1993, p.7). In this case the role of the school would be that of marginalizing and excluding vulnerable groups and ensuring the success of children of elites. There is a radical version of this theory stating that "inequality in educational opportunities are maximally preserved". Specifically, since the dominant social groups "preclude" the dominated ones from getting a high social status, the latter can only climb the social hierarchy when almost all children from the "high class" will have occupied a similar social position (included the educational level) to that of their parents or, in other words, when the legacy status has been entirely passed from one cohort to its successors, the so-called "ceiling effect". In such a context certain positions become "vacant" at the top of the social hierarchy, therefore the vertical mobility of those situated at the basis becomes possible.

Social capital theory and its role in equal opportunities in education

Another useful perspective in understanding the phenomenon of equal opportunities in education is the one focusing on the concept of social capital (Coleman, 1988). Social capital in education is relevant from the parent-child relationship perspective. When the relationship between parents and children is problematic for various reasons, family resources can't become a support for the child's development. This is the case of monoparental families, children remaining at home during their parents' emigration, as well as large families, where parents' attention is divided among several children. More specifically, the human capital (education, knowledge etc.) of a family (parents, adults within the family etc.) has a lesser impact on



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the further development of the child if it is not backed up by social capital, namely by parental involvement in the child's development, starting from preschool and continuing later on (by helping out with homework for instance). It can be assumed that a child whose parents possess a lower human capital (such as an upper education level) could be more advantaged as compared to someone with higher human capital if in the latter case parents are disinterested or too busy to devote their time and attention to the education of their child or simply if one of the parents is absent from the family. An operational dimension of social capital that can be captured in the survey data refers to parental expectations for the educational attainment of the child or their perception as to the importance of school visits to monitor the child's academic progress.

Explanatory mechanisms for ESL - Research hypotheses

Our fundamental assumption – at the very heart of this study – is that behind the educational inequalities affecting Roma students and the high rate of early school leavers among them there is a marginalising and unfair education system, unable to compensate the lack of support from family / environment which originates in economic, human, cultural and social capital shortage. The research questions we started with were: *1) Are there any differences between Roma and non-Roma students in terms of ESL risk? And if so, which is the explanation for this? 2) What is the role and effect of the way school resources are organised (such as existence of stimulating communication channels between parents and teachers, degree of school segregation, degree of teacher involvement, manifestation of stereotypes and discrimination etc.) on the ESL phenomenon among students from vulnerable groups (especially Roma children)? and 3) What is the connection between social conditionalities such as family type and characteristics (defined by the educational status of parents, time and material resources, perception on the importance of education etc.) and the risk of early school leaving?*

There are several explanatory mechanisms for ESL identified in the specialised literature and previously conducted studies that we assume to be generally applicable to Roma students as well. However, there are some specific aspects of Roma children situation in Romania that increase the risk of early school leaving among them. The most relevant aspects are the school integration difficulties originating in the language barrier (language at school differs from the mother tongue) and in the marginalization / discrimination in class (school segregation is the very expression of such a phenomenon). In addition, the influence of early marriage on ESL, especially among girls, should also be considered, although a fairly recent study (Surdu, Vincze, Wamsiedel, 2011) concluded that the influence of marriage on school leaving is low (only 6.6% of the interviewed parents indicated it), despite the fact that all recorded dropout cases



referred to girls.

In analysing the explanatory mechanisms of early school leaving we shall rely on the five categories identified by Audas and Willms (2001):

1. **Individual effects:** originating in each person's specific characteristics such as school attendance, academic performance, health, engagement in academic and school activities and participation in anti-social behaviour;
2. **Family effects:** include variables such as socio-economic status of parents, parenting style, household composition and parents' participation in school, social capital;
3. **Peer effects:** refer to environment, the role of young people's friends and the effects of rejection;
4. **School effects:** include the quality of teaching and available resources, school size, effectiveness and equity of school policies and practices, school climate and engagement of teachers, school segregation;
5. **Community effects:** the extent to which students are affected by the social proximity in which they live and the broader effects of the social, economic and historical features of their neighbourhoods and communities. An important element in this case is the role local labour market conditions play in encouraging or discouraging early exit from school.

Certain mechanisms increasing the risk of early school leaving among certain categories of students operate at the level of each of the above-mentioned factors. In the next section we shall focus on those mechanisms and we shall advance a set of hypotheses that we will afterwards use in the present research. In our approach we will rely on the study conducted by Traag VanDerVelden (2006).

1. Individual effects

Previous studies have shown that there is a high risk of early school leaving among boys. This originates in the different type of socialization and development of certain gender-specific traits. Studies have confirmed that children who exhibit increased aggressive / anti-social behaviour in the early school years have a greater chance to leave school later on (Audas and Willms, 2001). A relevant aspect in this case is the degree to which students get involved in extracurricular activities, which positively influence early school leaving. Considering that the characteristics of each student are the ones helping him / her to integrate and feel comfortable within the school environment, the risk of dropping out decreases. School participation (in certain specific areas, see below) is another important element in this framework - students tend to perform better at school through participation. Several levels of participation can be identified (Finn



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and Rock, 1997), the basic one being compliance with school and class rules (arriving on time, not talking during teaching times etc.) Another level of student participation lies in his / her initiatives and the degree of enthusiasm manifested throughout the scholastic process, a type of behaviour that increases performance and reduces the risk of leaving school. Finally, a third level of participation lies in engaging in extracurricular activities (sports, school clubs, events related to school activities etc.). Participation leads to identification with the school, its practices and values thus increasing the level of pleasure in spending time at school, which in turn prevents dropout (Audas and Willms, 2001).

Another important factor that recent researches have highlighted as being crucial to children's life chances (Heckman, 1999, Bowles and others, 2001, Esping-Andersen and Mestres, Esping-Andersen, 2004) is that of cognitive abilities and their formation, which depends on the family environment, parents' ability to help train them, as well as the quality of preschool education. Hence, it is important to point out that cognitive abilities represent individual features that explain, to an overwhelming extent, the academic performance of a child and also reduce dropout risk (Audas and Willms 2001). During the preschool period children consolidate their cognitive abilities and the necessary motivation to attain good school performance; when this consolidation process does not occur, the likelihood of school dropout increases and the chance of a transition to higher educational levels decreases. These skills are both innate and moulded by the pre-school and pre-pre-school education model, starting from the first years of life. Therefore it is vital that children received appropriate training and cognitive stimulation from the preschool period. In this case parental involvement refers to the family lifestyle imposed to the preschool child and the degree to which it supports his / her academic activities later on. It is the lack of a stimulating family environment for cognitive development, the poor and limited linguistic baggage that create a handicap – from the very moment of enrolment in school – that becomes very difficult to get over afterwards. Lareau (2003) coined this phenomenon as "concerted cultivation", which suggests the idea that some parents give their children the opportunity to go to the theatre and attend various cultural events, constantly involving them in laborious conversations that enrich their vocabulary (more abstract words and ideas about life and the world in general etc.) and, thereby, help to develop their cognitive abilities, which in turn provides them with a considerable asset for later school success and prevent the risk of early school leaving. Students who have high cognitive abilities also attained higher levels of academic performance. Studies have also shown that poor school performance are significantly correlated with higher drop-out risks (Alexander et al. , 2001 and Slusarcick Enslinger , 1992).



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As far as those groups vulnerable to ESL phenomenon are concerned, it is necessary to establish certain compensatory measures in order to address the "social handicap" originated in the family and in the poor development environment they grew up in during the preschool period. The seeds for school attending and learning motivation, or even the low aspirational level – they all reside in the family environment and represent relevant individual characteristics in preventing ESL (Audas and Willms 2001). It should be added that the aspirational level is also influenced by teachers' expectations and characteristics of the social network developed by the student. For instance, if one usually interacts with people having a low aspirational level, it is very likely that, at some point, that person ends up internalizing a low aspirational level. If, on the other hand, one socialises, on a daily basis, with individuals with high expectations, one could get over the low level of expectations induced by the family. This is where segregation plays a significant role: when an individual from a family with low aspirational level socializes with the same type of individuals, that particular individual will have a low motivation for carrying on with education; when instead the individual socializes with various individuals with different levels of expectations and aspirations, there is a solid foundation for building up a different kind of motivation for further education.

The hypotheses emerging in this case are easily predictable: boys and students with lower cognitive abilities are more likely to drop out. A higher degree of participation and school identification (school compliance, low absenteeism, involvement in extracurricular activities etc.) reduce the risk of drop-out. Also, students who leave school early have poor academic results and a lower level of motivation. School segregation emphasizes individual factors that predispose to early school leaving.

2. Family effects

Clearly family plays a key role in avoiding early school leaving. Family characteristics are essential in determining the student's success in school and, in a wider sense, his / her social success as an adult, later on. Family capital can take three distinct forms: financial / economic capital (material resources of the family), human capital (level of education and knowledge, occupation) and social / cultural capital (norms, values, expectations regarding the relationship to the child, the need to get involved in his / her education etc.) (Coleman, 1988, Traag and VanDerVelden 2006, Esping-Andersen and Mestres). The elements that emphasize the ESL risk are low socioeconomic status, family structure - monoparental families or large families with many children also predispose to high risk of dropping out, same as unemployment of one or both parents.

The economic capital of the family has an overwhelming influence on ESL risk, as already



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highlighted by previous studies. This is correlated with the extent of importance attached to education among family members. In cases where the cost of education is very high when compared to the available economic resources and there is a perception that the social benefits of investment in education (not necessarily financial, but also symbolic benefits, such as the pride of having a child with good academic results or the shame of having a child repeating a year etc.) are low, there is a high probability of leaving school. The surveys conducted on Roma population have shown that many families choose not to send their child to school simply because they can't afford to pay for school transportation (Surdu, Vincze and Wamsiedel, 2011), clothes or even food to feed the child. In addition, the economic capital allows the family to ensure the goods required for an adequate education such as books, notebooks etc. Duncan (1998) found a significant positive correlation between family poverty during the child's early years of life and his / her later success. It should be made clear that the relationship between parents' status and school performance varies between countries, ranging from one extreme in Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States of America (this relationship is the strongest, meaning that good school performance depends on the parents' social status, which in turn translates in less equality of opportunity) and, at the other extreme, the Nordic countries - Sweden, Norway and Denmark, along with the Netherlands - which show a significantly higher social mobility (Denmark showed the weakest relationship between parental education and children's chances of achieving a high level of education) (Esping - Andersen, 2004). The difference between the group of Nordic countries (and the Netherlands) and Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States can be explained primarily by the differences in income among families⁹, the different levels of investment in education and the different degree of efforts to ensure equality of opportunity in education. In terms of social inequality and investment to ensure equality of opportunity in education, Romania is closer to the Anglo - Saxon model rather than the Nordic one.

In this framework our assumption is that students coming from families with good financial situations present a higher level of school performance; moreover, we also estimate that students coming from families with low economic capital have a higher rate of dropout. This is emphasized by the low value attached to education. Moreover, family financial resources also impact on the family's capacity to provide private tutoring for the student. Understandably, we anticipate that the greater the number of private tutoring sessions the better the academic performance of the student and the lower the risk of dropout.

The educational status is the most significant expression of a family's human capital and it is one of

⁹ The Anglo – Saxon societies are far more unequalitarian than the Nordic ones. The Gini coefficient is an expression of the degree of social inequality within the society.



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the characteristics determining ESL risk and school success¹⁰. Certain researches conducted in the West have shown that high parental educational status increases the student's probability to achieve academic performance (see Esping - Andersen, 2004, DiMaggio, 1992, Graaf and Ganzeboom, 1993). Parents' ability to "surf" the education system, to support the child and manage the relationship with the school for his / her academic success is a significant variable in explaining life chances (Erikson and Jonsson, 1996). Behind this relationship there is a specific generative mechanism since much of the investment in the education is done at home, within the private domestic space of the family. Obviously, the support granted to the student varies as the more fortunate students have both higher educational resources and very involved parents who are also very familiar with specific school expectations and challenges. Considering the aspects mentioned above, the hypothesis that students whose parents have a low educational status are more likely to early school leaving comes naturally.

The cultural capital of the family is another important aspect revealed as such by ESL specialised literature (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Dimaggio 1982). The concept of cultural capital was launched by Bourdieu and understood as *"tools for acquiring symbolic wealth socially defined as worthy of being sought and held"* (Bourdieu in DiMaggio, 1982). Bourdieu's hypothesis was that students with high cultural capital interact more easily with their teachers and, generally speaking, adapt better to the academic environment, thus, obtaining better results. Children from families belonging to the cultural elite are more familiar with school expectations and practices, adapt easier to the rules and informal environmental that characterize school, an environment that is, by far, more connected to the cultural elite and further away from popular culture. Naturally, Roma students who in their early years speak the Romani language at home are faced with a significant disadvantage in their process of adapting to the school system, which also reproduces social inequalities by using the language of the dominant elites and not that of vulnerable groups (to which the Roma minority belongs). The language problem is relevant for Roma students since sometimes the separation / school segregation is caused by "ignorance of the official language". As children from families with a "popular" culture (as is the case for children belonging to vulnerable groups, including those from Roma families, who have obviously socialized in a different cultural environment from that of the cultural elite) perceive school as a foreign, unfamiliar environment, consequently, as far as these children are concerned, there is a higher risk of not feeling at ease in school, having poor academic performance and

¹⁰ This is valid at least as far as Romania is concerned, since certain studies have shown that countries such as Sweden and Denmark have succeeded to dislodge the "steady stream" of cultural heritage, by providing children - regardless of their social background – with relatively equal chances of success.



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being subjected to early school leaving. In this line of thought DiMaggio (1982) found a significant effect of cultural capital on the academic success of students by controlling the family characteristics; therefore, a similar effect of cultural capital on the academic success of children in their pre -university path is plausible. These considerations support the previously introduced association regarding the effect of parental educational status on the academic performance of the children and also suggest that students' access to opportunities and cultural development resources, such as books, is a factor in developing cultural capital, thus generating academic performance and reducing ESL risk. The existence of an extensive library at home and the frequency of reading materials other than textbooks from the school curriculum generate superior academic performance. At the same time frequent attendance of cultural events - theatre, cultural performances - is another element that favours a good academic performance and reduces ESL risk. The emerging hypothesis is that children from families with a different cultural capital from that of the predominant cultural elite (popular culture) are more likely to leave school at an early stage of their education path.

The matter of social capital and its implications for the accumulation of knowledge of the student has already been addressed in a previous section. The profound and systematic interaction between a parent and his child is an element that facilitates the transmission of resources (knowledge, information, cognition) that can be used to better perform at school. There is a lack of interaction which manifests itself in cases of monoparental families or when one or even both of the parents are not temporarily living in the same household as the child (such is the case of migrant workers, a very common phenomenon nowadays in Romania). We anticipate that children coming from monoparental families or families with one or both parents temporarily missing from home are more likely to have poor school results or to leave school compared to students from families in which both parents are present. Therefore our hypothesis is that students who come from monoparental families and students from families having one or both parents temporarily missing from home present a greater risk of ESL. In analysing this hypothesis we will also take into consideration the situations where students from our sample group have older siblings present in the household and they can benefit from their support in order to improve their academic performance.

Previous studies have highlighted the role played by parental involvement in student education, as a reflection of family characteristics. For example, a parent with a higher educational level can easily find his way in the school "maze" and properly understand the importance and relevance of education for later on success in life; hence, it can be assumed that such a parent is involved in his child's scholastic activities.



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Basically, the inequality in terms of family status is also reflected in the unequal involvement of parents in school activities; unfortunately the Romanian educational system does not seem to be able to compensate for school inequalities – for a perspective on the nuances of parent participation in school activities see: Theodorou, 2007, Smit, Driessen, Sluiter & Slegers, 2007, Sheridan & KRATOCHWILL, 2007, Epstein, 1996, Ivan, 2010. Under the circumstances we expect that parental involvement be even lower for families of students from vulnerable groups (especially Roma) and that it correlates with a higher EST risk.

3. Peer effects

The present category includes the entourage and influence of friends and peers. Despite the limited attention paid to this aspect by the specialised literature, we feel that this category of factors is important and we have decided to address it as well. Up to a certain extent adolescents tend to derive their sense of self merits from their network of friends and also to adjust their behaviour to suit them (Audas and Willms, 2001). In this situation there may also be a subculture group aspect that manifests on students and may influence them as far as school behaviour is concerned. Studies have shown that students who have an early school leaver friend have a higher risk of ending up in the same situation (Ellenbogen and Chamberland, 1997). In this study we shall test the relationship between the students' network of friends and ESL.

4. School effects

This category includes several factors such as quality of the teaching and available school resources, school size, effectiveness and equity of policies and school practices, school climate and teacher involvement. There is little public intervention margin from the family side to ensure an equal support for all students, since the other part of the education occurs in the extra-family environment, namely at school – the public meeting space of family baggage with formal school education expectations. As already seen, some theories show that student treatment is not always equal in this space, as it is a reflection of the initial pre-school formation started within the family (Bourdieu). But even so, the fact that there is a broad public intervention area where successful advocacy actions for non-discriminatory treatment for all students can be taken, is fundamental (Audas and Willms 2001. Parents' participation and involvement in school activities, constant monitoring of student progress and on-going collaboration with teachers in order to ensure the success of student academic performance are all vital dimensions in this framework. Some empirical Western studies have highlighted the role played by proper education conditions and school environment for



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academic performance. In this respect, Cortens and Dronkers (2004) showed, based on PISA data¹¹, that independent private schools are more effective for students coming from larger or lower status families than private schools depending on governmental support. Other studies have proved that variables such as the degree of heterogeneity of the school (number of levels of education within the school), the type of area in which the school is located and the proportion of ethnic minority students represent relevant variables as far as the ESL phenomenon is concerned (Traag, van der Velden, 2006, Bryk and Thum, 1989). Adapting these findings to the Romanian situation and given that students from rural areas are less likely to accumulate a good level of knowledge (Voicu and Vasile, 2009), we can assume that there is a higher rate of ESL in rural schools, as compared to urban schools¹². But the most important aspect as far as Romania and Roma minority students are concerned is testing the effect of school segregation on early school leaving rate. Ethnic school segregation is critically important in Romania and has been documented by relevant studies (Jigău and Surdu, 2002, Surdu, 2008). Although the identification and analysis of this particular phenomenon¹³ was not the objective of the present study, we did, however, follow the variation of certain fundamental variables according to the percentage of Roma students in school. A previous study showed that in schools with a higher percentage of Roma students there is less parental involvement (Ivan, 2010). Again, schools with a higher percentage of Roma students have less human and material resources (laboratories, computers, different degree of teacher professionalization etc.) (Duminică and Ivasiuc, 2011). Therefore, we expect more precarious school environment and conditions in schools with a high proportion of Roma students.

A possible explanation for the increase of equality of life chances in Nordic countries - as the studies already mentioned have pointed out (Esping-Andersen, 2004) – lies in the expansion of the institutionalised children care system (crèches, kindergartens) for their first years of life given that most of their mothers are working. Thus, there was a kind of equalization of quality ensured to childcare and, consequently, an

¹¹ PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is a complex study consisting in a survey and a test administered to students from several countries that provide data on students' abilities to use the academic knowledge as well as data on schools, families and the social environment they live in.

¹² However, an INS data-based study showed that from 1997 to 2000 the dropout rate was higher in urban areas at the compulsory education level (Jigău, Surdu, 2002). Presently we have some reservations about this result, as one of the explanations for this situation may simply be that upper secondary education schools are more numerous in urban areas and naturally, the dropout rates increase at higher levels of education. Therefore, the higher rate of school abandonment in urban areas could simply be caused by the larger share of students enrolled in upper secondary urban schools (grades 9th – 12th).

¹³ School segregation is common when there is a higher proportion of Roma children in school compared to their real share in the community. There is school segregation when Roma children are concentrated more in certain classes, not equitably and proportionately distributed in all classes.



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equalization of the cognitive capacities training received by children from these countries (Esping-Andersen, 2004). Therefore, a fundamental aspect in explaining equality of life chances and a formidable weapon to break the "steady stream" lies within the foundation of a solid development of cognitive capacities of children in their preschool period (Esping-Andersen and Mestres). It is our hypothesis that pre-school formal education in kindergartens reduces the risk of early school leaving - the greater the number of years attending kindergarten, the lesser the risk of early school leaving. As a corollary, we expect Roma children to have received fewer years of preschool kindergarten training – due to multiple causes originating in difficult social conditions that were highlighted by specialized studies (e.g. EUMAP, 2007). The specific aspects of the preschool education system and its functioning in Romania should also be considered. On one hand, the preschool education system is not in fact entirely free, therefore children from vulnerable groups are disadvantaged from this point of view; on the other hand, when these children start attending school, this initial disadvantage becomes more prominent, as the actual configuration of classes takes into account the preschool preparation of children. This practice does not stimulate an egalitarian educational system intended to ensure the respect of equal opportunities.

Another discussion point regarding the education system would be the inclusive aspect of education and school. As long as there is no official data formally presented in schools about the ethnic groups (neither in the curricula nor otherwise) it is obvious that the school is perceived as an unfamiliar environment. Moreover, contempt for the culture and practices of the community combined with prejudices reflected in the predominant culture and, implicitly, at school level, lead to a situation where Roma children perceive the school environment as a hostile one, a threat to their ethnic identity. From this point of view, neither the education system nor schools are inclusive. Roma minority children are therefore faced with two options, either rejection of the school or assimilation. Ethnic relevance is a very important concept, especially when considering the characteristic propensity for assimilation at school level. From the Roma community perspective a student who successfully completes his upper secondary or even university education, but denies his ethnicity, is not a "success" story. Therefore, the study will also consider the extent to which school promotes the cultural identity elements.

5. Community effects

Some studies have tried to test the possible role of the social environment in which the child is born, lives and learns in influencing his life chances. Social environment is a broad term that can include the proximity to the child's home, the characteristics of the neighbourhood where he lives, the existing social



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networks and the ease with which information travels, the degree of social or civic activism of the population or, more generally, the social capital that characterizes a community. In this particular case we are referring to the extent to which students are affected by the social proximity in which they live, the social, economic and historical aspects of their community and neighbourhood. In this context the local labour market conditions also play a decisive role by either encouraging or discouraging early school leaving. Some studies have concluded, based on empirical evidence, that there is a link between the particularities of the neighbourhood where the child lives and his future development.

Neighbourhood specificity is defined by the proportion between families with low income and families with high income, while child development was characterized by indicators related to the child's IQ, the proportion of births among adolescents and school dropout. The effect of neighbourhood specificity remained even after keeping under control the family characteristics (Brooks- Gunn, 1993). Quite the contrary, other studies drew the opposite conclusion, namely the lack of a significant influence of neighbourhood specificity on the later on socio-economic status of the child (Solon and others, 2000). However, the authors did mention that their results may be influenced by the fact that the neighbourhood specificity really does not have an impact on the child's later success, or because the neighbourhood specificity was not adequately operationalized and measured. As far as Romania is concerned studies have revealed that students from rural areas are less likely to attend university than those from urban areas (Voicu and Vasile, 2009). Consequently, we expect students from rural areas to show a higher risk of ESL and to be more influenced by the valuing of education among people from their community (other than family) when deciding whether or not to further their education.

Types of studies conducted on ESL

At this point it is appropriate to mention several types of representative studies on ESL. The specification is necessary as the phenomenon has received specific operational interpretations - as described above – and, generally speaking, the studies were folded on the goals of the researchers. In addition, the review of these studies has led to the premise of choosing an appropriate approach for the present research. According to a summary from 2001 (Audas and Willms, 2001) ESL studies can be grouped into the following categories:

1. Longitudinal (panel studies surveying the same sample at different moments in time) or transverse studies (such as surveys conducted at a certain moment in time, without continuing afterwards) that examined school abandonment based on representative data collected at a national level. Such



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studies have allowed for an estimation of the number of people at risk of early school leaving and the scale of the phenomenon. Examples: Rumberger (1983), Whelage and Rutter (1986), Barrington and Hendricks (1989), Crane (1991), Bădescu and others, 2007, Fleck and Rughiniș (2008), Dumincă and Ivasiuc (2011), Surdu, Vincze and Wamsiedel (2011).

2. Other studies that focused on early school leaving have developed multilevel statistical models that allowed for the identification of the effects at individual level, on one hand, and the effects at school level, on the other hand. These studies accurately identified the effects pertaining to the specific situation of young people and the effects originated in the schools / institutions in which they were studying. Examples: Bryk and Thum (1989), Rumberger and Thomas (2000).
3. Another category of studies were the experimental ones in which particular aspects of school dropout were considered. The samples used were rather small and unrepresentative. These studies were rather similar to the qualitative ones, but there were sufficient cases so that certain statistical analyses could be carried on. Their relevance lies within the new perspectives they have opened as to the topic of discussion. Examples: Ensminger and Slusarcick (1992), Ellenbogen and Chamberlain (1997).
4. Qualitative studies, the fourth category of research conducted on ESL phenomenon, use in-depth interviews or focus groups and are important because they allow in-depth survey of student school participation, motivations and values. Examples of such studies: Fine (1986), Tanner, Krahn and Hartnagel (1995), Voicu (ed.) (2010).

As far as we are concerned, taking into account the context in which the study was conducted and the objectives of the project within which it was conducted, we opted for a combined study containing both the quantitative dimension, developed as a longitudinal study (the same sample of students interviewed at two different moments in time, namely the first and, respectively, the third year of the project), and the qualitative dimension in the form of some focus groups conducted with parents of early school leavers.

The present study aims for an integrated approach of all explanatory ESL aspects, but from a new perspective, complementary to the previous studies conducted in Romania on this theme. Up until now the quantitative studies in this category began from samples drawn from the general population (the stratification beginning with the Roma communities); this study focused instead on school, perceived as the arena where the accumulation of knowledge occurs.

The samples of respondents interviewed were selected from students enrolled in schools (both



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students and their parents have been interviewed) in a comparative manner - a sample of Roma and one of non-Roma students, "in the mirror", from the same schools with a significant percentage of Roma students (minimum 5 - 10%), identified through the hetero-identification method by their teachers. A third sample was also used for comparison reasons, consisting of students (and their parents) who had been enrolled in the sampled schools, but left school or are at high risk of doing so.



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Research Methodology

Objectives of the research:

- Identify ESL risk among students from vulnerable groups (especially Roma) compared with other students enrolled in lower secondary education based on the indicators that predispose to ESL;
- Highlighting the explanatory mechanisms for ESL among lower secondary schools (grades 5-8), with special emphasis on vulnerable groups (especially Roma);
- Identify the opportunities for Roma students enrolled in lower secondary education to accede to high school education and describe the explanatory mechanisms for the situation.

Research universe: In order to achieve the objectives described above the research was conducted within the population of students (and their parents) enrolled in lower secondary education in schools with a significant share of Roma children (at least 5 - 10%) from urban and rural areas from the Centre, North-East and South-Muntenia regions. This was also the target population of the study subdivided into three categories: Roma students (and, respectively, their parents), non-Roma students (and, respectively, their parents) and early school leavers (students who have not been attending school over the past 4 weeks prior to the study) / students with more than 20 unmotivated absences¹⁴ (and, respectively, their parents). For each target group a sample of people interviewed following a predetermined procedure was selected.

Research method: questionnaire-based survey of students selected in the sample completed by face-to-face interviewers specifically trained for this purpose.

Research tool: "face to face" individual questionnaire applied by specifically trained operators.

Sampling survey students:

The study used a model of probabilistic sampling, two-staged stratified for the selection of Roma / non-Roma students. The choice of early school leavers was made by interviewers from the community in the vicinity of the school, as they were identified following discussions with teachers and students from the schools included in the study. The surveys were organized as panel (the first wave being carried out in the first year of the project and the second one in the third year of the project - using the same sample of students) in order to track the longitudinal progress of sample students and compare the ESL rates from the

¹⁴ Initially we planned to include in the early school leavers sample only the students who have not been attended school for the past 4 weeks prior to the study. During the course of the study the field operators encountered several situations at the school level where the number of interviews needed to validate the research could not be effectively held, so we decided to include in this category students at risk of leaving school based on their gathering of more than 20 unmotivated absences. Thus, we obtained a sample including both early school leavers and students with a high risk of school abandonment following the conclusion of the study. The subsequent results demonstrated that our choice was the right one.



time of the first wave up to the moment of the second wave among sampled students.

Samples used:

WAVE1

- Roma students (and their parents / guardians): 700 subjects;
- Non-Roma students (and their parents / guardians): 632 subjects;
- Students at risk of school dropout (and their parents / guardians): 299 subjects.

WAVE 2

- Roma students (and their parents / guardians): 699 subjects;
- Non-Roma students (and their parents / guardians): 630 subjects;
- Students at risk of school dropout (and their parents / guardians): 299 subjects.

Maximum acceptable error:

- Early school leavers (and their parents / guardians): the representativeness of this sample group can't be calculated since the selection of students was neither randomized nor stratified - there are no data to substantiate such a sample. However, this sample consented for comparative analysis in relation to the representative samples of Roma / non-Roma students selected for the research.
- Roma and non-Roma students / parents: + / - 3.9% at a 95% probability level.

Data collection period:

The data from Wave 1 were collected during April-May 2011 by means of a questionnaire applied in face to face sessions at school or at home.

The data from Wave 2 were collected during April-May 2013 by means of a questionnaire applied in face to face sessions at school or at home.

The study had two components: a qualitative research and a quantitative one.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

It consisted of:

- A. 3 focus groups in the rural areas of Șoldanu (Călărași), Frumușani (Călărași) and Vlașca (Ialomița) with parents / people responsible for taking care of Roma early school leavers;
- B. 10 interviews with early school leavers / their parents in various places from the regions covered by the project.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

It consisted in surveys conducted among students enrolled in lower secondary education and their



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parents from the counties pertaining to the Centre, North-East and South-Muntenia regions. The surveys were conducted among the following target groups:

- Roma students and their parents;
- Non-Roma students and their parents;
- early school leavers / students who have gathered at least 20 unmotivated absences at the time of the study, respectively their parents.

A sample of respondents was selected for each target group. The data were also collected at the school level. The surveys were organized as a panel (Wave 1 took place during the first year of the project, and Wave 2 during the third and final year of the project, using the same sample of students), so as to longitudinally track the progress of the sampled students, by comparing school leaving rate since the moment of Wave 1 until the moment of Wave 2 among sampled students. Wave 2 was projected to be undertaken in the last year of the project (2012 / 2013).

Samples used:

- Roma students (and their parents / guardians): 700 subjects, representative for the target population of Roma students in the counties covered by the project (from Centre, North-East and South-Muntenia regions);
- Non-Roma students (and their parents / guardians): 632 subjects, representative for the target population of Roma students in the counties covered by the project (from Centre, North-East and South-Muntenia regions);
- early school leavers (who haven't been attending school for the past 4 weeks prior to the study or who have at least 20 unmotivated absences) ((and their parents / guardians): 299 students.

Maximum acceptable error:

- Roma and non-Roma students / parents: + / - 3.9% at a 95% probability level;
- early school leavers (and their parents / guardians): the representativeness of this sample group can't be calculated since the selection of students was neither randomized nor stratified - there are no official data regarding the distribution of early school leavers from lower secondary education level in relevant socio-demographic categories; moreover, there is no field identification framework for them so as to allow a random selection. However, this sample consents for comparative analysis in relation to the representative samples of Roma / non-Roma students selected research.

Survey sampling students:



The study used a model of probabilistic two-staged stratified sampling for the selection of Roma and non-Roma students. The choice of early school leavers was made by the field interview operators based on their discussions with teachers and students from the selected schools and their indication and identification of former students from the community in the vicinity of the school.

Research method: questionnaire-based survey of sampled students completed by specially trained interview operators in face-to-face interviews.

Research tool: individual questionnaire.

Sampling

The sample :

The sampling of Roma and non-Roma students was a probabilistic one, stratified in two stages. During the first stage it was decided upon the number of schools to be sampled from each layer and a random selection of sampled schools was conducted. Target population stratification was done at this stage according to two criteria: the area of residence (urban / rural) where the school attended by the student is located and the county it belongs to (there are 19 counties from 3 regions - Centre, North East and South – Muntenia – covered within the project). An average of 10 students were interviewed in each school. During the second stage the classes and the students to be interviewed from each class were selected. A class was selected in a random way from each level of the lower secondary education (5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grades) from each sampled school. The students afterwards surveyed through the questionnaire were randomly selected. The detailed sampling procedure is presented below:

Stage 1. In the first sampling stage the schools where the research was to be conducted were selected, taking into account the following two stratification criteria:

- A. the area of residence (rural / urban) in which the school unit was located; hence, the investigated population (population of students enrolled in grades 5 to 8) was grouped into two distinctive categories, each with its specific weight based on the number of students;
- B. the county in which the school unit was located; thus, the investigated population (population of students enrolled in grades 5 to 8) was grouped in 19 separate categories for each county, each with its specific weight based on the number of students. The same procedure was used for the region-based stratification.

Based on the result of combining these criteria 100 schools with a percentage of Roma students of at least 5 - 10% from the 19 counties pertaining to the three regions covered by the study were randomly



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selected. On average 5 Roma, 5 non-Roma students and 5 former students (early school leavers that haven't been attending school over the previous 4 weeks prior to the study, without any medical reason) were selected from each school. The procedure described below was applied separately on the sampled Roma students, respectively on the sampled non-Roma students. The procedure used for the selection of former students who left school is described separately below.

Stage 2. In stage two classes from each sampled school were randomly selected from each educational level according to a specific procedure presented in detail to each field operator. In this way we avoided the predominant choice of classes where the best students in the school were concentrated.

Stage 3. Once the class sampling was finished the final choice of Roma and non-Roma students was the result of preparatory pre-stage according to the following procedure :

Step 1. The field operator identified the Roma students. This step was done with the utmost care due to the reluctance of many Roma students to declare their ethnicity. In order to identify the Roma students the hetero-identification method was used with the help of teachers / tutors (they were asked in private and by no means in front of the students, to indicate the Roma students). Roma students in the class were listed separately in an alphabetical order.

Step 2. The field operator separately sampled on one hand the non-Roma students from the catalogue, and on the other the Roma children from the list created in Step 1, following the catalogue selection procedure described below. At least one Roma student was selected from each class. When there was no Roma student in the class, more Roma students were selected from another class, in order to compensate. However these were rare situations, since all sampled schools had a minimum of 5 - 10% of Roma students, so naturally in each sampled class there would be at least 2 or 3 Roma students. The selection of non-Roma students was based on the class register-selection procedure, without however including the Roma students when their names came up.

Student class selection: The selection of sampled students was random and systematic based on a statistical step. Therefore, the number of students from a sampled class was divided to the number of questionnaires to be applied within that particular class, resulting in the selection step (always negatively rounded up). The basis was the catalogue order. The first selected student was the third one listed in the catalogue, while the others were selected by applying the statistical step. When all names from the catalogue were exhausted, the counting continued from the beginning of the catalogue until identifying the right person indicated by the statistical step.



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The sample of early school leavers was obtained by resorting to the following procedure: each teacher / tutor from the sampled schools was asked if there was any student who left school - definition: someone who has not been attending school over the last 4 weeks prior to the visit of the operator. All confirmed cases were listed and contact information was gathered (from teachers, tutors, colleagues). The final list only included the alphabetically ordered former students for whom there was a registered address. Then the first names on the list were selected until the necessary number was met. When no such student existed in a class the same procedure was used for the next class, in alphabetical order, until the needed number of former students was identified. The procedure was identical for each level of education.

The sample of parents was generated by interviewing parents of students enrolled in the samples of students. For orphan students or in case of unavailable parents the questionnaire was answered by the legal guardian.

Post-stratification: the resulting sample was post-stratified / weighted taking into account the actual size of the Roma population / other ethnicity according to NIS. The share was calculated based on the stratification criterion (residence area and county) as a ratio between the actual population according to official data and the sampled one from each stratum.

Research results – Wave 1 (2011)

The study addressed the fundamental dimensions of school situation for three different target groups: groups of Roma and non-Roma students and early school leavers. The sampled students were selected from the same types of schools with a significant percentage of Roma students (minimum 5 -10%). The research design allowed us to assess the possible differences between groups of Roma and non-Roma students living and studying in relatively similar scholastic and social environments. The manifestation of differences in terms of indicators (academic performance, level of family support, material, human and social capital of the family, school type and school conditions, school segregation etc.) supports the idea that the origin of educational inequalities and higher ESL risk among Roma students lie both within the characteristics of the unfavourable social / academic environment in which they live (the non-Roma students were selected from the same environment) and the specific social mechanisms through which Roma students are excluded in school. Our research highlights precisely these mechanisms, some of them already intuited, but unsupported by relevant data, others new and bringing additional significant insight to the matter. In addition, we included in the survey, as a distinct target group, a sample of early school leavers or students at high risk of



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doing in the future (from an operational perspective we included in this category the students who have not been attending school in the last four weeks prior to the survey or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences). The results obtained from this category represent a benchmark, while the comparison of data for Roma and non-Roma students with that of early school leavers indicate the gap and ESL risk prevalence among these categories.

1. Influence of school environment - school discrimination and educational resources

The results show that school discrimination is still very much present in Romanian schools, especially those with similar profiles (located close to poor communities, with a significant share of Roma students - minimum 5-10%). School discrimination manifests itself primarily at the class level, as Roma children are sited in the last row, as compared to non-Roma students. At the same time it is noticeable – see the table below - that from this point of view Roma children are closer to the situation of early school leavers or students with a high ESL risk. Thus, while the share non-Roma students sited in the first row is 32.6%, that of Roma students is only 23.8% and even lower, a merely 8.7%, as far as early school leavers or students with a high risk of leaving school are concerned.

Roma children are mostly sited in the last row at the back of the class - 26.5% of Roma children are sited in the fourth row or even further back, while only 17% of non-Roma students are positioned as such in their classroom. Those sited at the back of the class were mainly early school leavers or students with many unmotivated absences and 47.1% of them sat in the fourth row or even further back in the class.

Table 1. Correlation between the variable “seat assigned in the classroom” and the selection group

Student selection group* Seat assigned in the classroom

			Seat assigned in the classroom					Total
			Front seat	Second seat	Third seat	Fourth seat	Fifth or further back seat	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	201	182	128	58	47	616
		% within Student selection group	32.6%	29.5%	20.8%	9.4%	7.6%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	164	170	172	116	66	688
		% within Student selection group	23.8%	24.7%	25.0%	16.9%	9.6%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	25	47	80	84	51	287
		% within Student selection group	8.7%	16.4%	27.9%	29.3%	17.8%	100.0%
Total	Count	390	399	380	258	164	1591	
	% within Student selection group	24.5%	25.1%	23.9%	16.2%	10.3%	100.0%	

Student selection group*lastorpenultimate seat

			Last or penultimate seat		Total
			Does not sit in the last or penultimate seat	Sits in the last or penultimate seat	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	469	147	616
		% within Student selection group	76.1%	23.9%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	448	240	688
		% within Student selection group	65.1%	34.9%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	123	164	287
		% within Student selection group	42.9%	57.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	1040	551	1591
		% within Student selection group	65.4%	34.6%	100.0%

The classroom positioning is an indicator of the teacher's care for the student, the latter's attention and level of class participation, his / her understanding and assimilation of knowledge in the classroom and a higher academic performance. Data analysis show that the closer the students are to the front row, the higher the academic performance and the lower the absenteeism level. The relationships between the usually assigned seat in the class and the student's school absenteeism and his academic performance in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature are presented below:

Table 2. Correlation between the variable “seat assigned in the classroom” and school absenteeism

Seat assigned in the classroom* Student categories based on the no. of unmotivated absences

			Student categories based on the no. of unmotivated absences					Total
			No unmotivated absences	Between 1 and 10 absences	Between 11 and 20 absences	Between 21 and 39 absences	40 absences or more	
Seat assigned in the classroom	Front seat	Count	84	125	30	28	45	312
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	26.9%	40.1%	9.6%	9.0%	14.4%	100.0%
	Second seat	Count	91	103	33	34	60	321
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	28.3%	32.1%	10.3%	10.6%	18.7%	100.0%
	Third seat	Count	48	88	40	37	70	283
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	17.0%	31.1%	14.1%	13.1%	24.7%	100.0%
	Fourth seat	Count	28	56	28	23	73	208
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	13.5%	26.9%	13.5%	11.1%	35.1%	100.0%
	Fifth or further back seat	Count	19	30	25	12	41	127
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	15.0%	23.6%	19.7%	9.4%	32.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	270	402	156	134	289	1251



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% within Seat assigned in the classroom	21,6%	32.1%	12.5%	10.7%	23.1%	100.0%
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Table 3. Correlation between the variable “seat assigned in the classroom” and the average grade in Mathematics

Seat assigned in the classroom* Average grade in Mathematics grouped on performance categories

			Average grade in Mathematics grouped on performance categories					Total
			Below 5	Between 5 and 6	Between 6 and 7	Between 7 and 8	Above 8	
Seat assigned in the classroom	Front seat	Count	26	112	128	51	52	369
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	7.0%	30.4%	34.7%	13.8%	14.1%	100.0%
	Second seat	Count	37	139	115	50	38	379
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	9.8%	36.7%	30.3%	13.2%	10.0%	100.0%
	Third seat	Count	46	149	114	21	26	356
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	12.9%	41.9%	32.0%	5.9%	7.3%	100.0%
	Fourth seat	Count	47	121	46	9	14	237
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	19.8%	51.1%	19.4%	3.6%	6.9%	100.0%
	Fifth or further back seat	Count	34	70	31	8	6	149
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	22.8%	47.0%	20.6%	5.4%	4.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	190	591	434	139	136	1490
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	12,8%	39.7%	29.1%	9.3%	9.1%	100.0%

Table 4. Correlation between the variable “seat assigned in the classroom” and the average grade in Romanian language and literature

Seat assigned in the classroom* Average grade in Romanian language and literature on performance categories

			Average grade in Romanian language and literature on performance categories					Total
			Below 5	Between 5 and 6	Between 6 and 7	Between 7 and 8	Above 8	
Seat assigned in the classroom	Front seat	Count	14	99	113	56	83	365
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	3.8%	27.1%	31.0%	15.3%	22.7%	100.0%
	Second seat	Count	37	109	123	55	54	378
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	9.8%	28.8%	32.5%	14.6%	14.3%	100.0%
	Third seat	Count	32	156	95	42	31	356
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	9.0%	43.8%	26.7%	11.8%	8.7%	100.0%
	Fourth seat	Count	36	122	50	7	19	234
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	15.4%	52.1%	21.4%	3.0%	8.1%	100.0%
	Fifth or further back seat	Count	26	69	36	10	5	148
		% within Seat assigned in the classroom	18.9%	46.6%	24.3%	6.8%	3.4%	100.0%



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Total	Count	147	555	417	170	192	1481
	% within Seat assigned in the classroom	9.9%	37.5%	28.2%	11.5%	13.0%	100.0%

The meaning of the causal relationship between the student's assigned seat and his academic performance is not unequivocal. In some cases it is precisely the academic performance that qualifies the student to occupy one of the front or maybe the parents' intervention that entails a certain seat assignment – in which case the explanatory variable being parental interest and participation. However, the fact remains that Roma and non-Roma students do not occupy equally distributed seats, as they should.

Discrimination manifests itself not only in the way students are being assigned seats in the classrooms, but also in the overall class organisation system at the school level. All sampled schools had a minimum of 5 - 10% of Roma students, so if there were an equal distribution of Roma and non-Roma students (such as a random distribution), in each class within each sampled school at least 10% of the class should have been of Roma origin. However, 15 % of the interviewed non-Roma students stated that there were less than 10% Roma students in their class. Data show that 43.3 % of the Roma respondents study in a class where more than a half of the students are of Roma origin; however, the share of non-Roma students studying in the same type of classes (that is with at least half of the students being of Roma origin) is 29.6%. Still, these percentages only show one side of the problem and partially express the extent of school segregation. Analysis of class segregation can be best perceived by comparing the real percentage of Roma children in the class to the percentage of Roma children in the school population. Unfortunately it is nearly impossible to have the exact share of Roma students from the real population, since neither schools, nor inspectorates have the data. As a matter of fact we did not have these data either. In addition there is also the problem of assuming the Roma identity. It is our opinion that the only entities that can obtain the true data are the non-governmental organisations active in the Roma related matters.

Table 5. Correlation between the variable “share of Roma students in the class” and the student's affiliation group

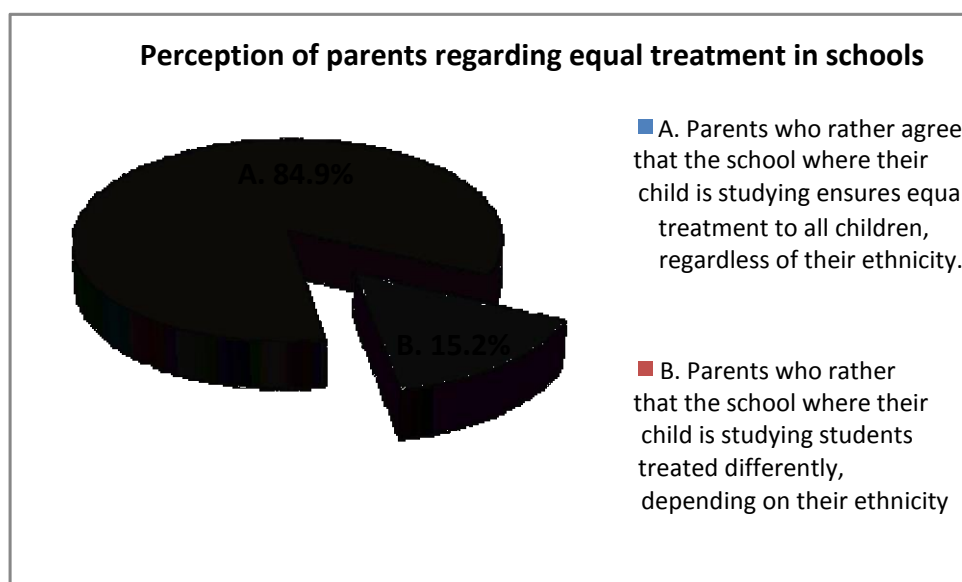
Student selection group* Share of Roma students in the classroom

			Share of Roma students in the classroom							Total	
			Below 10 percent Roma students	Between 10 and 20 percent Roma students	Between 20 and 30 percent Roma students	Between 30 and 40 percent Roma students	Between 40 and 50 percent Roma students	Between 50 and 60 percent Roma students	Between 60 and 70 percent Roma students		Between 70 and 100 percent Roma students
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count % within	91 15.0%	106 17.5%	87 14.4%	81 13.4%	61 10.1%	40 6.6%	52 8.6%	87 14.4%	605 100.0%

Student selection group										
Roma students	Count	33	99	85	73	97	59	60	176	682
	% within Student selection group	4.8%	14.5%	12.5%	10.7%	14.2%	8.7%	8.8%	25.8%	100.0%
	Student selection group									
Early school leavers	Count	32	43	32	38	28	27	29	63	292
	% within Student selection group	11.0%	14.7%	11.0%	13.0%	9.6%	9.2%	9.9%	21.6%	100.0%
	Student selection group									
Total	Count	156	248	204	192	186	126	141	326	1579
	% within Student selection group	9.9%	15.7%	15.7%	12.2%	11.8%	8.0%	8.9%	20.6%	100.0%
	Student selection group									

Another noteworthy aspect related to school environment refers to the degree to which the interviewed parents estimated that the school provides equal unbiased treatment to all students.. About one in six parents (15.2%) believes that the school treats children differently, depending on the student's ethnicity – they graded this school issue with 5 out of a total of 10 (1 – I agree that the school provides equal treatment to all children regardless of their ethnicity, 2 - contrary opinion, the school treats children differently depending on their ethnicity). It is an important share that demonstrates that serious efforts are still required before schools truly become environments for equal opportunities.

Table 6. Distribution of parents' opinion on equal school treatment of children at school



The analysis of students belonging groups shows that parents of Roma students / early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences are more likely to consider school as an

environment that provides ethnicity- based unequal treatment of students - see the next table- than non-Roma parents. Among non-Roma parents the share of those who totally agree with the fact that the school ensures equal treatment to all students is 69.9%, higher than the 57.1% share of parents of early school leavers who feel the same way; among the latter 21% are more likely to agree that the school treats children differently depending on their ethnicity (grade 6 or higher on the scale used), while only 12.5% of non-Roma parents share the same opinion. It is an issue on which the mentor should insist in relation to the program beneficiaries, as our research revealed the need to improve students' relationships with the academic environment, to identify the reasons behind the school-created disadvantage for children from vulnerable groups in relation to the other students and to intervene and eliminate them.

Table 7. Correlation between group affiliation and opinion on equal treatment in schools

Student selection group* In your opinion, the school where your child studies ensures the equal treatment of all children, regardless of their ethnicity or are they treated differently, depending on their ethnicity?

			In your opinion, the school where your child studies ensures the equal treatment of all children, regardless of their ethnicity or are they treated differently, depending on their ethnicity?										Total
			Totally agree to the affirmation from the left	2.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	6.00	7.00	8.00	9.00	Totally agree to the affirmation from the right	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	413	50	24	11	19	6	10	10	2	46	591
		% within Student selection group	69.9%	8.5%	4.1%	1.9%	3.2%	1.0%	1.7%	1.7%	.3%	7.8%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	402	56	27	20	37	6	8	11	31	58	656
		% within Student selection group	61.3%	8.5%	4.1%	3.0%	5.6%	9%	1.2%	1.7%	4.7%	8.8%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	157	20	21	4	15	8	9	13	10	18	275
		% within Student selection group	57.1%	7.3%	7.6%	1.5%	5.5%	2.9%	3.3%	4.7%	3.6%	6.5%	100.0%
Total			972	126	72	35	71	20	27	34	43	122	1522
			63.9%	8.3%	4.7%	2.3%	4.7%	1.3%	1.8%	22%	2.8%	8.0%	100.0%

It is within the present framework that we bring forward another set of data that supports the idea that discrimination is still a problem in Romanian schools affecting the academic performance of Roma students, their school integration and, ultimately, the degree of ESL risk. About 1 out of 10 interviewed parents (12%) stated that Roma students are treated worse than the rest of the students. This impression prevails among parents of Roma children / early school leavers, namely 1 out of 6 Roma parents (16.7%) feel this way, as compared to only 1 out of 25 non-Roma parents (3.9%).



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Table 8. Correlation between group affiliation and opinion on Roma students' treatment in school

Student selection group* As far as you know, which one of the following statements is closer to the truth?

			As far as you know, which one of the following statements is closer to the truth?			
			Roma children are treated worse than the other children at the school where my child studies	Roma children are treated better than the other children at the school where my child studies	Roma children are treated just like the other children at the school where my child studies	
			Total			
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	21	16	500	537
		% within Student selection group	3.9%	3.0%	93.1%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	105	5	519	629
		% within Student selection group	16.7%	8%	82.5%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	46	4	214	264
		% within Student selection group	17.4%	1.5%	81.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	172	25	1233	1430
		% within Student selection group	12.0%	1.7%	86.2%	100.0%

Data should be complemented with the practical perspective of Roma parents that shed light on the actual mechanisms that weigh against Roma students as compared to the non-Roma ones. It is a mix of causes combining family financial situation, poor living conditions, inadequate handling of cases of disadvantaged children by the teachers and insufficient family support. Roma children are disadvantaged both because of difficult family financial situation and the fact that, in many cases, teachers do not show the necessary tact and empathy in providing additional support to students coming from disadvantaged families; on the contrary, the teachers' approach in relation to students from disadvantaged families seems to discourage them to continue their education.

An illustrative case is the one described by a Roma parent whose child was heckled by a teacher on grounds of dirty fingernails; such admonishment in front of the class is the kind of factor that creates an obstacle for integration and establishing normal relations with colleagues. Moreover, the reason behind the dirty fingernails is not so much negligence (in which case it would rather be the parents' responsibility, not the student's) as the need to work in order to secure food - in this particular case it was about poaching the land looking for iron pieces - and the lack of home conditions to ensure a proper hygiene. In such circumstances we believe it is more important that the student be encouraged and helped to attend his classes, despite poor personal hygiene, and the solution to the problem lies in consolidating the relationship with the parents.



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"- Yes, school is good because they learn how to write, how to get by, but he won't come anymore because he comes dirty after looking through garbage, poor devils, out there looking for iron pieces, comes back dirty and the Romanian stay away from they and they are ashamed, so the child leaves and doesn't come back. That's why mine didn't go back.

- AND THEY HAVE TO GO LOOKING FOR THAT, THEY DON'T HAVE WITH WHAT TO GET BY OTHERWISE.

- They don't even have what to wash up with.

- My child, S.G, he went to look for iron because we don't have the means to support ourselves and came back with dirty hands and nails and their teacher told him that she'll cut off his fingers.

- AND SHE FRIGHTENED HIM.

- She did and he came to me and said mum I am no longer going to school because the lady will cut my nails and he hasn't been going since. I just managed to send him back today, I spanked him a couple of times, I lashed out at him and he went every now and then...and today they called me too, at 10, to talk about the child.

- BUT YOU WANT HIM TO COME TO SCHOOL, IT'S GOOD FOR HIM.

- It's good that he began to learn.

- WHAT CLASS IS HE IN?

- It's the first school year, but when she threatened him he got scared and didn't come no more. She said she will give him the writing materials, but she didn't, but she asks for money for the class fund and one and the other. He comes and says mum gimme 50 grand, but where do I get it, baby, because these money is for bread and if I give it to you to take to school which bread will you eat today? That's why we keep looking for iron, aluminium, copper..." (Focus Group in Vlașca - Fetești with Roma parents of early school leavers)

The data show that almost 1 out of 4 Roma students spoke Romani at home before going to school – see the table below. Obviously these students have encountered greater difficulties in adapting to the school environment and recovering the gap as compared to the other students. Under the circumstances the appropriate recommendation is to facilitate the scholastic integration of students who spoke a language other than Romanian at home, before going to school, through a series of measures such as summer schools, an intensive program of familiarization with the Romanian language from pre-school or first school years, intensive support provided by the school mediator etc.



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Table 9. Correlation between the language spoken at home before attending school and the affiliation group

Student selection group* In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child, before going to school?

			In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child, before going to school?			Total
			Romanian	Romani	Hungarian	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	568	4	36	608
		% within Student selection group	93.4%	.7%	5.9%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	467	151	44	662
		% within Student selection group	70.5%	22.8%	6.6%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	183	79	26	288
		% within Student selection group	63.5%	27.4%	9.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	1218	234	106	1558	
	% within Student selection group	78.2%	15.0%	6.8%	100.0%	

The revealed aspects reinforce the idea that school is not equally friendly to all students, regardless of their ethnicity. There are multiple reasons for this, originating in a mix of causes. One of them is that school does not possess effective mechanisms to facilitate school integration for students from vulnerable groups. The opinion that schools do not ensure equal treatment for all students is significantly wider among parents who have used (and still do) Romani or Hungarian at home. It is interesting for example that this opinion is even more prevalent among parents who used to speak Hungarian with their children when at home. It would be interesting someday to test the assumption that in schools with a significant share of Hungarian children the treatment Roma children are subjected to is even more pronounced, as compared to schools where there are little or no Hungarian students. We are also considering the schools where the pre-university education system has been implemented in Hungarian. It is a working hypothesis for the time being, as our data are inconclusive, so no categorical answer can be given for now.

Table 10. Correlation between the language spoken at home and the opinion on Roma students' treatment at school

In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child, before going to school?* As far as you know, which one of the following statements is closer to the truth

			As far as you know, which one of the following statements is closer to the truth?			Total
			Roma children are treated worse than the other children at the school where my child studies	Roma children are treated better than the other children at the school where my child studies	Roma children are treated just like the other children at the school where my child studies	
In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child,	Romanian	Count	109	22	979	1110
		% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child,	9.8%	2.0%	88.2%	100.0%



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before going to school?	before going to school?				
Romani	Count	30	3	181	214
	% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child, before going to school?	14.0%	1.4%	84.6%	100.0%
Hungarian	Count	34	1	68	103
	% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child, before going to school?	33.0%	1.0%	66.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	173	26	1228	1427
	% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child, before going to school?	12.1%	1.8%	86.1%	100.0%

Another form of ethnic class discrimination, tested throughout the research, was the ethnical seat grouping in the class and the data confirmed the trend: students of similar ethnicity are usually sited next to each other. The data continue to be valid even when the analysis was conducted by controlling the Roma students' share effects.

Table 11. Correlation between the ethnicity of the desk mate and the student's selection group

Student selection group* Which is the ethnicity of the desk mate you usually sit next to?

			Which is the ethnicity of the desk mate you usually sit next to?					Total
			Romanian	Hungarian	Roma	German	Other	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	385	41	85	0	5	516
		% within Student selection group	74.6%	7.9%	16.5%	.0%	1.0%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	213	27	293	0	2	535
		% within Student selection group	39.8%	5.0%	54.8%	.0%	4%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	95	12	132	0	2	241
		% within Student selection group	39.4%	5.0%	54.8%	.0%	8%	100.0%
Total	Count	693	80	510	0	9	1292	
	% within Student selection group	53.6%	6.2%	39.5%	.0%	.7%	100.0%	

Three quarters (74.6%) of non-Roma students and about 1 in 2 Roma students respondents (54.8%) have a desk mate of the same ethnicity. These results should however be interpreted with caution. The responses may have been wrong – as students may not have known the actual ethnic identity of their desk mate; moreover, the ethnic composition of the class is also relevant. Therefore, it is only natural that a higher proportion of Roma students in the class would also lead to a higher percentage of students having a Roma desk mate. That is why our analysis was also conducted separately for the classes depending on the share of Roma students. Data show that in classes with 10 to 20% Roma students, only 7% of non-Roma students have a Roma desk mate and 32% of Roma students have a desk mate of the same ethnicity. In these



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classes the maximum share of non-Roma students who might have had a Roma desk mate is equal to the percentage of Roma students in the class (10 - 20%) and there was a chance that no Roma student would have a Roma desk mate (since Roma students were up to 20% at most, there was a possibility that each Roma student had a non-Roma desk mate from the remaining 80%). Despite this, it is obvious that classroom sitting is not random, on the contrary, there is a clear tendency of seat assignment and grouping that includes the ethnicity factor as well. Education is also a socialization mechanism for students as they acquire certain habits in terms of perception, values, attitudes and behaviour. The characteristics of the school environment (rules, interaction patterns, classroom control etc.) have a defining role in terms of representation and relating to students of different ethnicities. Under the circumstances the reality highlighted by the study suggests rather that schools generate segregated socialisation, drawing boundaries and emphasising ethnic differences. This is all the more serious as students first entering the school system have no dichotomic perspective on ethnicity, on the contrary, the data from the conducted focus groups revealed cases of friendship, mutual assistance and cooperation between Roma and non-Roma students.

- BUT DID YOU HAVE MONEY FOR BOOKS AND THEIR WRITING MATERIALS?

- But if we don't have enough for food, how could we have had for books?

- AND FROM WHERE DID THEY STUDY? HOW DID THEY MANAGE TO GET BY?

- They gave them the writing supplies from schools.

- My daughter did not have books and she used to go to a classmate with more opportunities and studies there.

(...)

- I WANTED TO ASK YOU SOMETHING, ABOUT WHAT THE GENTLEMAN SAID AND I WANTED TO SEE IF IT HAPPENED TO YOUR CHILDREN, THIS COLLABORATION I MEAN, AS HE SAID THAT HIS DAUGHTER USED TO GO TO A FRIEND AND STUDY TOGETHER DID THIS HAPPEN TO YOU TO HAVE SUCH FRIENDS THAT YOUR CHILD COULD GO OVER THEIR HOUSE AND STUDY TOGETHER, A MUTUAL AID BETWEEN CHILDREN ?

- Yes , and others came by o my house when they had no books they would come and help each other at home then they would pick up their backpack and leave the other way.

- DID YOU EVER FEEL ANY DIFFERENCE THAT THAT ONE IS ROMA AND THE OTHER ONE IS NOT?

- No.

- FOR INSTANCE, YOUR DAUGHTER'S BEST FRIEND, IS SHE ROMA?

- My daughter is Roma and the friend she used to go to was non-Roma, but that made no difference what so ever. and friend that went non Roma did not distinguish . (Focus group in Frumușani, Parents of Roma



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early school leavers)

The influence of the school environment in emphasizing ethnic differences is favoured by the presence of school segregation. The qualitative research data revealed the existence of such ethnic segregation tendencies caused both by teachers' and parents' decisions. On one hand school classes are divided according to student performance – there are classes with good or less good students; although the ethnicity is not taken into consideration in this case, the effect of dividing classes based on academic performance leads to school segregation, since Roma students mostly have lower academic performances (as a consequence of certain social conditions which are beyond their control).

-HOW DID YOUR CHILDREN GET ALONG WITH OTHER CHILDREN, DID YOU FEEL ANY DIFFERENCIES, I DON'T KNOW, IS JUST THAT SOMETIMES THEY TEND TO PUT TOGETHER IN A CLASS ALL THE GOOD STUDENTS AND THEN THE CLASSES WITH WEAKER STUDENTS ...

-So they did, they choose the best class at fall and assign it to a certain teacher, then the class that doesn't do well goes to another teacher.

- She was in class A and then, in 5th grade, they moved her to class B.

-BUT HOW TO THEY DO THIS, IS IT BASED ON THE GRADES DO THEY USE OTHER CRITERIA, HOW DO THEY DIVIDE CLASSES?

-I understand that based on how they study.

- My daughter is doing well, she's in the 6th grade, so she also got a computer.

-SO IT DIDN'T MATTER THAT THEY WERE ROMA OR NON-ROMA, I MEAN WERE THERE SUCH CASES OR DID YOU FEEL SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

- No, no such thing happened in the 6th grade, in the tutor's class. (Focus group in Frumușani, Roma parents with children who have left school)

On the other hand during our focus groups we have come across situations when parents of non-Roma students chose to move their children from schools with a high share of Roma children – this is clearly an ethnical segregation, a reflection of discriminatory attitudes. All these are glimpses of realities of the Romanian school system that leave their mark on the way students socialize and internalize the meaning of ethnic differences as a segregationist criterion and on their promoting the ethnic stereotypes.

"- Just to keep them away from the Gypsies, there are many who have moved away, I see them leaving with



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the minibus.

- And from the 1st and 2nd grade they moved already .
- There are still some poor Romanians and the gypsies that go to school .
- There is no argument, but supposedly there are Gypsies.
- There are people here who do not send children to school because of the Gypsy and take them to school at the station .
- AND WHY IS THAT BOTHERING THEM ?
- Well the Romanians here say what, I should let my kids go to school to sit between Gypsies ? So they take them from the 1st, the 2nd grade and take them to the station.
- My child had a Romanian child in his classroom and he was hooked by the Gypsies who taught him Romani and the parents were not happy that he learned Romani instead of another language, like other children do, so eventually they moved him at the station and my child remained here and eventually he didn't go anymore either.
- SO EVENTUALLY THEY HAD BECOME FRIENDS.
- Yes, they had become friends, with his colleagues too, some of them went to the high school from the station and completed 7 or 8 grades, but he got sucked in the 6th grade and then stopped going". (Focus group in Fetești - Roma parents with children who have left school)

The investigation also took into consideration the students' opinion regarding teacher bias. Data show that Roma students feel more often that teachers show greater understanding towards other colleagues - see the table below. 1 in 5 Roma students (20.7%) feel this way often or even often, as compared to 15.9% of non-Roma children; on the other hand, 1 in 2 non- Roma students (49,1%) does not feel the bias at all and neither do 38.3% of Roma students. The share of early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences feeling the teacher bias is even more significant: 35.4% of them felt / feel often or very often that teachers show greater understanding towards their peers. These differences persist even when data is being broken down to residence (rural / urban) level. This result reflects, once more, the persistence of structural inequalities within the Romanian education system in terms of equality of educational opportunity, as ethnicity continues to be a differentiating factor as far as school treatment is concerned. Obviously, it is a question of subjective perception of students, but this applies to all three groups that are being compared, namely the Roma and non-Roma students, and the early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences. The intervention to support students at risk of leaving



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school should also monitor the relationship between teachers and students during the teaching classes.

Table 12. Correlation between students' opinion regarding teacher bias and group affiliation (on the overall sample and separately based on residence)

Student selection group* Have you ever felt that some teachers are more understanding with other students than they are with you?

			Have you ever felt that some teachers are more understanding with other students than they are with you?					Total
			Very often	Often	Rarely	Very rarely	Not at all	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	21	74	91	117	292	595
		% within Student selection group	3.5%	12.4%	15.3%	19.7%	49.1%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	31	98	116	141	240	626
		% within Student selection group	5.0%	15.7%	18.5%	22.5%	38.3%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	14	88	60	51	67	280
		% within Student selection group	5.0%	31.4%	21.4%	18.2%	23.9%	100.0%
Total	Count	66	260	267	309	599	1501	
	% within Student selection group	4.4%	17.3%	17.8%	20.6%	39.9%	100.0%	

Student selection group* Have you ever felt that some teachers are more understanding with other students than they are with you? *Current residence. But presently you live...

Current residence. But presently you live ...				Have you ever felt that some teachers are more understanding with other students than they are with you?					Total
				Very often	Often	Rarely	Very rarely	Not at all	
Rural	Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	11	30	42	69	168	320
			% within Student selection group	3.4%	9.4%	13.1%	21.6%	52.5%	100.0%
		Roma students	Count	21	62	75	91	167	416
			% within Student selection group	5.0%	14.9%	18.0%	21.9%	40.1%	100.0%
		Early school leavers	Count	9	53	38	34	44	178
			% within Student selection group	5.1%	29.8%	21.3%	19.1%	24.7%	100.0%
	Total		Count	41	145	155	194	379	914
			% within Student selection group	4.5%	15.9%	17.0%	21.2%	41.5%	100.0%
Urban, in a city	Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	10	44	50	49	124	277
			% within Student selection group	3.6%	15.9%	18.1%	17.7%	44.8%	100.0%
		Roma students	Count	10	35	41	50	73	209
			% within Student selection group	4.8%	16.7%	19.6%	23.9%	34.9%	100.0%
		Early school leavers	Count	5	35	22	17	23	102
			% within Student selection group	4.9%	34.3%	21.6%	16.7%	22.5%	100.0%
	Total		Count	25	114	113	116	22	588
			% within Student selection group	4.3%	19.4%	19.2%	19.7%	37.4%	100.0%

We tested the research and the relationship between the weight of students in school and issues such

as academic performance (underlined in our research by grades average in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature), students' motivation to further their education, school facilities or the extent to which students had been enrolled in preschool education. Data on the share of Roma students in school were provided by school management and the items included in the analysis were defined with the following thresholds: below 10%, between 10 and 30%, between 30 and 50%, between 50 and 75%, over 75% .

Table 13. Correlation between the share of Roma students and average grade in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature over the last school semester

Share of Roma students in school* Average grade in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature grouped on performance categories

			Average grade in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature grouped on performance categories					Total
			Below 5	Between 5 and 6	Between 6 and 7	Between 7 and 8	Above 8	
Share of Roma students in school	Maximum 10%	Count	35	34	41	21	28	159
		% within Share of Roma students in school	22.0%	21.4%	25.8%	13.2%	17.6%	100.0%
	Between 10 and 30%	Count	28	73	80	49	53	283
		% within Share of Roma students in school	9.9%	25.8%	28.3%	17.3%	18.7%	100.0%
	Between 30 and 50%	Count	54	155	93	37	41	380
		% within Share of Roma students in school	14.2%	40.8%	24.5%	9.7%	10.8%	100.0%
	Between 50 and 75%	Count	20	108	64	39	32	263
		% within Share of Roma students in school	7.6%	41.1%	24.3%	14.8%	12.2%	100.0%
	Above 75%	Count	10	62	47	19	30	168
		% within Share of Roma students in school	6.0%	36.9%	28.0%	11.3%	17.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	147	432	325	165	184	1253
		% within Share of Roma students in school	11.7%	34.5%	25.9%	13.2%	14.7%	100.0%

There is a significant level of association between the weight of Roma students in the school and the average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature, but not as expected. Basically, the proportion of students with an average grade below 5 in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature is significantly higher in schools with less than 10% Roma students. On the other hand, in schools with over 75% Roma students, the number of students with grades between 5 and 6 is significantly higher. Also, in schools with a maximum of 30% Roma students the number of students with grades above 7 is significantly higher.

These results should be considered bearing certain aspects in mind. First, the percentage of Roma students in schools was recorded in accordance with the headmasters' indications. Therefore it is only



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natural that not all answers were completely accurate - issues such as hetero-identification, ethnic autoidentification, lack of a detailed family history, all these are possible error sources. However, since this was the only reliable source in estimating the percentage of Roma students in school, we implicitly acknowledged the limitations. Second, the grading system is not the best instrument to evaluate, in a comparative manner, the quality of education for each student, as the same academic performance can be graded differently in different schools; additionally, the overall class and school performance, teachers' expectation, the degree of parental scholastic involvement, all these aspects matter as well. Third, other variables can influence and leave their mark on the correlations we have presented. Bearing in mind these limitations, certain conclusions can still be drawn based on these results. Firstly, there are some differences in terms of grades between the schools defined by the share of students, but great caution is necessary in interpreting them. The difference between students' average grades may reflect a difference in the quality of education, but the cause is not necessarily the share of Roma students within the school or some others segregationist phenomena; it might be, but the results do not allow us to draw this conclusion. The average grade is also an indicator of school conditions, quality of teaching staff and family support, which was scientifically proved to be a fundamental factor for the academic performance of the student. For example, in case of a higher proportion of students from families with higher levels of education the overall average grades within the school will also be higher.

Schools with less than 10% Roma students are more dihotomizate than the rest, with a larger share of students scoring grids situated at the extremes (grades below 5 and above 8). Another unexpected aspect was the low weigh of students with grades below 5 in schools where Roma students represent over 75% of the school population, especially considering that the overall sample data indicate that Roma students usually get lower grades. Two explanations are required at this point, namely that residence is important – the urban / rural schooling differences are well known; in addition we can assume that teachers' expectations differ and the schools from the two areas do not necessarily include proportionate share of Roma children. For instance, when assuming that Roma children are rather concentrated in rural schools it is important to analyse how Roma / non-Roma students are performing separately in schools with different ratios of Roma students, as this may influence the overall grades in school. Therefore we present below two tables illustrating the relationship between the ratio of Roma students and average grades, divided by type of residence and within the group of Roma and non-Roma students.

Table 14. Correlation between the share of Roma students and the average grades based on students' residence

Share of Roma students in school* Average grade in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature grouped on performance categories

Current residence. But presently you live ...				Average grade in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature grouped on performance categories					Total
				Below 5	Between 5 and 6	Between 6 and 7	Between 7 and 8	Above 8	
Rural	P Share of Roma students in school	Maximum 10%	Count	2	6	15	7	7	37
			% within Share of Roma students in school	5.4%	16.2%	40.5%	18.9%	18.9%	100.0%
		Between 10 and 30%	Count	12	35	33	17	24	121
			% within Share of Roma students in school	9.9%	28.9%	27.3%	14.0%	19.8%	100.0%
		Between 30 and 50%	Count	30	120	60	25	23	258
			% within Share of Roma students in school	11.6%	46.5%	23.3%	9.7%	8.9%	100.0%
	Between 50 and 75%	Count	19	98	59	34	24	234	
	% within Share of Roma students in school	8.1%	41.9%	25.2%	14.5%	10.3%	100.0%		
	Above 75%	Count	6	45	28	17	25	121	
		% within Share of Roma students in school	5.0%	37.2%	23.1%	14.0%	20.7%	100.0%	
Total			Count	69	304	195	100	103	771
			% within Share of Roma students in school	8.9%	39.4%	25.3%	13.0%	13.4%	100.0%
Urban	Share of Roma students in school	Maximum 10%	Count	32	28	27	15	21	123
			% within Share of Roma students in school	26.0%	22.8%	22.0%	12.2%	17.1%	100.0%
		Between 10 and 30%	Count	16	39	47	32	29	163
			% within Share of Roma students in school	9.8%	23.9%	28.8%	19.6%	17.8%	100.0%
		Between 30 and 50%	Count	24	36	33	12	18	123
			% within Share of Roma students in school	19.5%	29.3%	26.8%	9.8%	14.6%	100.0%
	Between 50 and 75%	Count	1	10	5	5	8	29	
	% within Share of Roma students in school	3.4%	34.5%	17.2%	17.2%	27.6%	100.0%		
	Above 75%	Count	5	17	19	2	5	48	
		% within Share of Roma students in school	10.4%	35.4%	39.6%	4.2%	10.4%	100.0%	
Total			Count	78	130	131	66	81	486
			% within Share of Roma students in school	16.0%	26.7%	27.0%	13.6%	16.7%	100.0%

Data presentation based on the student's residence reveals a totally different picture. In rural schools



with less than 10% Roma students the average grades below 5 are no longer as numerous as indicated by the results processed for the entire sample; actually, only 6.5% of the students enrolled in these schools were graded under 5 in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature. Briefly, rural schools with less than 10% Roma students also record higher grades when compared to other rural schools where the ratio of Roma students is higher. As far as the urban areas are concerned, the situation is different. Schools where the percentage of Roma students is below 10% register the highest number of students with average grades below 5 and the lowest share of students with grades between 5 and 6. Schools with over 75% Roma students have the largest group of students with grades between 5 and 6 and the smallest group of students with grades above 7 - only 1 in 10 students of the latter category acquired an average grade above 8 in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature. Differences between schools remain, as far as average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature are concerned, without an uniform distribution, possibly reflecting both the effects of different levels of expectations and a case of different ratios of excellence among schools. However, for the time being, these are only hypothetical explanations that deserve to be looked into in the future.

Table 15. Correlation between the share of Roma students and the average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature depending on the ethnic group affiliation

Share of Roma students in school* Average grade in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature grouped on performance categories* Student selection group

Student selection group				Average grade in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature grouped on performance categories					Total
				Below 5	Between 5 and 6	Between 6 and 7	Between 7 and 8	Above 8	
Non-Roma students	Share of Roma students in school	Maximum 10%	Count	15	15	25	17	27	99
			% within Share of Roma students in school	15.2%	15.2%	25.3%	17.2%	27.3%	100.0%
		Between 10 and 30%	Count	6	29	45	34	50	164
			% within Share of Roma students in school	3.7%	17.7%	27.4%	20.7%	30.5%	100.0%
		Between 30 and 50%	Count	11	50	55	26	33	175
			% within Share of Roma students in school	6.3%	28.6%	31.4%	14.9%	18.9%	100.0%
Roma students	Share of Roma students in school	Between 50 and 75%	Count	3	20	30	18	24	95
			% within Share of Roma students in school	3.2%	21.1%	31.6%	18.9%	25.3%	100.0%
		Above 75%	Count	0	11	27	9	18	95
			% within Share of Roma students in school	.0%	16.9%	41.5%	13.8%	25.3%	100.0%
		Total	Count	35	125	182	104	152	598
			% within Share of Roma students in school	5.9%	20.9%	30.4%	17.4%	25.4%	100.0%



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Roma students	Share of Roma students in school	Maximum 10%	Count	20	20	16	4	1	61
			% within Share of Roma students in school	32.8%	32.8%	26.2%	6.6%	1.6%	100.0%
	Between 10 and 30%	Count	22	44	35	15	4	120	
		% within Share of Roma students in school	18.3%	36.7%	29.2%	12.5%	3.3%	100.0%	
	Between 30 and 50%	Count	42	105	38	10	8	203	
		% within Share of Roma students in school	20.7%	51.7%	18.7%	4.9%	3.9%	100.0%	
	Between 50 and 75%	Count	17	88	34	21	8	168	
		% within Share of Roma students in school	10.1%	52.4%	20.2%	12.5%	4.8%	100.0%	
Above 75%	Count	10	51	21	11	12	105		
	% within Share of Roma students in school	9.5%	48.6%	20.0%	10.5%	11.4%	100.0%		
Total			Count	111	308	144	61	33	657
			% within Share of Roma students in school	16.9%	46.9%	21.9%	9.3%	5.0%	100.0%

These data provide a picture of how Roma students are performing depending on the percentage of other students of the same ethnicity in school (at this point the quality of academic education is expressed by the average grade obtained in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature). Data show that in schools with a maximum of 10% share of Roma students the number of those with an average grade above 8 is definitely lower compared to students from schools where the percentage of Roma students is over 75%. Also, about 1 out of 3 Roma children attending a school with under 10% Roma students has the average grade in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature below 5. There is an obvious contrast with non-Roma students from the same categories of schools. For instance, in schools with Roma student population above 75% the number of non-Roma students with grades below 5 is virtually 0.

Subject to the limitations mentioned above, several conclusions can be drawn at this point. Thus, the data clearly show that student performance varies depending on the ratio of Roma population in school, as well as student ethnicity. Of course, the correlation between the ratio of Roma students and school performances might be a false one, and other characteristics of schools with a high percentage of Roma students may, in fact, be the primary determinant for school grades (teacher qualifications, the proportion of students from families with high educational status etc.).

However, data seem to suggest that schools resort to different exigency layers depending on the share of Roma students enrolled. Hence, in schools with a maximum of 10% Roma students the number of students with grades below 5 is higher than in schools where the percentage of Roma students is over 75%. It seems that schools with less than 10% share of Roma children are more demanding in granting grades above 5, compared with schools with higher percentages of Roma students.



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However, the striking aspect is that Roma students receive higher grades in schools where their share is higher than in schools where the Roma students' proportion is lower (under 10%). Generally speaking a similar share of non-Roma students have grades above 7, regardless of the Roma students percentage in their school; but the share of Roma students with grades above 7 differ significantly according to the percentage of Roma students in the school. In other words, the higher the percentage of Roma students in school, the greater the chances of Roma students to receive grades above 5. There are two possible explanations to be looked into in the future: one is that the level of expectations is lower in schools with higher numbers of Roma students, teachers are less qualified, which would imply a poorer quality of the acquired competences (despite the higher grades); the second one is that the last few years' investments (European funded projects and so on) targeting schools with a high percentage of Roma children also increased their academic performances. However, to what extent the grades received by Roma students correspond to their real academic competencies, compared to non-Roma students, is yet to be seen.

Another dimension tested within the analysis was the relationship between the percentage of Roma students in the school and their motivation to continue their education. The data show a rather weak correlation between the percentage of Roma students in school and motivation to continue the secondary education by going to high school. The entire sample indicates that students from schools where the proportion of Roma students is below 10% want very much to further their education compared to the others.

Table 16. Correlation between the share of Roma students and the desire to further education by enrolling in upper secondary schools

Share of Roma students in school* How much do you want to go to high school?

			How much do you want to go to high school?					Total
			Very much	Much	Little	Very little	Not at all	
Share of Roma students in school	Maximum 10%	Count	126	33	8	2	1	170
		% within Share of Roma students in school	74.1%	19.4%	4.7%	1.2%	.6%	100.0%
	Between 10 and 30%	Count	207	76	6	3	3	295
		% within Share of Roma students in school	70.2%	25.8%	2.0%	1.0%	1.0%	100.0%
	Between 30 and 50%	Count	254	85	25	6	12	382
		% within Share of Roma students in school	66.5%	22.3%	6.5%	1.6%	3.1%	100.0%
	Between 50 and 75%	Count	194	49	23	4	5	275
		% within Share of Roma students in school	70.5%	17.8%	8.4%	1.5%	1.8%	100.0%



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Above 75%	Count	125	31	15	2	4	177
	% within Share of Roma students in school	70.6%	17.5%	8.5%	1.1%	2.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	906	274	77	17	25	1299
	% within Share of Roma students in school	69.7%	21.1%	5.9%	1.3%	1.9%	100.0%

The previous conclusions following a breaking down of data depending on the residence factor are still valid: students attending schools with less than 10% Roma students and regardless of their origin have a higher propensity to look forward to further their education in high school – as demonstrated in the table below. Still, the correlation is weak and, no doubt, dependent on other variables such as the weight of high school students from families with a high education status.

Table 17. Correlation between the share of Roma students and the desire to further education by enrolling in upper secondary schools, depending on residence

Share of Roma students in school* How much do you want to go to high school?* Current residence. But presently you live ...

Current residence. But presently you live ...				How much do you want to go to high school?					Total
				Very much	Much	Little	Very little	Not at all	
Rural	Share of Roma students in school	Maximum	Count	34	5	2	0	1	42
		10%	% within Share of Roma students in school	81.0%	11.9%	4.8%	.0%	2.4%	100.0%
		Between 10 and 30%	Count	99	27	4	0	1	131
			% within Share of Roma students in school	75.5%	20.6%	3.1%	.0%	.8%	100.0%
		Between 30 and 50%	Count	168	54	18	4	12	256
			% within Share of Roma students in school	65.6%	21.1%	7.0%	1.6%	4.7%	100.0%
Urban	Share of Roma students in school	Between 50 and 75%	Count	172	43	23	4	5	247
			% within Share of Roma students in school	69.6%	17.4%	9.3%	1.6%	2.0%	100.0%
		Above 75%	Count	92	17	8	2	4	123
			% within Share of Roma students in school	74.8%	13.8%	6.5%	1.6%	3.3%	100.0%
		Total	Count	565	146	55	10	23	799
			% within Share of Roma students in school	70.7%	18.3%	6.9%	1.3%	2.9%	100.0%
Urban	Share of Roma students in school	Maximum	Count	92	28	6	2	0	128
		10%	% within Share of Roma students in school	71.9%	21.9%	4.7%	1.6%	.0%	100.0%
		Between 10 and 30%	Count	108	49	2	3	3	165
			% within Share of Roma students in school	65.5%	29.7%	1.2%	1.8%	1.8%	100.0%
Urban	Share of Roma students in school	Between 30 and 50%	Count	86	31	7	2	1	127
			% within Share of Roma students in school	67.7%	24.4%	5.5%	1.6%	.8%	100.0%
		Between 50 and 75%	Count	22	6	0	0	1	29
			% within Share of Roma students in school	75.9%	20.7%	.0%	0%	3.4%	100.0%

Above 75%	Count	34	14	7	0	0	55
	% within Share of Roma students in school	61.8%	25.5%	12.7%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	342	128	22	7	5	504
	% within Share of Roma students in school	67.9%	25.4%	4.4%	1.4%	1.0%	100.0%

The analysis was also run against the ethnic group affiliation of the students. Data show that there is no significant correlation in this case regarding the level of student aspirations between the various categories of Roma and non-Roma students, depending on the ratio of Roma students in their school. For instance Roma children's level of desire to attend high school is similar, whether they attend schools where their share is below 10% or above 75% (the differences are not statistically relevant).

Table 18. Correlation between the share of Roma students and the desire to further education by enrolling in upper secondary schools, depending on ethnic group affiliation

Share of Roma students* How much do you want to go to high school?* Student selection group

Student selection group				How much do you want to go to high school?					Total
				Very much	Much	Little	Very little	Not at all	
Non-Roma students	Share of Roma students	Maximum 10%	Count	80	19	2	1	0	102
			% within Share of Roma students in school	78.4%	18.6%	2.0%	1.0%	.0%	100.0%
		Between 10 and 30%	Count	129	39	1	0	0	169
			% within Share of Roma students in school	76.3%	23.1%	.6%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
		Between 30 and 50%	Count	132	37	10	1	0	180
			% within Share of Roma students in school	73.3%	20.6%	5.6%	.6%	.0%	100.0%
	Share of Roma students	Between 50 and 75%	Count	70	19	6	0	1	96
			% within Share of Roma students in school	72.9%	19.8%	6.3%	.0%	1.0%	100.0%
		Above 75%	Count	54	14	2	1	1	72
			% within Share of Roma students in school	75.0%	19.4%	2.8%	1.4%	1.4%	100.0%
		Total	Count	465	128	21	3	2	619
			% within Share of Roma students in school	75.1%	20.7%	3.4%	.5%	.3%	100.0%
Roma students	Share of Roma students	Maximum um10%	Count	46	15	6	1	1	69
			% within Share of Roma students in school	66.7%	21.7%	8.7%	1.4%	1.4%	100.0%
		Between 10 and 30%	Count	78	37	5	3	3	126
			% within Share of Roma students in school	61.9%	29.4%	4.0%	2.4%	2.4%	100.0%
		Between 30 and 50%	Count	122	48	14	6	12	202
			% within Share of Roma students in school	60.4%	23.8%	6.9%	3.0%	5.9%	100.0%
		Between 50 and 75%	Count	124	31	17	4	5	181
			% within Share of Roma students in school	68.5%	17.1%	9.4%	2.2%	2.8%	100.0%



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Above 75%	Count	72	17	13	1	3	106
	% within Share of Roma students in school	67.9%	16.0%	12.3%	.9%	2.8%	100.0%
Total	Count	442	148	55	15	24	684
	% within Share of Roma students in school	64.6%	21.6%	8.0%	2.2%	3.5%	100.0%

We tested the relationship between the percentage of Roma students in school and the existence (or lack) of a school counsellor. The data show that schools with a share of Roma children below 10% are more likely to have a school counsellor position - see the table below below. In other words, schools with higher percentage of Roma students are bereft of a school counsellor.

Table 19. Correlation between the share of Roma students and the existence of a school counsellor in the school

Share of Roma students* School counsellor			School counsellor		Total
			There are no school counsellors in the school	There are school counsellors in the school	
Share of Roma students	Maximum 10%	Count	4	9	13
		% within Share of Roma students in school	30.8%	69.2%	100.0%
	Between 10 and 30%	Count	10	12	22
		% within Share of Roma students in school	45.5%	54.5%	100.0%
	Between 30 and 50%	Count	22	5	27
		% within Share of Roma students in school	81.5%	18.5%	100.0%
	Between 50 and 75%	Count	20	2	22
		% within Share of Roma students in school	90.9%	9.1%	100.0%
	Above 75%	Count	10	6	16
		% within Share of Roma students in school	62.5%	37.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	66	34	100
		% within Share of Roma students in school	66.0%	34.0%	100.0%

Schools with a higher percentage of Roma students are, instead, more likely to have Roma teachers. In the table below we can see, for example, that at least 6 of the schools where the percentage of Roma students is above 75% have at least one teacher of Roma origin (62%).

Table 20. Correlation between the share of Roma students and the existence of Roma teachers in the school

Share of Roma students* Roma teachers

			Roma teachers		Total
			There are no Roma teachers in the school	There are Roma teachers in the school	
Share of Roma students	Maximum 10%	Count	11	2	13
		% within Share of Roma students in school	84.6%	15.4%	100.0%
	Between 10 and 30%	Count	19	3	22
		% within Share of Roma students in school	86.4%	13.6%	100.0%
	Between 30 and 50%	Count	18	9	27
		% within Share of Roma students in school	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
	Between 50 and 75%	Count	17	5	22
		% within Share of Roma students in school	77.3%	22.7%	100.0%
	Above 75%	Count	6	10	16
		% within Share of Roma students in school	37.5%	62.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	71	29	100
		% within Share of Roma students in school	71.0%	29.0%	100.0%

The research also facilitated the testing of the relation between the number of Roma students in school and the existing school facilities. The data confirm that there is significant correlation between the percentage of students in the school and the level of institutional equipment with the necessary teaching supplies. A specially designed school welfare index was used; it was created based on headmasters' responses regarding the existence of school facilities such as physics / chemistry laboratories, gyms, computer labs, computers, toilets inside the school, centralised heating. Thus, the higher the percentage of Roma students in school, the fewer the school facilities.

Table 21. Correlation between the share of Roma students and school facilities

Share of Roma students* Index school facilities

			Index school facilities		Total
			Few school facilities	Many school facilities	
Share of Roma students	Maximum 10%	Count	2	10	12
		% within Share of Roma students in school	16.7%	83.3%	100.0%
	Between 10 and 30%	Count	11	9	20
		% within Share of Roma students in school	55.0%	45.0%	100.0%



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Between 30 and 50%	Count	16	11	27
	% within Share of Roma students in school	59.3%	40.7%	100.0%
Between 50 and 75%	Count	14	7	21
	% within Share of Roma students in school	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Above 75%	Count	12	4	16
	% within Share of Roma students in school	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	55	41	96
	% within Share of Roma students in school	57.3%	42.7%	100.0%

The correlation between the share of Roma students in school and the frequency of attendance kindergartens was also tested - see the table below. Data show that there is a higher concentration of students who have attended three years of kindergarten in schools with less than 10% of Roma students; also, in schools where the percentage of Roma students is higher there is also a higher rate of students who attended kindergarten for a maximum period of 1 year.

Table 22. Correlation between the share of Roma students and kindergarten attendance

Share of Roma students* Kindergarten attendance

			Kindergarten attendance				Total
			Never attended	Maximum a year	Two years	Three years	
Share of Roma students	Maximum 10%	Count	25	9	24	108	166
		% within Share of Roma students in school	15.1%	5.4%	14.5%	65.1%	100.0%
	Between 10 and 30%	Count	39	17	99	132	287
		% within Share of Roma students in school	13.6%	5.9%	34.5%	46.0%	100.0%
	Between 30 and 50%	Count	74	64	76	149	363
		% within Share of Roma students in school	20.4%	17.6%	20.9%	41.0%	100.0%
	Between 50 and 75%	Count	39	32	56	127	254
		% within Share of Roma students in school	15.4%	12.6%	22.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	Above 75%	Count	34	19	44	62	159
Total		% within Share of Roma students in school	21.4%	11.9%	27.7%	39.0%	100.0%
	Total	Count	211	141	299	578	1229
		% within Share of Roma students in school	17.2%	11.5%	24.3%	47.0%	100.0%

2. Scholastic situation – absenteeism, academic performance, school integration

Data clearly indicate that there are noteworthy differences in terms of school absenteeism and academic performance among Roma and non-Roma students – the level of academic performance



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(measured by means of average grade in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature over the last semester ended) for the former is considerably lower, while truancy is far more frequent – see the table below. As expected, the group of early school leavers or students with a high risk of leaving school registered the lowest level of academic performance and the highest level of school absenteeism. Almost 1 in 4 non-Roma sampled students have average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature above 8, as compared to only 5% of the Roma students. Practically, none of the early school leavers or those with a high risk of leaving school ever obtained an average grade above 8 in the two subjects. As far as school absenteeism is concerned, the percentage of non-Roma students registering more than 40 unmotivated absences was of only 3.6%, compared to 23.6 % in the case of Roma students (approximately one in four!) and 65.5 % for early school leavers or students with a high risk of leaving school. The huge gap separating the student groups in terms of academic performance and school absenteeism is more than obvious.

Table 23. Correlation between group affiliation and levels of academic performance

Student selection group* Average grade in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature on performance categories

			Average grade in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature on performance categories					Total
			Below 5	Between 5 and 6	Between 6 and 7	Between 7 and 8	Above 8	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	35	125	182	104	152	598
		% within Student selection group	5.9%	20.9%	30.4%	17.4%	25.4%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	112	308	144	61	33	658
		% within Student selection group	17.0%	46.8%	21.9%	9.3%	5.0%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	80	147	21	8	0	256
		% within Student selection group	31.3%	57.4%	8.2%	3.1%	..0%	100.0%
Total	Count	227	580	347	173	185	1512	
	% within Student selection group	15.0%	38.4%	22.9%	11.4%	12.2%	100.0%	

Table 24. Correlation between group affiliation and number of motivated absences

Student selection group* Student categories based on the number of motivated absences

			Student categories based on the number of motivated absences					Total
			No unmotivated absences	Between 1 and 10 absences	Between 11 and 20 absences	Between 21 and 39 absences	40 absences or more	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	178	190	54	35	17	474
		% within Student selection group	37.6%	40.1%	11.4%	7.4%	3.6%	100.0%



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Roma students	Count	85	198	83	70	135	571
	% within Student selection group	14.9%	34.7%	14.5%	12.3%	23.6%	100.0%
Early school leavers	Count	11	18	18	30	146	223
	% within Student selection group	4.9%	8.1%	18.1%	13.5%	65.5%	100.0%
Total	Count	274	406	155	135	298	1268
	% within Student selection group	21.6%	32.0%	12.2%	10.6%	23.5%	100.0%

These data confirm both our expectations and data from other previous reports. However, at this point it is important to highlight the explanatory mechanisms for this situation, since the survey data allowed us to pinpoint the determinant factors for the high rate of absenteeism and academic performance of students. Our interest was to capture the extent to which the effect of ethnicity or group affiliation remains statistically significant in terms of absenteeism level / academic performance despite controlling the well-known effect of certain variables, such as the level of parental education on academic performance. In other words, if in the same category of students defined by their parents' level of education a significant correlation remains between student ethnicity and the level of school absenteeism, then we can conclude that the higher educational capital of non-Roma parents compared to the Roma parents does not explain the situation, and the answer is to be found elsewhere. Within the statistical analysis model we have developed other relevant variables were included according to previous hypotheses and research - such as student residence, family cultural capital (the indicator was the number of books in the household), preschool education, as well as other relevant variables pertaining to school discrimination issue, such as seats assigned in class (among the front or the back rows). The independent variables were categorical variables, hence they were coded as dummy variables.

Essentially we ran two logistic regression models. For the first one we considered academic performance as a dependent variable; we created the academic performance variable based on the average grades obtained by students in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature during the last ended semester prior to the research – these are basic subjects in lower secondary school and considered relevant for further academic education. Basically, we created a new variable from the average of the grades obtained in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature - the arithmetic average of the two - and when there were no data available for one of the subjects, we only considered the average grade for the subject for which we had the data. The newly created variable was recoded into 3 categories: students with an average of less than 6, students with an average between 6 and 7, respectively students with an average of above 7. The decision took into consideration the distribution of the averages within the entire sample, so



as to have relatively equal categories in terms of weigh. For the second model the dependent variable was considered the number of unmotivated absences. In this case a new variable was created: the group of students with 19 unmotivated absences, at most, during the first semester, and, correspondingly, the group of students with more than 20 unmotivated absences.

The results of the two statistical models are shown below. The first one illustrates the relationship between academic performance and the relevant independent variables considered within the analysis.

Table 25. Statistic model for highlighting the significantly correlated variables to academic performance

Parameters estimates

Average of Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature averages divided into 3 performance levels	B	Std.E rror	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)	95% confidence interval for Exp (B)	
							Lower Bound	Upper bound
Between 6 and 7								
Intercept	-	.773	2.680	1	.102			
[lowersecondaryeducationparents=.00]	1.266	.238	.113	1	.737	1.083	.679	1.729
[lowersecondaryeducationparents=1.00]	0 ^b			0				
[vocationaleducationparents=.00]	.106	.253	.175	1	.676	1.112	.676	1.827
[vocationaleducationparents=1.00]	0 ^b			0				
[highschoolhighereducationparents=.00]	-.151	.269	.313	1	.576	.860	.507	1.458
[highschoolhighereducationparents=1.00]	0 ^b			0				
[Romai=.00]	.889	.180	24.490	1	.000	2.432	1.711	3.459
[Roma=1.00]	0 ^b			0				
[pts=.00]	1.912	.294	42.261	1	.000	6.767	3.802	12.043
[pts=1.00]	0 ^b			0				
[rural=.00]	-.022	.159	.019	1	.890	.978	.717	1.335
[rural=1.00]	0 ^b			0				
[lastorpenultimateseat=.00]	.676	.161	17.594	1	.000	1.967	1.434	2.698
[lastorpenultimateseat=1.00]	0 ^b			0				
[kindergartenoneyear=.00]	-.617	.262	5.542	1	.019	.539	.323	.902
[kindergartenoneyear=1.00]	0 ^b			0				
[kindergartentwoyears=.00]	.676	.229	8.727	1	.003	.509	.325	.797
[kindergartentwoyears=1.00]	0 ^b			0				



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	[kindergartenthreeyears =.00]	-.517	.222	5.408	1	.020	.596	.386	.922
	[kindergartenthreeyears =1.00]	0 ^b			0				
	[between11and25booksath ome=.00]	-.253	.207	1.484	1	.223	.777	.517	1.166
	[between11and25booksath ome =1.00]	0 ^b			0				
	[morethan25booksathome =.00]	-.436	.222	3.865	1	.049	.646	.418	.999
	[morethan25booksathome =1.00]	0 ^b			0				
	[likesgoingtoschool=.00]	-	.374	15.478	1	.000	.230	.111	.478
	[likesgoingtoschool =1.00]	1.469 0 ^b			0				
Above 7	Intercept	-	.968	1.913	1	.167			
	[lowersecondaryeducation parents=00]	1.339 -.013	.315	.002	1	.966	.987	.533	1.828
	[lowersecondaryeducation parents=1.00]	0 ^b			0				
	[vocationaleducationparent s=.00]	-.090	.321	.078	1	.780	.914	.488	1.714
	[vocationaleducationparent s =1.00]	0 ^b			0				
	[highschoolhighereducatio nparents=.00]	-.587	.329	3.189	1	.074	.556	.292	1.059
	[highschoolhighereducatio nparents =1.00]	0 ^b			0				
	[Romai=.00]	1.051	.193	29.540	1	.000	2.861	1.958	4.179
	[Roma=1.00]	0 ^b			0				
	[pts=.00]	2.382	.401	35.291	1	.000	10.828	4.934	23.762
	[pts=1.00]	0 ^b			0				
	[rural=.00]	-.164	.171	.922	1	.337	.849	.607	1.186
	[rural=1.00]	0 ^b			0				
	[lastorpenultimateseat=.00]	1.142	.190	36.047	1	.000	3.132	2.158	4.547
	[lastorpenultimateseat =1.00]	0 ^b			0				
	[kindergartenoneyear=.00]	.222	.388	.327	1	.568	1.248	.584	2.670
	[kindergartenoneyear =1.00]	0 ^b			0				
	[kindergartentwoyears =.00]	-.658	.274	5.757	1	.016	.518	.302	.886
	[kindergartentwoyears =1.00]	0 ^b			0				
	[kindergartenthreeyears =.00]	-.971	.257	14.280	1	.000	.379	.229	.627



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[kindergartenthreeyears =1.00]	0 ^b				0				
[between11and25booksath ome=.00]	-.608	.216	7.946	1	.005	.544	.356	.831	
[between11and25booksath ome =1.00]	0 ^b			0					
[morethan25booksathome =.00]	-	.219	32.4444	1	.000	.287	.187	.441	
[morethan25booksathome =1.00]	1.249			0					
[likesgoingtoschool=.00]	0 ^b								
	-	.702	19.834	1	.000	.044	.011	.174	
	3.125								
[likesgoingtoschool =1.00]	0 ^b			0					

a. Reference category: Below 6

b. Parameter set at 0 because of redundancy

Data support our hypothesis, by controlling the effect of the variables parents' educational level, residence, cultural capital of the family (illustrated by the number of books held at home), number of years of preschool education, the extent to which students like to go to school or the seat assigned in the classroom, the group of Roma children exhibit a significantly higher probability to have lower grades than the non-Roma students group. The difference from non-Roma students is even more pronounced in the case of early school leavers or students at high risk of leaving school. For instance, the odds that a Roma student has an average grade below 6 rather than above 7 in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature are **twice higher** compared to a non-Roma pupil, when controlling the effect of the variables included in the model; when comparing early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences with non-Roma students, the odds that the former have an average grade below 6 rather than above 7 in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature are **ten times higher**, when controlling the effect of other variables included the model. This shows, without the shadow of a doubt, that Roma children are less likely to get a quality education and that their profile in terms of academic performance is closer to that of early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences. Our analysis took into account the average grade in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature, but in this case there is a limit of principle that can hide an even bigger difference in the quality of education between Roma / non-Roma students. Still, class obtained grades do not necessarily reflect the cognitive abilities / skills of students to meet the labour market requirements or adapt to real life challenges. Unfortunately the short time and limited resources did not allow us to also test these characteristics – for example the PISA study uses a specific standardized test for assessing students' abilities. Data also indicate other important aspects: students sitting in the back row seats have higher chances of poor academic performance, same as students who do not perceive school as a



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pleasant place to go to. The model also confirmed other expectations outlined in the international specialised literature, namely that academic performance is in close relation with the number of years attending kindergarten and the cultural capital expressed by the number of books in the family. The importance of the parents' education status is only relative in our analysis (after controlling the effect of the other variables included in the model), since it is only the higher education of at least one parent that increases the academic performance of the student compared to a student whose parents have a primary education level, at most. There is no significant difference between students living in rural areas compared to those in urban areas as far as academic performance is concerned - although previous data from Romania confirmed a real difference between the educational opportunities of students coming from the two environments – which could be explained through the different level of teachers' expectations or student mobility (some students living in rural areas and being enrolled in urban schools) .

The second model we have run allowed us to adequately assess whether the level of school absenteeism really differs between the Roma / non-Roma groups of students, by filtering the influence of certain relevant variables. The data confirmed our hypothesis once again, namely that Roma students are twice more likely to cumulate over 20 unmotivated absences compared to non-Roma students; the probability level for the early school leavers' group is 14 times higher, but this is normal, since the group also included students with more than 20 absences. Data also show that students who had attended kindergarten for two or three years were less likely to cumulate more than 20 absences, compared to those who were never enrolled in preschool education; the same pattern applies for students who possess more than 25 books at home, compared to those with less than 10. As expected, students who like to go to school also have a lower level of school absenteeism. However, the research also revealed a surprising aspect: students enrolled in rural schools have a lower probability of cumulating more than 20 unmotivated absences, compared to those in urban schools. The explanation probably lies within the higher level of indulgence of teachers in rural areas. Nevertheless, analysing the relationship without controlling other variables, it proves to be statistically irrelevant.

Table 26. Statistic model pinpointing the main variables correlated with school absenteeism

Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Step 1	lowersecondaryeducationparents	.181	.221	.674	1	.412	1.199
	vocationaleducationparents	.288	.243	1.405	1	.236	1.334
	highschoolhighereducationparents	-.034	.270	.016	1	.900	.967



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Roma	1.146	.208	30.354	1	.000	3.147
pls	2.675	.260	105.868	1	.000	14.509
rural	-.370	.164	5.072	1	.024	.691
lastorpenultimateseat	.289	.160	3.238	1	.072	1.336
kindergartenoneyear	.106	.244	.188	1	.664	1.112
kindergartentwoyears	-.642	.217	8.712	1	.003	.526
kindergartenthreeyears	-.706	.211	11.221	1	.001	.494
between11and25booksathome	-.063	.230	.074	1	.786	.939
over25booksathome	-.489	.253	3.742	1	.053	.613
likesgoingtoschool	-1.237	.270	21.034	1	.000	.290
Constant	-.230	.370	.386	1	.534	.795

a. Variable (s) entered on step1: lowersecondaryeducationparents,vocationaleducationparents,highschoolhighereducationparents, Roma, pls, rural, lastorpenultimateseat, kindergartenoneyear, kindergartentwoyears, kindergartenthreeyears, between11and25booksathome, over25booksathome, likesgoingtoschool.

Another important aspect to be highlighted at this point concerns the students who usually speak Romani at home and who attended kindergarten for a shorter period of time, compared to Romanian or Hungarian speaking children. Ultimately, children who speak another language at home during the preschool period are those who need most to attend kindergartens, in order to mitigate the shock of the 1st school year when they will have to study in a language they are not familiar with. Despite this 1 out of 2 Romani native speaker students (50%) never attended kindergarten; by comparison only 1 in 4 (27.4%) native Hungarian speaker students never attended kindergarten.

In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school? * Kindergarten frequency

			Kindergarten frequency				Total
			Never attended	Maximum one year	Two years	Three years	
In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?	Romanian	Count	178	143	303	554	1178
		% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?	15.1%	12.1%	25.7%	47.0%	100.0%
	Romani	Count	111	43	45	23	222
		% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?	50.0%	19.4%	20.3%	10.4%	100.0%
	Hungarian	Count	29	7	16	54	106
		% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?	27.4%	6.6%	15.1%	50.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	318	193	364	631	1506
		% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?	21.2%	12.8%	24.2%	41.9%	100.0%

The low degree of inclusiveness of the school system (starting from preschooling) is more than obvious and it represents an additional drawback from the very 1st year of school for the Romani native speakers in their scholastic integration process, leaving a mark on their latter educational path. This is also reflected by the level of performance and school absenteeism - see the following tables. Students coming



from families with a mother tongue other than Romanian, that they used as a first language before attending school, tend to record a significantly higher rate of school absenteeism - this is true for both Roma and Hungarian native speaker students.

In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child?* Level of school absenteeism

			Level of school absenteeism		Total
			20 unmotivated absences at most	Above 20 unmotivated absences	
In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?	Romanian	Count	659	300	959
		% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?	68.7%	31.3%	100.0%
	Romani	Count	100	81	181
		% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?	55.2%	44.8%	100.0%
	Hungarian	Count	46	35	81
		% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?	56.8%	43.2%	100.0%
Total	Count	805	416	1221	
	% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?	65.9%	34.1%	100.0%	

In addition, the students speaking a language other than Romanian at home have a significantly higher probability of obtaining average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature under 6 rather than above 7, compared to students who spoke Romanian at home during the preschool period. Although the conclusion expressed above applies both to Romani and Hungarian native speakers, there are more pronounced differences in the case of Roma students. This shows, once again, that the Romanian school system is marked by inequalities originating in the language spoken at home during the preschool period (and thus, the ethnic origin) and it is an indicator of its low degree of educational inclusion.

In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?* Average of Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature averages divided into 3 performance levels

			Average of Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature averages divided into 3 performance levels			Total
			Below 6	Between 6 and 7	Above 7	
In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?	Romanian	Count	546	280	315	1141
		% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?	47.9%	24.5%	27.6%	100.0%



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your child before going to school?	Romani	Count	163	36	17	216
		% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?	75.5%	16.7%	7.9%	100.0%
	Hungarian	Count	61	21	18	100
		% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?	61.0%	21.0%	18.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	770	337	350	1457
		% within In which language did you usually / mostly speak to your child before going to school?	52.8%	23.1%	24.0%	100.0%

An important element is that students usually sitting at the back of the class (in classes with at least three rows of benches) or occupying the penultimate seats (in classes that have at least four rows of benches) are more frequently absent from school compared to the other students. For students who consider school a place where they like to go the tendency to be absent from school is much lower.

Data show that there is a small, statistically insignificant difference between Roma and non-Roma students' answers when interviewed about liking to go to school - the overwhelming majority said they do like to go to school. A noteworthy difference occurs when operating the comparison with the group of early school leavers / students with more than 20 unmotivated absences, as the share of those stating that school is not a place they like going to is significantly greater.

Table 27. Correlation between the degree of liking to go to school and group affiliation

Student selection group What do you think? The school where you study is a place...you like to go to?

			The school where you study is a place...you like to go to?		Total
			Yes	No	
Student selection group	Non-Roma	Count	586	30	616
	students	% within Student selection group	95.1%	4.9%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	645	45	690
		% within Student selection group	93.5%	6.5%	100.0%
	Early school	Count	204	89	293
	leavers	% within Student selection group	69.6%	30.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	1435	164	1599
		% within Student selection group	89.7%	10.3%	100.0%

Preschool education and family cultural capital are explanatory factors for school absenteeism, but they cannot be intervened upon in the case of students enrolled in lower secondary education in order to reduce school drop-out rates. The intervention should focus on those elements that can be changed at the present time. One of the factors that can be changed refers to classroom seating arrangement (the occupied seat). In a previous section we saw that Roma children are more likely to be assigned seats from the back of



the classroom compared to non-Roma students, therefore a manifestation of discrimination is present within the class area. The research also showed that the further away the seats occupied in the classroom, the higher the frequency of absences. Basically, the seat occupied by a student in the classroom also reflects the concern of the teachers for the well-being of the students and indicates the level of school integration. The mentors (assigned to the beneficiaries of this project in which the research was conducted) should be guided in their endeavour to support the students in their school integration process and in focusing teachers' attention towards them. Teachers have several tools and the didactic methodology needed to increase students' interest for school and their level of school integration. However, the prerequisite is that they be convinced that students from vulnerable groups need increased attention, and this is precisely where mentors can successfully intervene.

According to our research students who perceive school a place where they like to go are less prone to absenteeism and the parents' answers support this conclusion - see the following table. Basically, students who do not like to go to school, as stated by parents / guardians, have a higher rate of school absenteeism. The results retain their significance even if the group affiliation of the student is controlled - in other words, the mechanism is viable for both Roma and non-Roma children.

Table 28. Correlation between the way students feel at school and the number of unmotivated absences

How does your child feel at school?* Student categories based on the number of absences

			Student categories based on the number of absences					Total
			No unmotivated absences	Between 1 and 10 absences	Between 11 and 20 absences	Between 21 and 39 absences	40 absences or more	
How does your child feel at school?	He hates to go to school	Count % within How does your child feel at school?	2 8.3%	3 12.5%	5 20.8%	0 .0%	14 58.3%	24 100.0%
	He does not like to go to school	Count % within How does your child feel at school?	6 4.1%	21 14.5%	21 14.5%	25 17.2%	72 49.7%	145 100.0%
	He likes to go to school	Count % within How does your child feel at school?	210 22.7%	319 34.5%	114 12.3%	94 10.2%	188 20.3%	925 100.0%
	He loves to go to school	Count % within How does your child feel at school?	50 41.7%	43 35.8%	9 7.5%	10 8.3%	8 6.7%	120 100.0%
Total			Count 268 % within How does your child feel at school? 22.1%	386 31.8%	149 12.3%	129 10.6%	282 23.2%	1214 100.0%

Another intervention point lies in this synchronous and common sense evidence: the cause for



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school dropout, as suggested during the focus group discussions with parents of early school leavers, is that students just did not feel fine going to school; however, the cause for their inconvenience was not related to the learning aspects, but to the fact of being poor and wearing clothes they were ashamed with (old, torn, patched etc.), thus becoming the target of ridicule of other students. In one of the schools where we conducted a focus group the school management took the initiative to collect clothes for the needy students; this is a partial solution, some parents said that even so their children were ashamed of wearing second hand clothes and that some colleagues occasionally noticed that the clothes used to belong to them.

" - ALL RIGHT, NOW LET'S TALK , YOU CAN INTERVENE NOW... I WANTED TO ASK YOU, DO YOU THINK IT STILL MAKES SENSE, THAT IT MATTERS TO GRADUATE AND TO GO TO SCHOOL NOWADAYS, IS IT STILL IMPORTANT, DOES IT STILL HELP IN LIFE?

- " - Yes, school is good because they learn how to write, how to get by, but he won't come anymore because he comes dirty after looking through garbage, poor devils, out there looking for iron pieces, comes back dirty and the Romanian stay away from they and they are ashamed, so the child leaves and doesn't come back. That's why mine didn't go back.

(...)

- AND THEY DON'T GO TO SCHOOL EITHER?

- No, they don't come no more, one is married, he has a daughter of a year and a half, the other one doesn't come because he is ashamed that he has no pants, nothing to wear. (Focus group in Fetești with Roma parents of early school leavers)"

" - I HAVE A REQUEST, PLEASE LET'S TAKE TURNS IN TALKING SO WE CAN HEAR EACH OTHER, ESPECIALLY WITH THE NOISE ABOVE.

- I mean, my child if he sees a child who is better dressed, wearing sneakers and fashionable jeans and maybe my kid doesn't and he looks at him, saying look at him, how can I go to school when I dont even have shoes to wear? He often came to school wearing my shoes, that's what he had to wear.

- AND BECAUSE HE IS ASHAMED HE DOESN'T WANT TO COME ANYMORE.

- The shame of seeing that the others are well dressed and they are undressed.

- HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED THE SAME SITUATION WITH YOUR CHILDREN? THE SAME FEELING OF NOT FEELING GOOD AT SCHOOL BECAUSE OF THE SHAME?

- I have a boy in the 4th grade that has to wait for the girl to come and borrow the sneakers to come here to school in the 5th grade.

- **THEY WERE EXCHANGING SHOES.**

- *They swap shoes because they have nothing else to wear, but for instance today the girl got home late from school and the boy didn't go to school because he didn't have what to wear and he said mommy I am not going to school today because I have no shoes to wear. (Focus group in Șoldanu, with Roma parents of early school leavers)"*

The quantitative research data confirm that a significantly higher number of Roma students declare to feel ashamed by the clothes they are wearing to school compared to non-Roma students; the difference is even higher when comparing non-Roma students with early school leavers or students with a high risk of leaving school.

Table 29. Correlation between the degree of shame felt by the clothes worn to school and the number of unmotivated absences

Student selection group* How often do you feel, when at school, ...? ashamed by the clothes you are wearing?

			How often do you feel, when at school, ...? ashamed by the clothes you are wearing?					Total
			Very often	Often	Rarely	Very rarely	Never	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	3	5	32	62	514	616
		% within Student selection group	.5%	.8%	5.2%	10.1%	83.4%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	11	27	60	96	493	687
		% within Student selection group	1.6%	3.9%	8.7%	14.0%	71.8%	100.0%
Early school leavers		Count	17	27	45	33	176	298
		% within Student selection group	5.7%	9.1%	15.1%	11.1%	59.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	31	59	137	191	1183	1601
		% within Student selection group	1.9%	3.7%	8.6%	11.9%	73.9%	100.0%

The parents of some Roma teenagers who left school also stated that there were times when, due to insufficient income, they had to send their children to school feeling hungry, without any food packages or money to buy food, and there they would see colleagues with food packages and pocket money with which they could afford to buy food – a situation that generated a strong sense of discomfort that anyone can relate to. The quantitative research data also confirm the fact that the percentage of students who don't normally have food packages is much higher among Roma students or early school leavers - see the table below.

Essentially these data show that all schools (and especially those in which the proportion of students from vulnerable groups is higher) should have a cafeteria and the social protection measures should be directed towards the children and not necessarily their parents. In this context, children from poor families should be entitled to free meals. Except for Romania (and maybe Bulgaria) all the other communist countries of Centre and South-Eastern Europe had such a system. Moreover, those that joined the EU have



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maintained it. Such measure would ensure a greater degree of school inclusiveness and contribute to increase the chances of success in life, regardless of the type of family in which the child was born. We strongly feel that this aspect should become one of the core advocacy goals of Roma organizations.

Table 30. Correlation between the variable “lunchbox at school” and group affiliation

Student selection group* Do you usually carry a lunchbox with you, when going to school?

			Do you usually carry a lunchbox with you, when going to school?		Total
			Yes, I usually do	No, usually I don't	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	353	245	598
		% within Student selection group	59.0%	41.0%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	316	349	665
		% within Student selection group	47.5%	52.5%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	75	214	289
		% within Student selection group	26.0%	74.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	744	808	1552	
	% within Student selection group	47.9%	52.1%	100.0%	

Furthermore, it often happens that Roma children go to school feeling hungry because of lack of food at home: 29.2% of the Roma students have experienced this during the month prior to the interview, as well as 11.5% of the non-Roma students

Table 31. Distribution of students who went to school feeling hungry over the last month and group affiliation

Student selection group* Has it happened over the past month to go to school without eating/hungry because you had nothing to eat at home?

			Has it happened over the past month to go to school without eating/hungry because you had nothing to eat at home?			Total
			Yes, it happened at least once	Yes, it happened at least several times	It never happened	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	41	28	533	602
		% within Student selection group	6.8%	4.7%	88.5%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	97	102	483	682
		% within Student selection group	14.2%	15.0%	70.8%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	42	95	161	298
		% within Student selection group	14.1%	31.9%	54.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	180	225	1177	1582	
	% within Student selection group	11.4%	14.2%	74.4%	100.0%	

Although the governmental program "Roll and milk" is still running in schools, it doesn't work – at least in rural areas - as a lever for compensation in this case. According to the data drawn from the focus groups conducted and the discussions held with school representatives, the food provided in the program usually arrives or is being distributed at the end of the school day and not in the first part of the day, or sometimes it arrives every three days. Granting scholarships to students from vulnerable groups helps

solving these issues, but only up to a certain extent. It is equally important that teachers intervene in the symbolic universe for the psychological comfort of children from vulnerable groups or that these students be given the necessary counselling.

Data also show that Roma students and early school leavers / students with more than 20 unmotivated absences have a higher tendency to consider school as a place where they feel marginalized, aggrieved.

Table 32. Correlation between the degree of school marginalisation experienced by students and group affiliation

Student selection group* What do you think? Is the school where you are studying a place where you feel... marginalized / aggrieved ?

			What do you think? Is the school where you are studying a place where you feel... marginalized / aggrieved ?		Total
			Yes	No	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	78	526	604
		% within Student selection group	12.9%	87.1%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	121	557	678
		% within Student selection group	17.8%	82.2%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	81	205	286
		% within Student selection group	28.3%	71.7%	100.0%
Total	Count	280	1288	1568	
	% within Student selection group	17.9%	82.1%	100.0%	

The mentoring activity within the project should also focus on the level of comfort experienced by the student in the classroom, the degree to which he / she feels accepted and treated as an equal, the relationships with the classmates. The responses provided by the interviewed parents also suggest that ethnicity based differential treatment is a problem that manifests itself in Romanian schools.

Table 33. Correlation between parents' perception about school discriminatory treatment and group affiliation

Student selection group* Schoolmates' discrimination a school problem

			Schoolmates' discrimination a school problem		Total
			Schoolmates' discrimination against Roma is not a major school concern	Schoolmates' discrimination against Roma is a major school concern	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	545	24	569
		% within Student selection group	95.8%	4.2%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	534	77	611
		% within Student selection group	87.4%	12.6%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	226	30	256
		% within Student selection group	88.3%	11.7%	100.0%



Total	Count	1305	131	1436
	% within Student selection group	90.9%	9.1%	100.0%

Table 34. Correlation between parents' perception regarding the support granted to students from vulnerable groups in schools and group affiliation

Student selection group* Insufficient support for disadvantaged children school problem

			Insufficient support for disadvantaged children school problem		Total
			Insufficient support for disadvantaged children is not a major school concern	Insufficient support for disadvantaged children is a major school concern	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	495	74	569
		% within Student selection group	87.0%	13.0%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	445	167	612
		% within Student selection group	72.7%	27.3%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	170	86	256
		% within Student selection group	66.4%	33.6%	100.0%
Total	Count	1110	327	1437	
	% within Student selection group	77.2%	22.8%	100.0%	

About one in ten (9.1%) interviewed parents / guardians indicated that one of the main problems of the school where their child is enrolled is the "discriminatory behaviour against Roma children / other minorities manifested by schoolmates", and approximately one in four (22.8%) indicated instead "the insufficient support for disadvantaged children". These impressions are prevalent among parents / guardians of Roma students, early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences. It is an alarming issue that needs to be taken into consideration by the policy-makers in the education field. Therefore, we strongly recommend that the mentors activating within the project strive to fight the classroom discrimination of the students the project focused on - both from their class- and schoolmates, as well as teachers - and to receive additional support for preventing ESL (school support, counselling etc.).

The results support the need to stimulate parental involvement, possibly with the help of a mentor that could mediate the entire process. The focus group data show that Roma parents deem school attendance to be useful for the students (at least the completion of lower secondary education) and always attended the parent-teacher conferences when invited to participate. But the problem is their low parental capacity to adequately support their children along the school maze (originating in the lower level of educational capital, poverty etc.). The discussions also revealed that teachers show scarce diplomatic skills in relating to parents of children from vulnerable groups. Under the circumstances, the process of stimulating parental school involvement should be accompanied by parental counselling in order to improve their relationship with both the student and the school representatives.



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"- I WANTED TO ASK YOU SOMETHING, BACK WHEN YOUR CHILDREN USED TO GO TO SCHOOL, DID YOU USE TO GO TO SCHOOL AND SEE HOW THEY WERE DOING, DID TEACHERS CALL YOU IN FOR PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES?

- Obviously! They used to call us for these meetings.

- AND WERE YOU GOING?

- I did go even for the little one, they said that I should teach him, take his hand and write with him. Well then why are you the teacher, if not to teach him and take his hand and guide, to tell him and show him how to write.

- THIS IS WHAT THE TEACHER ASKED YOU TO DO?

- Yeah, well I'll be doing the teaching, then, I said.

- I mean how can we teach them since we have no education?

- PLEASE, LET'S TALK ABOUT HOW YOU GOT ALONG WITH THE TEACHERS WHEN YOU WENT TO SCHOOL! HOW DID YOU FEEL, WERE YOU TREATED WITH RESPECT?

- I was asking about how the child studies, what he does, they would tell us about what was going on in the classroom.

- AND HOW WERE THE TEACHERS TREATING YOU?

- He was also telling me about how he's doing with his studies.

- I mean it depends, it would have been better to teach the child, but if I don't have any education, what could I possibly teach him?

- How could I have helped the boy, if I don't know anything?

- We haven't learnt anything, so I couldn't have possibly helped him. We have not learned the book and I could not help him . " (Focus group in Fetești with Roma parents of early school leavers).

- FINE. LET'S TALK ABOUT EACH OF THESE SUBJECTS IN MORE DETAILS. FIRST OF ALL I WOULD ASK YOU HOW RELEVANT DO YOU THINK SCHOOL IS NOWADAYS, GENERALLY SPEAKING I MEAN, DO YOU THINK IT STILL HELPS IN LIFE?

- It helps.

- BUT DOES IT HELP CHILDREN, DOES IT SERVE THEM?

- It helps when it helps, sometimes it doesn't, but at least it gave us a bottle of milk and the roll.

- I UNDERSTAND, BUT I AM ASKING YOU IF THE EDUCATION, THEIR EDUCATION, WOULD BE IMPORTANT IN LIFE, WOULD IT BE HELPFUL?



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- It's important, of course IT would help, it opens up their minds, they could find a job if parents could afford to support them, but when they don't have anything....
- HOW MANY GRADES DO YOU THINK ARE REQUIRED TO GET BY IN LIFE? HOW MANY GRADES THEY SHOULD ATTEND?
- About 8 years should do it, if we can afford it, but if we don't have the conditions what can we do, but keep them at home.
- BUT IF YOU HAD THE CONDITIONS HOW MANY GRADES WOULD THERE BE? AROUND 8, RIGHT?
- Maybe 8 grades, yeah.
- Even more, not just 8.
- SO YOU SAY MORE, YOU MEAN MORE THAN 8 GRADES?
- More, but with the proper conditions.
- The 8 grades would be just as good, to teach them to know this and that.
- Well, for instance, how are we to send them to Oltenița for the 9th grade since we don't actually have the means.
- AND HOW COULD EDUCATION HELP YOUR CHILDREN, IN WHAT WAY? WHAT FOR?
- To get a job or something, they could get by with 8 grades of education." (Focus Group in Soldanu with Roma parents of early school leavers)

Parents of students from vulnerable groups (Roma students, early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences) are less likely to characterize their relationship with the teachers as a positive one, compared to the non-Roma parents - see the table below. Thus, nearly one in two (45.5%) non-Roma parents considers to have a very good / excellent relationship with the teachers, while only one in three (29.5%) Roma parents, respectively one in five (19.9%) parents of early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences expressed the same opinion. A very relevant aspect is that a significantly high proportion of parents of Roma students or early school leavers stated that there is no relationship between them and the teachers / school staff: 7% of non-Roma parents, 10% of Roma parents and 18.1% of parents of early school leavers / students who have more than 20 unmotivated absences.



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Table 35. Correlation between group affiliation and the quality of the relationship between parents / guardians and teachers

Student selection group* How would you characterize the relation / way you get along with the teachers from your child's school?

			How would you characterize the relation / way you get along with the teachers from your child's school?					
							I cannot say, I have no relation with the school teacher / personnel	
			Very bad	Rather bad	Rather good	Very good, excellent		Total
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	3	8	266	266	41	584
		% within Student selection group	.5%	1.4%	45.5%	45.5%	7.0%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	2	25	371	194	66	658
		% within Student selection group	.3%	3.8%	56.4%	29.5%	10.0%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	1	24	147	55	50	277
		% within Student selection group	.4%	8.7%	53.1%	19.9%	18.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	6	57	754	515	157	1519
		% within Student selection group	.4%	3.8%	51.6%	33.9%	10.3%	100.0%

The quality of the relationship between parents / guardians and teachers is positively correlated with the number of unmotivated absences recorded by the student- see the table below. Thus, students whose parents have a very good or excellent relationship with their teachers, rather than a bad one or even no relationship at all, have very few unmotivated absences. The correlation is valid both for the Roma and non-Roma groups of students.

Table 36. Correlation between school absenteeism and the quality of the relationship between parents / guardians and teachers

How would you characterize the relation / way you get along with the teachers from your child's school? * Student categories based on the number of unmotivated absences

			Student categories based on the number of unmotivated absences					Total
			No unmotivated absences	Between 1 and 10 absences	Between 11 and 20 absences	Between 21 and 39 absences	40 absences or more	
How would you characterize the relation / way you get along with the teachers from your child's school?	Very bad	Count	1	1	0	2	2	6
		% within How would you characterize the relation / way you get along with the teachers from your child's school?	16.7%	16.7%	.0%	33.3%	33.3%	100.0%
	Rather bad	Count	6	5	2	12	20	45
		% within How would you characterize the relation / way you get along with the teachers from your child's school?	13.3%	11.1%	4.4%	26.7%	44.4%	100.0%



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Rather good	Count	123	188	86	68	166	631
	% within How would you characterize the relation / way you get along with the teachers from your child's school?	19.5%	29.8%	13.6%	10.8%	26.3%	100.0%
Very good / Excellent	Count	119	149	39	35	43	385
	% within How would you characterize the relation / way you get along with the teachers from your child's school?	30.9%	38.7%	10.1%	9.1%	11.2%	100.0%
I cannot say, I have no relation with the school teacher / personnel	Count	16	31	21	11	42	121
	% within How would you characterize the relation / way you get along with the teachers from your child's school?	13.2%	25.6%	17.4%	9.1%	34.7%	100.0%
Total	Count	265	374	148	128	273	1188
	% within How would you characterize the relation / way you get along with the teachers from your child's school?	22.3%	31.5%	12.5%	10.8%	23.0%	100.0%

The effect of the quality of the relationship between parents and teachers on the school absenteeism rate continues to manifest itself even after controlling the effect of other relevant variables (parental education level, residence, years of attending kindergarten etc.) - see the logistic regression model presented below. In light of this evidence, the intervention program (mainly the mentoring part) should also focus on stimulating parental involvement in the child's education (informing them on the school situation of the student, facilitating their relationships with the teachers etc.) and filling in, as much as possible, the parental support when it is missing.

Table 37. Statistical model to highlight the significant effect of the quality of the relationship between parents / teachers on school absenteeism

		B	S. E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	lowersecondaryeducationparents	.116	.231	.253	1	.615	1.123
	vocationaleducationparents	.249	.253	.971	1	.324	1.283
	highschoolhighereducationparents	-.065	.288	.052	1	.820	.937
	Roma	1.193	.218	29.956	1	.000	3.298
	pls	2.765	.273	102.390	1	.000	15.881
	rural	-.357	.172	4.285	1	.038	.700
	lastorpenultimateseat	.167	.169	.974	1	.324	1.182
	kindergartenoneyear	.117	.255	.209	1	.647	1.124
	kindergartentwoyears	-.683	.234	8.551	1	.003	.505
	kindergartenthreeyears	-.688	.223	9.495	1	.002	.502
	between1land25booksathome	-.025	.242	.010	1	.919	.976
	over25booksathome	-.500	.267	3.504	1	.061	.606
	likesgoingtoschool	-.966	.278	12.089	1	.001	.381
	parentteacherrelationneitherbadorinexistent	.728	.260	7.852	1	.005	2.072
	parentteacherrelationgood	.419	.187	5.030	1	.025	1.521
	Constant	-.796	.419	3.609	1	.057	.451

a. Variable (s) entered at Step 1: lowersecondaryeducationparents, vocationaleducationparents,



highschool/highereducationparents, Roma, pls, rural, lastorpenultimate/seat, kindergarten/oneyear, kindergarten/twoyears, kindergarten/threeyears, between11and25booksathome, over25booksathome, likesgoingtoschool, parentteacherrelationeitherbadorinexistent, parentteacherrelationgood.

The opportunity of stimulating parental involvement is supported by the data showing that parents of Roma students / early school leavers are rarely invited to school compared to parents / guardians of non-Roma students.

Table 38. Correlation between the frequency with which parents are invited to school and group affiliation

Student selection group * How often were you or someone from your household have been invited to school over the past year to discuss the student's academic performance?

			How often were you or someone from your household have been invited to school over the past year to discuss the student's academic performance?						Total
			At least once a week	Monthly or more often	At least every 3 months or more often	At least every 6 months or more often	At least once a year or more often	Never	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	20	217	244	54	27	29	591
		% within Student selection group	3.4%	36.7%	41.3%	9.1%	4.6%	4.9%	100%
	Roma students	Count	16	193	225	78	41	46	599
		% within Student selection group	2.7%	32.2%	37.6%	13.0%	6.8%	7.7%	100%
	Early school leavers	Count	9	82	94	38	26	26	275
		% within Student selection group	3.3%	29.8%	34.2%	13.8%	9.5%	9.5%	100%
Total		Count	45	492	563	170	94	101	1465
		% within Student selection group	3.1%	33.6%	38.4%	11.6%	6.4%	6.9%	100%

The three groups of students targeted by the project seem to have different perceptions as to the value of education – see the table below; however, no hasty conclusions should be drawn in terms of judging the students, since life choices, aspirations and values during adolescence are influenced by family, school, community / friends / acquaintances and media through the social models promoted. Students' perception regarding social equity, that is to say their confidence that they can succeed in life just like others from more or less favourable environments, and the educational opportunities or the lack of it, basically the structural factors in general, are also very important. This is precisely what the data indicated so far is highlighting, namely that the Romanian education system is very little inclusive in relation to Roma students; the latter feel that their teacher do not relate to them, they feel less integrated into the school environment as compared to other students. The results of the study clearly indicate that education is mostly valued among non-Roma students, as 47.5% of them consider it to be the most important thing in order to



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succeed in life. Only 37.1% of Roma students and 12.1% of early school leavers or students with a high risk of abandoning school feel the same way.

Table 39. Correlation between group affiliation and students according to their opinion about the most important thing in life to succeed

			Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?						Total
			To be lucky	To have money	To have connections	To be educated	To know how to get by	To believe in yourself	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count % within Student selection group	47 7.9%	37 6.2%	13 2.2%	284 47.5%	126 21.1%	91 15.2%	598 100.0%
	Roma students	Count % within Student selection group	99 15.4%	64 9.9%	21 3.3%	239 37.1%	122 18.9%	99 15.4%	644 100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count % within Student selection group	63 22.5%	52 18.6%	6 2.1%	34 12.1%	79 28.2%	46 16.4%	280 100.0%
Total			209 13.7%	153 10.1%	40 2.6%	557 36.6%	327 21.5%	236 15.5%	1522 100.0%

Student selection group * Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?

According to the interviewed students the most important alternative to education is "knowing to get by" in order to succeed in life. Of course the statement may have different meanings, depending on the student, but the very existence of such an attitude putting education on the second place at the expense of something else it more than relevant. A corollary of this would be that according to these students one can do just fine without having an education; 28.2% of the early school leavers or students with a high risk of dropping out have indicated that "knowing to get by" is the most important thing to succeed in life. As far as they are concerned it may very well be a case of sour grapes. However, it is noteworthy that this feature is prevalent among this group of students. Another factor considered to be the most important ingredient for success in life is luck, a manifestation of an attitude that favours hazard over control. "To be lucky " is by far the most important factor for success in life according to 22.5% early school leavers or students with a high risk of dropping out, 15.4% Roma students and 7.9% of non-Roma students.



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Table 40. Correlation between students' opinion on things that help to succeed in life and absenteeism rate

Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?* Student level of school absenteeism

			Student level of school absenteeism		Total
			20 unmotivated absences at most	Above 20 unmotivated absences	
Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?	Count	Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?	91	81	172
	% within	Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?	52.9%	47.1%	100.0%
	To be lucky				
	Count	Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?	68	54	22
	% within	Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?	55.7%	44.3%	100.0%
	To have money				
To have connections	Count	Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?	19	11	30
	% within	Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?	63.3%	36.7%	100.0%
To be educated	Count	Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?	329	94	423
	% within	Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?	77.8%	22.2%	100.0%
To know how to get by	Count	Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?	168	102	270
	% within	Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?	62.2%	37.8%	100.0%
To believe in yourself	Count	Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?	122	61	183
	% within	Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?	797	403	1200
	% within	Which of the following do you think is the most important in order to succeed in life?	66.4%	33.6%	100.0%

There is a certain irony to the fact that this belief is also the one closer to the truth of Romanian realities, as also revealed by our data, namely that the "luck" of being born in a family with high potential for support during the education process is the primary determinant for academic performance and increased chances for success in life. These results also indicate that Roma children have lower self-confidence than the non-Roma in avoiding ESL and achieving academic performances. As long as one has a strong negatively stigmatized identity, the level of belief in own strengths and the confidence of succeeding in life are quite low. This is a possible intervention area for the mentors, a reassessment of education, ethnic identity and its role could be useful for these children. The issue is reinforced by data demonstrating that children valuing education have a lower rate of school dropout: 77.8% of students who consider education



as a primary factor of success in life have 20 unmotivated absences at most, compared to 52.9% among those valuing luck above any other factors.

School integration is also stimulated by student involvement in extracurricular activities that can bring him / her closer to teachers and classmates, develop his / her skills of relating to others and take him / her out of marginalization and isolation, if he / she is facing such experiences. In this regard the research also considered the extent to which students from vulnerable groups (Roma students, early school leavers or students with over 20 unmotivated absences) participate in such extracurricular activities compared to non-Roma students. Data indicate, without the shadow of a doubt, the existing gap between Roma and non-Roma students. The share of non-Roma students participating in extracurricular activities such as excursions, hikes or camping is significantly higher; 64.1% of them have participated at least once in 2010 (the year prior to the research) in such activities with the teacher. By comparison, only 48.8% Roma students have. About one in ten non-Roma students (9%) was involved at least once every 3 months in such activities, compared to only 1.9% of Roma students. The differences are even more striking when comparing non-Roma students and early school leavers or students with absences over 20: 67.9% of the latter did not participate at all in such extracurricular activities. The differences were similar the extracurricular activity was defined as a visit to the museum - see the tables below.

Table 41. Correlation between the degree of participation in extracurricular activities and group affiliation

Student selection group* In 2010, how often...? did you go on a trip, backpacking, camp with one of your teachers?

			In 2010, how often...? did you go on a trip, backpacking, camp with one of your teachers?					Total
			Monthly	Once every 3 months	Once every six months	Once a year or less	Never	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	9	46	65	275	221	616
		% within Student selection group	1.5%	7.5%	10.5%	44.6%	35.9%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	2	11	50	272	352	687
		% within Student selection group	3%	1.6%	7.3%	39.6%	51.2%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	2	7	16	70	201	296
		% within Student selection group	7%	2.4%	5.4%	23.6%	67.9%	100.0%
Total	Count	13	64	131	617	774	1599	
	% within Student selection group	8%	4.0%	8.2%	38.6%	48.4%	100.0%	

Student selection group* In 2010, how often...? did you visit a museum with one of your teachers?

			In 2010, how often...? did you visit a museum with one of your teachers?					Total
			Monthly	Once every 3 months	Once every six months	Once a year or less	Never	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	8	51	72	243	242	616
		% within Student selection group	1.3%	8.3%	11.7%	39.4%	39.3%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	6	7	42	243	389	687
		% within Student selection group	9%	1.0%	6.1%	35.4%	56.6%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	1	9	10	63	212	295
		% within Student selection group	3%	3.1%	3.4%	21.4%	71.9%	100.0%
Total	Count	15	67	124	549	843	1598	
	% within Student selection group	9%	4.2%	7.8%	34.4%	52.8%	100.0%	

In a certain way these results reflect another effect of school segregation due to the lack of resources. The explanation for the lower level of participation of Roma children in such extracurricular activity is most likely the insufficient family income (more severe among Roma families), since any participation in such activities requires a certain financial expense. This represents an additional argument for intervention in the education of Roma children in the form of material support. At the same time, it is a topic of reflection for the school management of such activities, since it is also the school / teachers' duty to seek solutions to integrate students without financial possibilities in extracurricular activities.

The school differential treatment of students based on ethnicity is also reflected in the way Roma children feel at school, compared to non-Roma students. Thus, a significantly higher proportion of Roma students feel marginalized / isolated at school: 6.1% of Roma children experience this feeling very often or often, compared to only 3.2% non-Roma students. Eight out of ten non-Roma students never experienced this feeling (80.1%), while the percentage of Roma students is 73%. The situation is more dramatic among early school leavers or students who skipped school more than 20 times: one in ten adolescents in this group (12.8%) feels marginalized / isolated very often or often, and only 55.6% say they do not feel that at all.

Table 42. Correlation between the extent to which students feel marginalized / isolated at school and group affiliation

Student selection group* How often do you feel...? marginalized / isolated at school?

			How often do you feel...? marginalized / isolated at school?					Total
			Very often	Often	Rarely	Very rarely	Never	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	5	15	44	59	494	617
		% within Student selection group	.8%	2.4%	7.1%	9.6%	80.1%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	17	25	61	82	500	685
		% within Student selection group	2.5%	3.6%	8.9%	12.0%	73.0%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	10	28	55	39	165	297
		% within Student selection group	3.4%	9.4%	18.5%	13.1%	55.6%	100.0%



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Total	Count	32	68	160	180	1159	1599
	% within Student selection group	2.0%	4.3%	10.0%	11.3%	72.5%	100.0%

The poor financial situation of Roma families also leaves its mark on the degree of school integration and how students perceive school, as an attractive environment, where they like to go. Roma children feel greater shame because of the clothes they are wearing to school than non-Roma students - see the table below. Thus, one out of twenty Roma students (5.5%) very often or often feels ashamed of the clothes they have to wear, compared to only 1.3% non-Roma students. Eight out of ten non-Roma students do not experience this condition at all (83.4%), while only seven out of ten Roma students are in this situation (71.8%). The situation of early school leavers or students with many absences is definitely worse from this point of view, whether compared to Roma or non-Roma students: every seventh student (14.7 %) in this category often or very often feels ashamed of his clothes and just six out of ten students are not familiar with this feeling. The qualitative research data (the focus groups with Roma parents of early school leavers) showed that the shame caused by the poor clothes worn at school is an important mechanism that makes students not to want to go to school - some parents even said that the standardized system of uniforms used during communism was better, as children did not feel the differences caused by the quality of the clothes they were wearing. There are Roma students that have to wait for their siblings to come home from school so as to have clothes / shoes to wear to school. Sociologically speaking clothes are a status indicator, a matter with high impact on a person's self-esteem. The unpleasant situation and discomfort felt by Roma students due to their poor clothes is easily understandable. This matter can be controlled by providing material support, but also by teacher's intervention in redefining the symbolic universe between students and changing their normative perspective on clothes assessment – the student wearing quality clothing has no merit to it, it is a matter of gambling, since only the clothes worn at maturity can reflect the merit of the person wearing them. An example of good practice was shown previously, when mentioning the case of a school where clothing and supplies were collected and distributed to disadvantaged students.

Table 43. Correlation between the degree of shame felt by students because of the clothes they wear to school and group affiliation

Student selection group* How often do you feel...? ashamed with the clothes you wear at school?

			How often do you feel...? ashamed with the clothes you wear at school?					Total
			Very often	Often	Rarely	Very rarely	Never	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count % within Student selection group	3 /5%	5 .8%	32 5.2%	62 10.1%	514 83.4%	616 100.0%

Roma students	Count	11	27	60	96	493	687
	% within Student selection group	1.6%	3.9%	8.7%	14.0%	71.8%	100.0%
Early school leavers	Count	17	27	45	33	176	298
	% within Student selection group	5.7%	9.1%	15.1%	11.1%	59.1%	100.0%
Total	Count	31	59	137	191	1183	1601
	% within Student selection group	1.9%	3.7%	8.6%	11.9%	73.9%	100.0%

Student school integration is also demonstrated by the degree to which he / she feels understood by teachers and classmates. Data show that there are some differences between Roma and non-Roma in this respect: 57.4% of non-Roma students do not feel misunderstood by their teachers and neither do 50.5% of Roma students; the differences between Roma students non-Roma in terms of feeling misunderstood by their peers are rather insignificant - see the following tables. The striking difference can be noticed when comparing the group of early school leavers and students with more than 20 absences with the others: every sixth early school leaver (17.5%) often or very often felt misunderstood by the teacher, compared to only 6% of non-Roma students.

Table 44. Correlation between the degree to which students feel understood by teachers / peers and group affiliation

Student selection group* How often do you feel...? misunderstood by the teachers

			How often do you feel...? misunderstood by the teachers					Total
			Very often	Often	Rarely	Very rarely	Never	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	8	29	83	142	353	615
		% within Student selection group	1.3%	4.7%	13.5%	23.1%	57.4%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	17	46	104	173	347	687
		% within Student selection group	2.5%	6.7%	15.1%	25.2%	50.5%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	12	39	64	66	110	291
		% within Student selection group	4.1%	13.4%	22.0%	22.7%	37.8%	100.0%
Total		Count	37	114	251	381	810	1593
		% within Student selection group	2.3%	7.2%	15.8%	23.9%	50.8%	100.0%

Student selection group* How often do you feel...? misunderstood by the schoolmates

			How often do you feel...? misunderstood by the schoolmates					Total
			Very often	Often	Rarely	Very rarely	Never	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	9	32	63	139	376	619
		% within Student selection group	1.5%	5.2%	10.2%	22.5%	60.7%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	21	48	82	139	399	689
		% within Student selection group	3.0%	7.0%	11.9%	20.2%	57.9%	100.0%



Early school leavers	Count	8	23	59	53	146	289
	% within Student selection group	2.8%	8.0%	20.4%	18.3%	50.5%	100.0%
Total	Count	38	103	204	331	921	1597
	% within Student selection group	2.4%	6.4%	12.8%	20.7%	57.7%	100.0%

The study also assessed the degree to which students develop general knowledge by reading other books except for textbooks. This type of activity is considered as a prerequisite for easier social integration for future and social success. The results unequivocally show a major difference from this point of view between the groups of Roma and non-Roma students - see the table below. Thus, nearly one in two non-Roma students (45.5%) reads, at least a few times a week, other books than textbooks; the percentage of Roma students with the same positive behaviour is of only 22.7%. About one in ten non-Roma students (9.9%) never does further reading, compared to one in four Roma children (26.2%). The worse situation is that of early school leavers, as almost half of them never read books outside the school textbooks. A detailed analysis also shows that students who rarely or never read anything other than textbooks also present a higher risk of having more than 20 unmotivated absences and leaving school. Under the circumstances, we recommend to compensate this gap resorting to the mentoring activity that could stimulate the student to practice further reading outside the curriculum. Also, school libraries should be established in all schools.

Table 45. Correlation between the frequency with which students read other books outside textbooks and group affiliation

Student selection group* How often do you read...? books other than textbooks?

			How often do you read....? books other than textbooks?					Total
			Daily or almost daily	Several times a week	Several times a month	Once a month or less	Never	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	59	215	149	122	60	605
		% within Student selection group	9.8%	35.5%	24.6%	20.2%	9.9%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	32	124	152	199	180	687
		% within Student selection group	4.7%	18.0%	22.1%	29.0%	26.2%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	13	39	46	59	139	296
		% within Student selection group	4.4%	13.2%	15.5%	19.9%	47.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	104	378	347	380	379	1588
		% within Student selection group	6.5%	23.8%	21.9%	23.9%	23.9%	100.0%

Table 46. Statistical model characterizing the relationship between the habit of reading something other than textbooks and school absenteeism

	B	S. E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a						
lowersecondaryeducationparents	.203	.225	.809	1	.368	1.225
vocationaleducationparents	.340	.249	1.862	1	.172	1.404
highschoolhighereducationparents	.007	.275	.001	1	.980	1.007
Roma	1.077	.211	26.109	1	.000	2.936
pls	2.642	.264	100.434	1	.000	14.045
rural	-.419	.167	6.318	1	.012	.658
lastorpenultimateseat	.189	.164	1.326	1	.250	1.208
kindergartenoneyear	.159	.247	.411	1	.522	1.172
kindergartentwoyears	-.638	.221	8.371	1	.004	.528
kindergartenthreeyears	-.691	.215	10.383	1	.001	.501
between11and25booksathome	-.021	.233	.008	1	.927	.979
over25booksathome	-.490	.255	3.704	1	.054	.613
likesgoingtoschool	-1.023	.276	13.754	1	.000	.360
readingsseveraltimesamonth	.130	.222	.344	1	.558	1.139
readingsonceamonthorless	.381	.220	3.013	1	.083	1.464
readingsnever	.733	.224	10.763	1	.001	2.082
Constant	-.674	.405	2.772	1	.096	.510

a.Variable (s) entered on Step 1: a.Variable (s) entered at Step 1: lowersecondaryeducationparents, vocationaleducationparents, highschoolhighereducationparents, Roma, pls, rural, lastorpenultimateseat, kindergartenoneyear, kindergartentwoyears, kindergartenthreeyears, between11and25booksathome, over25booksathome, likesgoingtoschool, readingsseveraltimesamonth, readingsonceamonthorless, readingsnever.

The research also tried to assess the degree to which students have studied Romani at school. Data show that the Romani language was studied at school by nearly one in four Roma children (22.6%), 6.2% of non-Roma students and 17.5% of early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences - see the table below.

Table 47. Share of students who studied Romani among each of the target groups

Student selection group* During the previous year did you study Romani in school?

			During the previous year did you study Romani in school?		Total
			YES	NO	
Student selection group	Non-Roma	Count	38	577	615
	students	% within Student selection group	6.2%	93.8%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	156	534	690
		% within Student selection group	22.6%	77.4%	100.0%
Early school leavers	Count		52	245	297
	% within Student selection group		17.5%	82.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	246	1356	1602



% within Student selection group	15.4%	84.6%	100.0%
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At this point the question of whether studying Romani in school correlates with academic performance, level of school attendance and degree of school integration arises. More specifically the question is whether there are any differences between Roma students studying Romani in school and those who have not studied it.

The analysis revealed that there is only one relatively significant correlation between school performance (expressed by the average grade obtained in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature) and the study of Romani - see the table below. According to data students who studied Romani were less likely to have an average grade below 5 rather than between 5 and 6, compared to those who have not studied it and who are more likely to obtain average grades between 5 and 6, rather than above 8.

Did you study Romani during the previous year?* Average of Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature averages divided into 3 performance levels

			Average of Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature averages divided into 3 performance levels					Total
			Below 5	Between 5 and 6	Between 6 and 7	Between 7 and 8	Above 8	
Did you study Romani during the previous year?	YES	Count	18	85	25	17	3	148
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	12.2%	57.4%	16.9%	11.5%	2.0%	100.0%
	NO	Count	92	221	116	43	30	502
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	18.3%	44.0%	23.1%	8.6%	6.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	110	306	141	60	33	650
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	16.9%	47.1%	21.7%	21.7%	5.1%	100.0%

As far as school absenteeism is concerned data show that there is no significant relationship with studying Romani. In other words, it seems that the rate of absenteeism is in no way influenced by the study of Romani language - see the table below.

Did you study Romani during the previous year?* Student level of absenteeism

			Student level of absenteeism		Total
			20 unmotivated absences at most	Above 20 unmotivated absences	
Did you study Romani during the previous year?	YES	Count	86	47	133
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	64.7%	35.3%	100.0%
	NO	Count	275	158	433
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	63.5%	36.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	361	205	566
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	63.8%	36.2%	100.0%



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According to our data there is no connection between studying Romani and the quality of the relationship with classmates and teachers - see the following tables. Also, the study of Romani does not influence the degree to which students feel they enjoy going to school

Did you study Romani during the previous year?* How often do you feel...? misunderstood by schoolmates?

			How often do you feel...? misunderstood by schoolmates?					Total
			Very often	Often	Rarely	Very rarely	Never	
Did you study Romani during the previous year?	YES	Count	6	12	17	26	93	154
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	3.9%	7.8%	11.0%	16.9%	60.4%	100.0%
	NO	Count	14	35	66	111	304	530
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	2.6%	6.6%	12.5%	20.9%	57.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	20	47	83	137	397	684
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	2.9%	6.9%	12.1%	20.0%	58.0%	100.0%

Did you study Romani during the previous year?* How often do you feel...? misunderstood by teachers?

			How often do you feel...? misunderstood by teachers?					Total
			Very often	Often	Rarely	Very rarely	Never	
Did you study Romani during the previous year?	YES	Count	6	13	21	31	86	157
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	3.8%	8.3%	13.4%	19.7%	54.8%	100.0%
	NO	Count	11	33	83	140	258	525
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	2.1%	6.3%	15.8%	26.7%	49.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	17	46	104	171	344	682
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	2.5%	6.7%	15.2%	25.1%	50.4%	100.0%

Did you study Romani during the previous year?* What do you think? Is your school a place where ...you make friends?

			What do you think? Is your school a place where ...you make friends?		Total
			Yes	No	
Did you study Romani during the previous year?	YES	Count	146	6	152
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	96.1%	3.9%	100.0%
	NO	Count	501	23	524
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	95.6%	4.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	647	29	676
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	95.7%	4.3%	100.0%

Did you study Romani during the previous year?* What do you think? Is your school a place where ...you like to go?

			What do you think? Is your school a place where ...you like to go?		Total
			Yes	No	
Did you study Romani during the previous year?	YES	Count	147	9	156
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	94.2%	5.8%	100.0%
	NO	Count	492	36	528
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	93.2%	6.8%	100.0%
Total		Count	639	45	684
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	93.4%	6.6%	100.0%

However, data revealed another important aspect, namely that there is a significant relationship between students learning Romani in school and the extent to which they feel marginalized / isolated - see the following tables. The surprising aspect is that Roma students who have studied Romani feel far more isolated / marginalized than those who haven't.

Did you study Romani during the previous year?* How often do you feel...? isolated/ marginalised?

			How often do you feel...? isolated/ marginalised?					Total
			Very often	Often	Rarely	Very rarely	Never	
Did you study Romani during the previous year?	YES	Count	8	10	14	11	113	156
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	5.1%	6.4%	9.0%	7.1%	72.4%	100.0%
	NO	Count	10	16	47	68	384	525
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	1.9%	3.0%	9.0%	9.0%	73.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	18	26	61	79	497	681
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	2.6%	3.8%	9.0%	11.6%	73.0%	100.0%

Did you study Romani during the previous year?* What do you think? Is your school a place where you feel ...marginalized / isolated?

			What do you think? Is your school a place where you feel ...marginalized / isolated?		Total
			Yes	No	
Did you study Romani during the previous year?_	YES	Count	35	118	153
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	22.9%	77.1%	100.0%
	NO	Count	83	435	518
		% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	16.0%	84.0%	100.0%



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Total	Count	118	553	671
	% within Did you study Romani during the previous year?	17.6%	82.4%	100.0%

3. Family situation - cultural capital, material, human, social and value capital

The present report also includes data about the family situation of the students from the three sampled groups, due to the notable discrepancies observed. Such data certifies the tremendous gap between Roma and non-Roma students in terms of academic support provided by family and, once more, they draw attention to the need for public intervention in order to provide equal opportunities for Roma students. First of all, we shall refer to the cultural capital of students' families. As internationally conducted studies have unequivocally shown, there is a positive correlation between the number of books available at home and the quality of the student's cognitive abilities. The table below reflects the distribution of this indicator among the sampled groups of the research:

Table 48. Correlation between the number of books at home and sampled groups

Student selection group* Number of books at home

			Number of books at home				
			Maximum 10 books	Between 11 and 25 books	Between 26 and 50 books	Above 50 books	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	218	14	118	109	579
		% within Student selection group	37.7%	23.1%	20.4%	18.8%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	448	91	36	25	600
		% within Student selection group	74.7%	15.2%	6.0%	4.2%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	198	23	8	8	237
		% within Student selection group	83.5%	9.7%	3.4%	3.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	864	248	162	142	1416
		% within Student selection group	61.0%	17.5%	11.4%	10.0%	100.0%

There is an undeniable huge difference between Roma and non-Roma children from this perspective: 62.3% of non-Roma students have at least 11 books (other than textbooks) at home, compared to only 25.3%. Furthermore, one in five students (18.8%) comes from families where there are at least 50 books, while only one in twenty Roma students (4.2%) has the same cultural opportunities at home. The situation of early school leavers / students with over 20 absences is even worse than that of Roma students: 83.5% of them have 10 books, at most. It is clearly noticeable that, from this point of view, the profile of Roma students is closer to that of early school leavers or students with a high risk of school leaving due to the high number of unmotivated absences.

As preschool education is essential to later success and school integration, the number of years of kindergarten attendance were also considered within the research. According to research data, Roma students are, once again, at disadvantage and in a situation that puts them closer to the profile of early school leavers. Almost all non-Roma students attended kindergarten (19 out of 20 students), compared to only three quarters of Roma children and 60% of those who left school.

Table 49. Kindergarten attendance among sampled students

Student selection group* Did you go to kindergarten?

			Did you go to kindergarten?		Total
			Yes	No	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	583	30	613
		% within Student selection group	95.1%	4.9%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	495	180	675
		% within Student selection group	73.3%	26.7%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	175	115	290
		% within Student selection group	60.3%	39.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	1253	325	1578
		% within Student selection group	79.4%	20.6%	100.0%

Out of the sampled students enrolled in kindergarten 66.4% of the non-Roma students attended it for three years or more, same as 41.1% of Roma children and 38.6% of early school leavers. The gap is quite significant and it provides a clear picture of the initial educational differences that Roma children have to compensate.

Table 50. Kindergarten attendance period among sampled students

Student selection group* Did you go to kindergarten? *If so, for how many years?

			If so, for how many years?			Total
			Maximum 1 year	Two years	Three or more years	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	47	146	382	575
		% within Student selection group	8.2%	25.4%	66.4%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	128	157	199	484
		% within Student selection group	26.4%	32.4%	41.1%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	46	59	66	171
		% within Student selection group	26.9%	34.5%	38.6%	100.0%
Total		Count	221	362	647	1230
		% within Student selection group	18.0%	29.4%	52.6%	100.0%

Another relevant aspect is the level of computer knowledge, as it gives students an additional chance to integrate into the labour market after graduating. Research data show higher skills of computer usage among non-Roma students, compared to Roma: 71.6% of non-Roma students can use the computer by themselves, just as 54.9% of the Roma students. Only 32% of early school leavers have a similar level of



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computer knowledge.

Table 51. Computer knowledge among sampled students

Student selection group* Level of computer knowledge

			Level of computer knowledge				
			Does not know how to operate a computer	Knows very little about how to operate a computer, could not do it without help	Knows enough about how to operate a computer, can use it independently	Knows very well how to operate a computer, an expert	Total
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	27	141	303	119	590
		% within Student selection group	4.6%	23.9%	51.4%	20.2%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	74	237	304	60	675
		% within Student selection group	11.0%	35.1%	45.0%	8.9%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	90	106	74	18	288
		% within Student selection group	31.3%	36.8%	25.7%	6.3%	100.0%
Total			191	464	681	197	1553
			12.3%	31.2%	43.9%	12.7%	100.0%

These data must be correlated with the share of students with computer access among the sampled groups. At school the weights of the three groups are similar:

Table 52. School computer access among sampled students

Student selection group* At school, do you have access to...? a computer

			At school, do you have access to...? a computer		Total
			YES	NO	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	436	167	603
		% within Student selection group	72.3%	27.7%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	499	174	673
		% within Student selection group	74.1%	25.9%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	204	79	283
		% within Student selection group	72.1%	27.9%	100.0%
Total	Count	1139	420	1559	
	% within Student selection group	73.1%	26.9%	100.0%	

It can be therefore concluded that the degree of access to a computer at school has nothing to do with the difference in ability among Roma and non-Roma students in terms of computer usage and know-how. However, what does matter is the degree to which students are being trained for this in Romanian schools. Unfortunately, there is no data collected in this regard. Still, the research does show the share of students with home access to a computer / laptop, and there are significant differences.



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Table 53. Home access to computer among sampled students

Student selection group* At home do you have access to... a computer / a functional laptop?

			At home do you have access to... a computer / a functional laptop?		Total
			YES	NO	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	387	226	613
		% within Student selection group	63.1%	36.9%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	262	423	685
		% within Student selection group	38.2%	61.8%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	74	222	296
		% within Student selection group	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	723	871	1594
		% within Student selection group	45.4%	54.6%	100.0%

61.1% of non-Roma students have access to a computer at home, compared to 38.2% of Roma children and only 25% of early school leavers / students with more than 20 absences. In addition, the data confirm that students who have access to a computer at home are more likely to know how to use it; the usage of the computer is unknown to only 1.3% of the students who actually have one at home and 21.6% of those who do not possess one. The statistical association persists among each of the three sampled groups of students.

Table 54. Correlation between access to a computer at home and the level of computer knowledge

At home do you have access to... a computer / a functional laptop?* Level of computer knowledge

			Level of computer knowledge				Total
			Does not know how to operate a computer	Knows very little about how to operate a computer, could not do it without help	Knows enough about how to operate a computer, can use it independently	Knows very well how to operate a computer, an expert	
At home do you have access to... a computer / a functional laptop?	YES	Count	9	132	410	156	707
		% within At home do you have access to... a computer / a functional laptop?	1.3%	18.7%	58.0%	22.1%	100.0%
	NO	Count	180	347	266	40	833
		% within At home do you have access to... a computer / a functional laptop?	21.6%	41.7%	31.9%	4.8%	100.0%
Total		Count	189	479	676	196	1540
		% within At home do you have access to... a computer / a functional laptop?	12.3%	31.1%	43.9%	12.7%	100.0%

The number of Roma students living in households with more people under the age of 18 is higher than that of non-Roma students. About two out of three students live in households where there are no more than two persons under 18, a situation encountered in the case of 50% of Roma children.



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Table 55. Correlation between the number of persons under 18 within the household and sampled respondents

Student selection group* Number of persons under 18 within the student's household

			Number of persons under 18 within the student's household					Total
			One person under 18 within the student's household	Two persons under 18 within the student's household	Three persons under 18 within the student's household	Four persons under 18 within the student's household	Five persons under 18 within the student's household	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	205	243	95	29	30	602
		% within Student selection group	34.1%	40.4%	15.8%	4.8%	5.0%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	120	221	165	94	82	882
		% within Student selection group	17.6%	32.4%	24.2%	13.8%	12.0%	100%
	Early school leavers	Count	48	69	67	54	55	293
		% within Student selection group	16.4%	23.5%	22.9%	18.4%	18.8%	100.0%
Total		Count	373	533	327	177	167	1577
		% within Student selection group	23.7%	33.8%	20.7%	11.2%	10.6%	100.0%

According to the existing studies the educational capital of the family is another defining feature that has an impact on the student's academic path. Our research results unmistakably indicate that the families of the sampled Roma students and early school leavers / students with more than 20 absences have a significantly lower educational capital than non-Roma students. The following table presents the distribution of parental education, considering the parent with the highest level of education in the family, among the three groups of students¹⁵. Thus, only 3.9% of non-Roma students have the parent with the highest level of education with no education or primary school education, at most. In comparison, 29.1% of Roma students and 38.4% of students who left school / have more than 20 absences find themselves in this situation. About one in six non-Roma students have a parent with at least post-secondary, higher or postgraduate education, while only 2.5% of Roma students and 2.4% of students who have left school are in the same situation.

¹⁵ Data on parental education was collected for both parents. The two sets of data were condensed into a newly created variable indicating the education of the parent who reached the highest level of schooling. In this way a common measure for the family capital originating in the parents' education was created. It would have been even more useful to refine the variable by considering the education of the parent who is actually living with the child and, thus, influences the development of the child, but no such data were recorded. Anyway, the possible errors generated within the mechanism are minor, due to the low scale of the phenomenon and to the compensation mechanism among the sampled students.



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Table 56. Correlation between the parents' level of education and group affiliation

Student selection group* Level of education of the parent with the highest level of education in the family

			Level of education of the parent with the highest level of education in the family					Total
			No education, primary level education at most	Lower secondary education, 8 grades	Vocational or trades education	Upper secondary education	Post-high school, university or post-university education	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	21	69	181	256	89	616
		% within Student selection group	3.4%	11.2%	29.4%	41.6%	14.4%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	200	241	146	84	17	688
		% within Student selection group	29.1%	35.0%	21.2%	12,2%	2.5%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	113	95	53	26	7	294
		% within Student selection group	38.4%	32.3%	18.0%	8.8%	2.4%	100.0%
Total	Count	334	405	380	366	113	1598	
	% within Student selection group	20.9%	25.3%	23.8%	22.9%	7.1%	100.0%	

The low family educational capital of Roma students is also reflected in the significant inequalities between the sampled groups in terms of possibility of seeking family help for homework. Nine out of ten non-Roma students (89.8%) have someone in the family to help them with homework, just as 74.6% of the Roma students. The available family support for early school leavers or students having more than 20 unmotivated absences is lesser, merely 56.7% of them having someone to turn to in case of need. It is another argument justifying the need for additional mentoring and providing homework help after school to all children from vulnerable groups within the Romanian educational system. The "School after school" program should be extended to all those in need, regardless of their ethnicity.

Table 57. Correlation between the possibility of seeking family help for homework and the sampled groups

Student selection group* Should you need help to do your homework, is there someone at home to help you?

			Should you need help to do your homework, is there someone at home to help you?		Total
			YES, there is	NO, there is not	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	539	61	600
		% within Student selection group	89.8%	10.2%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	497	169	666
		% within Student selection group	74.6%	25.4%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	161	123	284
		% within Student selection	56.7%	43.3%	100.0%



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group				
Total	Count	1197	353	1550
	% within Student selection	77.2%	22.8%	100.0%
group				

Another important aspect is related to the degree of Romanian language knowledge – the sampled students are enrolled in lower secondary education, grades 5 to 8. Thus 80.7% of non-Roma students, 72.6% of Roma students and 63.6% of early school leavers consider to know Romanian very well: however, there is one out of fifty Roma students (2.5%) who does not speak Romanian and one out of twenty early school leavers or students having more than 20 unmotivated absences. These data raise questions about the quality of education provided in school, especially during the Romanian language classes. Naturally, the immediate question that comes up to one's mind is what educational opportunities can a student have when he / she is not very familiar with the teaching language?

Table 58. Correlation between the degree of Romanian language knowledge and group affiliation

Student selection group* How well do you know the following languages: Romanian?

			How well do you know the following languages: Romanian?				Total
			Very well	Well	Enough to get by	I do not know it	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	498	93	22	4	617
		% within Student selection group	80.7%	15.1%	3.6%	6%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	503	146	27	17	693
		% within Student selection group	72.6%	21.1%	3.9%	2.5%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	189	73	18	17	297
		% within Student selection group	63.6%	24.6%	6.1%	5.7%	100.0%
Total	Count	1190	312	67	38	1607	
	% within Student selection group	74.1%	19.4%	4.2%	2.4%	100.0%	

Considering the given context it is important to bear in mind that, according to the survey data, about one in four Roma children (23.8%) knows very well the Romani language and 9% know it well.

Table 59. Correlation between the degree of Romani language knowledge and group affiliation

Student selection group* How well o you know the following languages: Romani?

			How well o you know the following languages: Romani?				Total
			Very well	Well	Enough to get by	I do not know it	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	4	7	30	561	602
		% within Student selection group	.7%	1.2%	5.0%	93.2%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	162	61	91	367	681
		% within Student selection group	23.8%	9.0%	13.4%	53.9%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	63	28	33	174	298
		% within Student selection group	21.1%	9.4%	11.1%	58.4%	100.0%
Total	Count	229	96	154	1102	1581	
	% within Student selection group	14.5%	6.1%	9.7%	69.7%	100.0%	



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Knowledge of English is another factor that favours the later on success of students on the labour market. Data show that significantly more non-Roma students know English, compared to Roma students or early school leavers: 21.5% of non-Roma students have a good knowledge of English (approximately one in five students), compared to 8.2% of Roma children and only 4.2% of early school leavers / students having more than 20 unmotivated absences. The most likely explanation lies in the higher support provided by the family in learning a foreign language (the higher the level of education of the parents, the better the knowledge of English), the increased access to English communication means that facilitate its assimilation (TV and internet access) or longer periods of time spent in kindergarten (the longer the kindergarten attendance, the better the knowledge of English).

Table 60. Correlation between the level of English knowledge and group affiliation

Student selection group* How well do you know the following languages: English?

			How well do you know the following languages: English?				Total
			Very well	Well	Enough to get by	I do not know it	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	24	106	380	94	604
		% within Student selection group	4.0%	17.5%	62.9%	15.6%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	5	49	405	205	664
		% within Student selection group	8%	7.4%	61.0%	30.9%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	2	10	126	149	287
		% within Student selection group	7%	3.5%	43.9%	51.9%	100.0%
Total	Count	31	165	911	448	1555	
	% within Student selection group	2.0%	10.6%	58.6%	28.8%	100.0%	

The research design consents an assessment of the level of material resources that are available to the students. The focus groups conducted throughout the research highlighted the significance of this factor as far as ESL is concerned. The parents of early school leavers indicated that, because of their poverty, their children had to work side by side with them in order to ensure their daily living, and that, in turn, affected their school attendance. The research clearly shows that non-Roma students are far more advantaged from this point of view.

Table 61. Correlation between pocket money and group affiliation

Student selection group* What do you think, your daily pocket money is ...?

			What do you think, your daily pocket money is ...?					Total
			Not enough for the bare necessities	Enough for the bare necessities	Enough to buy some more expensive goods, but with constraints in other areas	Enough to buy all that you need, without any tp of constraints	I never have pocket money	
Student selection	Non-Roma students	Count	83	361	59	65	47	615
		% within Student selection	13.5%	58.7%	9.6%	10.6%	7.6%	100.0%



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group	group						
	Roma students	Count	171	336	48	47	81
		% within Student selection	25.0%	49.2%	7.0%	6.9%	11.9%
	Early school leavers	Count	129	96	12	9	49
		% within Student selection	43.7%	32.5%	4.1%	3.1%	16.6%
Total	Count	383	793	119	121	177	1593
	% within Student selection	24.0%	49.8%	7.5%	7.6%	11.1%	100.0%

Only one in ten non-Roma students (13.5%) says that his / her daily pocket money is not enough for their bare necessities, while the proportion of Roma children in the same situation is up to 25% and even higher among early school leavers (43.7%).

Furthermore, the data show that the lack of resources reaches sometimes dramatic levels for an important share of the students who stated that several times over the past month they had to go to school feeling hungry, since they had no food at home; once again, the situation is worse among Roma students and early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences. This situation was experienced by one out of twenty non-Roma students, one in six Roma students (15%) and 31.9% of those who left school. Considering all the above, it appears obvious that there is a higher deficit of material support among Roma families and, implicitly, Roma students, hence justifying the urgency of compensatory measures.

Table 62. Correlation between cases when students went to school feeling hungry and group affiliation

Student selection group* Over the past month did you ever happen to go to school without eating / hungry because there was no food at home?

			Over the past month did you ever happen to go to school without eating / hungry because there was no food at home?			Total
			Yes, at least once	Yes, at least several times	It never happened	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	41	28	533	60
		% within Student selection group	6.8%	4.7%	88.5%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	97	102	483	682
		% within Student selection group	14.2%	15.0%	70.8%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	42	95	161	298
		% within Student selection group	14.1%	31.9%	54.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	180	225	1177	1582
		% within Student selection group	11.4%	14.2%	74.4%	100.0%

There are other data that support our conclusion regarding the more precarious material conditions of



Roma students compared to non-Roma ones. One out of six non-Roma students (15.6%) has less than 10 RON per month, same as 23.6% of Roma students and 33% of early school leavers / students who have more than 20 absences. Focus group data, already presented within the report, show that the precarious situation interferes, in a negative way, with students' school attendance rate.

Table 63. Correlation between monthly pocket money and group affiliation

Student selection group* Student monthly pocket money

			Student monthly pocket money							Total
			Less than 10 RON	Between 11 and 20 RON	Between 21 and 30 RON	Between 31 and 40 RON	Between 41 and 50 RON	Between 51 and 100 RON	Above 100 RON	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	88	73	54	46	95	138	70	564
		% within Student selection group	15.6%	12.9%	9.6%	8.2%	16.8%	24.5%	12.4%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	144	82	65	49	69	114	86	609
		% within Student selection group	23.6%	13.5%	10.7%	8.0%	11.3%	18.7%	14.1%	100.0%
Early school leavers		Count	86	32	28	10	32	43	30	261
		% within Student selection group	33.0%	12.3%	10.7%	3.8%	12.3%	16.5%	11.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	318	187	147	105	196	295	186	1434
		% within Student selection group	22.2%	13.0%	10.3%	7.3%	13.7%	20.6%	13.0%	100.0%

The answers provided by parents outlined the same uneven situation between the three sampled groups of students. The family income is so scarce that it doesn't even cover the basic needs for 27% of the non-Roma families, 58.1% of Roma families and 72.7% of families of early school leavers / students having more than 20 absences.

Table 64. Correlation between income sufficiency and group affiliation

Student selection group* How would you consider your household income.?

			How would you consider your household income.?				Total
			Not enough for the bare necessities	Enough for the bare necessities	Enough to buy some more expensive goods, but with constraints in other areas	Enough to buy all that you need, without any type of constraints	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	145	264	108	21	538
		% within Student selection group	27.0%	49.1%	20.1%	3.9%	100.0%
Roma students		Count	350	214	28	10	602
		% within Student selection group	58.1%	35.5%	4.7%	1.7%	100.0%



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Early school leavers	Count	189	55	14	2	260
	% within Student selection group	72.7%	21.2%	5.4%	.8%	100.0%
Total	Count	684	533	150	33	1400
	% within Student selection group	48.9%	38.1%	10.7%	2.4%	100.0%

The researched also exposed the main sources of family income for the sampled students, that is a permanent and constant source of the main income, namely salary or pension, in the case of 71.3% of non-Roma parents, 28.9% Roma parents and 21% parents of early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences. A quarter of the Roma students (25.5%) and a third of early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences live in households where the main source of income is the child allowance; 11.1% of the non-Roma students experience the same living situation. However, most of the respondent Roma parents (32.4%) declared the main source of family income to be represented by social benefits. Consequently, not only most Roma families are largely dependent on state aid to survive, but they also provide a model for these children, that of the socially assisted person. Understandably, in a family depending on child allowance or social assistance as the main source of income for survival, it is rather difficult to put the child's education as a priority on top of the need to ensure the family's survival one day after another. The emerging conclusion is that Roma students need material support as a prerequisite to academic success and early school leaving prevention.

Table 65. Correlation between main family income source and group affiliation

Student selection group* Which is the main family income in your family?

			Which is the main family income in your family?						Total
			Salaries, pensions	Revenues from agriculture	Entrepreneur activities (companies, legal persons)	Working abroad	Social benefits (minimum living wage, unemployment benefits t)	Child benefits	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	423	30	12	28	34	66	593
		% within Student selection group	71.3%	5.1%	2.0%	4.7%	5.7%	11.1%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	190	24	25	38	213	168	658
		% within Student selection group	28.9%	3.6%	3.8%	5.8%	32.4%	25.5%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	58	11	8	16	88	95	276
		% within Student selection group	21.0%	4.0%	2.9%	5.8%	31.9%	34.4%	100.0%
Total			671	65	45	82	335	329	1527
			43.9%	4.3%	2.9%	5.4%	21.9%	21.5%	100.0%

The welfare of the sample students' households was another aspect taken into consideration by our



research. The parents / guardians were asked whether they own a series of household goods - access to hot water, refrigerator, television set, computer, air conditioning, washing machine / dishwasher, car etc. A total of 16 items were proposed in order to characterize the welfare level of the household in which the student lives. The fewer the missing items, the better the living conditions within the household. Once again the results indicate that Roma students are clearly disadvantaged compared to the non-Roma ones. The living conditions for the latter are considerably better. The share of students living in households where only 4 items are missing, at most, according to our list is of 44.6% for non-Roma children, 15.6% for Roma children and only 10% for early school leavers / students who have at least 20 unmotivated absences from school. One in three Roma children (35.2%) is missing more than 11 items from his / her household, same as one out of two early school leavers or students having more than 20 absences. In comparison, only 7.9% of the sampled non-Roma students live in a household with over 11 items missing.

Table 66. Correlation between welfare of the household and group affiliation

Student selection group* Index regarding the welfare of the student's household

			Index regarding the welfare of the student's household				Total
			Maximum 4 items missing in the household	Between 5 and 8 items missing in the household	Between 9 and 11 items missing in the household	Above 11 items missing in the household	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	254	141	130	45	570
		% within Student selection group	44.6%	24.7%	22.8%	7.9%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	100	114	201	225	640
		% within Student selection group	15.6%	17.8%	31.4%	35.2%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	27	41	62	140	270
		% within Student selection group	10.0%	15.2%	23.0%	51.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	381	296	393	410	1480
		% within Student selection group	25.7%	20.0%	26.6%	27.7%	100.0%

From the listed household goods that can characterize the welfare of a household, the writing desk is directly related to the student's school work. Thus, 68.2% of non-Roma children live in households where every child has his / her own writing desk, a necessary homework accessory. From the group of Roma students only 39% live in households where each child has his / her own desk, and the share of early school leavers in the same situation is of 27%.

Table 67. Variation of households possessing a writing desk for each student in the family among the sampled student groups

Student selection group* Do you have in your household..... the child / children living in your household have their own writing desk?

			Do you have in your household..... the child / children living in your household have their own writing desk?		Total
			YES	NO	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	408	190	598
		% within Student selection group	68.2%	31.8%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	260	407	667
		% within Student selection group	39.0%	61.0%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	76	206	282
		% within Student selection group	27.0%	73.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	744	803	1547
		% within Student selection group	48.1%	51.9%	100.0%

Table 68. Correlation between distance from home to school and group affiliation

Student selection group* Which is the approximate distance from your home to school?

			Which is the approximate distance from your home to school?				
			Living less than 0.5 km from school	Living between 0.5 and 1 km away from school	Living between 1 km and 2 km away from school	Living further than 2 km away from school	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	82	127	165	147	521
		% within Student selection group	15.7%	24.4%	31.7%	28.2%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	64	138	218	177	597
		% within Student selection group	10.7%	23.1%	36.5%	29.2%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	31	56	87	104	278
		% within Student selection group	11.2%	20.1%	31.3%	37.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	177	321	470	428	1396
		% within Student selection group	12.7%	23.0%	33.7%	30.7%	100.0%

The data also show that distance is a factor that influences the rate of school absenteeism. Thus, students who live more than 2 km away from school are also more likely to record more than 20 unmotivated absences than students who live closer to school. It is a possible explanation for the previously highlighted conclusion that Roma students record a higher rate of school absenteeism - in other words the fact that Roma children live further away from school than non-Roma students generates a higher rate of absenteeism among the former.



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Which is the approximate distance from your home to school?* Level of absenteeism

			Level of absenteeism		Total
			20 unmotivated absences at most	More than 20 unmotivated absences	
Which is the approximate distance from your home to school?	Living less than 0.5 km from school	Count % within Which is the approximate distance from your home to school?	104 72.2%	40 27.8%	144 100.0%
	Living between 0.5 and 1 km away from school	Count % within Which is the approximate distance from your home to school?	185 71.4%	74 28.6%	259 100.0%
	Living between 1 km and 2 km away from school	Count % within Which is the approximate distance from your home to school?	256 67.9%	121 32.1%	377 100.0%
	Living further than 2 km away from school	Count % within Which is the approximate distance from your home to school?	212 59.1%	147 40.9%	359 100.0%
Total		Count % within Which is the approximate distance from your home to school?	757 66.5%	382 33.5%	1139 100.0%

The research also consented for an approach of the acceptance of own ethnicity among Roma students. As stated in the chapter on methodology, the identification of Roma students in school was made through the hetero-identification method by teachers / head teachers (class based), following a series of discussions between field operators and teaching staff from the selected schools. Thus, the sample of Roma students was selected based on the identification / information provided by teachers. These students did not know they were interviewed because of their Roma ethnicity, both for scientific research purposes, but mostly in order to avoid any sense of discomfort among the sampled students, therefore the field operators were expressly trained in this respect. Also, in accordance with the specific instructions given to field operators, the questionnaires were applied individually, face to face, without any other student being present. It should also be remembered that the study was conducted in schools where the percentage of Roma students was of at least 5 - 10% .

The results confirmed our expectations: a significant percentage (11.6%) of Roma students declare themselves Romanians, despite having being heteroidentified as Roma and 2.2% declare themselves Hungarians. Basically one out of seven Roma`students chose to declare a non-Roma identity, while only 0.3% of non-Roma students declared themselves as Roma. Another important aspect to be considered is that 77.7% of the early school leavers or students with at least 20 unmotivated absences self-declared their Roma



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ethnicity. Their real share could be even higher, given the tendency of a large number of Roma students to hide their ethnicity. Therefore, no clear cut conclusion as to the exact share of Roma early school leavers or students with over 20 unmotivated absences within the research universe can be drawn. As already mentioned in the chapter on methodology, the group of early school leavers / students with a minimum of 20 unmotivated absences has not been selected by a random procedure and there was no stratification in their selection simply because of the lack of official data in this respect. The structure of the sampled early school leavers / students with more than 20 unmotivated absences was influenced by the manner in which the field operator has identified the students meeting the specified criteria. Despite all this, this sample represented an important milestone for the analysis by comparing the variation of responses to the other sampled groups and an important value added information source considering the lack of relevant official data on this matter.

Table 69. Correlation between ethnic autoidentification and group affiliation based on the hetero-identification method

Student selection group* Which is your ethnicity?

			Which is your ethnicity?					Total
			Romanian	Hungarian	Roma	German	Other	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	576	42	2	0	2	622
		% within Student selection group	92.6%	6.8%	.3%	.0%	.3%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	81	15	600	1	0	697
		% within Student selection group	11.6%	2.2%	86.1%	.1%	.0%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	63	3	230	0	0	296
		% within Student selection group	21.3%	1.0%	77.7%	0%	.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	720	60	832	1	2	1615
		% within Student selection group	44.6%	3.7%	51.5%	.1%	.1%	100.0%

Parental values regarding education were also investigated within the research, with a focus on parents' aspirations regarding the education of their children. There is a greater desire among parents / guardians of non-Roma students to see their children graduating from high school than among parents of Roma students or early school leavers. Nine out of ten parents of non-Roma students (90.9%) said that they really wanted the student to graduate from high school, compared to seven out of ten parents of Roma children (71.9%); as far as early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences are concerned, the share of parents who expressed the same desire is 43.7%.

Table 70. Parental aspirations regarding graduating from high school / university among sampled groups of students

Student selection group* How much do you want for your child.... to enrol in high school?

			How much do you want for your child.... to enrol in high school?					Total
			Very much	Much	A little	Very little	Not at all	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	551	52	2	0	1	606
		% within Student selection group	90.9%	8.6%	.3%	.0%	2%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	477	149	18	4	15	663
		% within Student selection group	71.9%	22.5%	2.7%	6%	2.3%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	124	115	15	9	21	284
		% within Student selection group	43.7%	40.5%	5.3%	3.2%	7.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	1152	316	35	13	37	1553
		% within Student selection group	74.2%	20.3%	2.3%	8%	2.4%	100.0%

Student selection group* How much do you want for your child.... to go to university?

			How much do you want for your child.... to go to university?					Total
			Very much	Much	A little	Very little	Not at all	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	491	81	17	9	8	606
		% within Student selection group	81.0%	13.4%	2.8%	1.5%	1.3%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	375	179	60	14	31	659
		% within Student selection group	56.9%	27.2%	9.1%	2.1%	4.7%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	81	108	39	17	31	276
		% within Student selection group	29.3%	39.1%	14.1%	6.2%	11.2%	100.0%
Total		Count	947	368	116	40	70	1541
		% within Student selection group	61.5%	23.9%	7.5%	2.6%	4.5%	100.0%

Only 5.6% of non-Roma parents stated that they had little, very little or no expectations regarding university attendance from their children. The share of parents with little or no interest in seeing their children attend university is much higher, 15.9% among Roma parents, respectively 31.5% among parents of early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences. There are some irrefutable differences in parental values regarding education among the three sampled groups of students. Naturally, parents' aspirations regarding the graduation of their children also reflect on the different degrees of support given throughout their scholastic process. Under the circumstances, additional support is necessary in the case of Roma students in order to compensate for the disadvantage generated by parental lower aspirations regarding their education.



Nonetheless, beyond parental aspirations there are also the financial possibilities of the family that influence the length of the education process, the degree of realism of these aspirations. In order to address this issue parents were asked about the envisaged level of education of their children by the age of 30 (when, supposedly, the education cycle is completed). Six out of ten non-Roma parents (59.9%) foresaw that their children would have completed at least their university education by the age of 30, an opinion shared by merely 19.8% Roma parents and a very low 6.9% of the parents of early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences. The discrepancy between Roma and non-Roma families' capacity to provide support for their children along their scholastic process is crystal clear.

Table 71. Parents' opinion on their children's level of education by the age of 30 among the sampled groups of students

Student selection group* What level of education you think your child will have by the age of 30?

			What level of education you think your child will have by the age of 30?					Total
			Elementary education (grades 1-4)	Lower secondary education (grades 5-8)	Upper secondary education or vocational education (12 grades)	University education	Post-university education	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	9	22	203	310	40	584
		% within Student selection group	1.5%	3.8%	34.8%	53.1%	6.8%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	10	135	369	122	5	641
		% within Student selection group	1.6%	21.1%	57.6%	19.0%	8%	100.0%
Early school leavers		Count	28	111	105	18	0	262
		% within Student selection group	10.7%	42.4%	40.1%	6.9%	0%	100.0%
Total		Count	47	268	677	450	45	1487
		% within Student selection group	3.2%	18.0%	45.5%	30.3%	3.0%	100.0%

Early advice on studying and treating school seriously positively settle a positive attitude towards the educational process in the student's mind. During the interviews students were asked if they were ever told by someone from the family that "knowledge is power" - a dictum encrypting the general attitude towards the usefulness of education in life. The data are striking (see the table below): almost one in ten Roma students (8%) was never advised like this, compared to only 5.1% of non-Roma students and 18.3% of early school leavers. The dictum is occasionally reminded by someone in the family in the case of 58% of non-Roma students, 43.5% of Roma students and 37.2% of early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences. Under the circumstances, it is advisable that the mentors within the project strive to

put in Roma children's minds the idea that education is useful and valuable. It could be useful to say the "knowledge is power" dictum in a persuasive manner to each student who has not heard it before in his family and to repeat it to the others.

Table 72. Frequency of parental advising with the "knowledge is power" dictum among the sampled groups of students

Student selection group* Has one of your parents or someone else at home ever told you that “knowledge is power”?

			Has one of your parents or someone else at home ever told you that “knowledge is power”?			Total
			No one ever told me, I do not remember	Yes, I was once told this	Yes, I am being told every now and then	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	19	135	215	369
		% within Student selection group	5.1%	36.6%	58.3%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	42	254	228	524
		% within Student selection group	8.0%	48.5%	43.5%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	40	97	81	218
		% within Student selection group	18.3%	44.5%	37.2%	100.0%
Total		Count	101	486	524	1111
		% within Student selection group	9.1%	43.7%	47.2%	100.0%

4. Characteristics of the community where the student lives

It was previously shown that the rural / urban residence has a relative influence on school absenteeism - students from rural schools were less likely to record more than 20 unmotivated absences; however, the result may be flawed by teachers' accurate recording of unmotivated absences that may vary from rural to urban. Nevertheless, the differences in terms of school attendance probability remains among Roma and non-Roma students, even when separately analysed data based on the urban and rural residence criteria – see the table below

Table 73. Correlation between residency and level of absenteeism

Student selection group* Level of absenteeism* Current residence. But presently you live ...

Current residence. But presently you live ...				Level of absenteeism		Total
				20 unmotivated absences at most	20 unmotivated absences and more	
Rural	Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	230	25	255
			% within Student selection group	90.2%	9.8%	100.0%
		Roma students	Count	259	134	393
			% within Student selection group	65.9%	34.1%	100.0%



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	Early school leavers	Count	30	105	135	
		% within Student selection group	22.2%	77.8%	100.0%	
Total		Count	519	264	783	
		% within Student selection group	66.3%	33.7%	100.0%	
Urban	Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	192	27	219
			% within Student selection group	87.7%	12.3%	100.0%
		Roma students	Count	107	71	178
			% within Student selection group	60.1%	39.9%	100.0%
		Early school leavers	Count	17	71	88
			% within Student selection group	19.3%	80.7%	100.0%
	Total		Count	316	169	485
			% within Student selection group	65.2%	34.8%	100.0%

The survey data show that there are significant differences between Roma and non-Roma students in terms of how their neighbours feel about educated people. It is an additional argument regarding the homogeneity of the social environment from which these students were selected. There is a significant discrepancy between the group of non-Roma / Roma students and that of early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences – within the latter's community there is little appreciation for more educated people.

Table 74. Correlation between neighbours' perceptions on educated people and sampled groups

Student selection group* As far as you know, what do your neighbours (from the block of flats, around the house) think about people with higher education / more grades?

			As far as you know, what do your neighbours (from the block of flats, around the house) think about people with higher education / more grades?			Total
			They have a better opinion about them compared to those without education	They have a worse opinion about them then about those without education	They feel the same way, there is no difference	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	443	61	101	605
		% within Student selection group	73.2%	10.1%	16.7%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	483	56	126	665
		% within Student selection group	72.6%	8.4%	18.9%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	167	24	79	270
		% within Student selection group	61.9%	8.9%	29.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	1093	141	306	1540
		% within Student selection group	71.0%	9.2%	19.9%	100.0%

In this particular situation the fundamental question is whether the community's perception on



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education influences the school absenteeism rate and that was analysed through the logistic regression model shown below. The conducted statistical analysis showed that there is an influence of values regarding education in the student's community on his / her school absenteeism. As a result, students who say that their neighbours have a bad opinion about people who attended more classes have a higher probability of recording more than 20 unmotivated absences and, therefore, a higher risk of dropping out. Consequently, any intervention model for preventing ESL should take into account the community effect and, more specifically, provide adequate counselling for the student in order to properly substantiate his / her reference values regarding education.

Table 75. Statistical model for assessing peer influence on school absenteeism

	B	S. E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a						
vocationaleducationparents	.401	.245	2.667	1	.102	1.493
highschoolhighereducationparents	.451	.267	2.838	1	.092	1.569
Roma	.255	.293	.759	1	.384	1.91
pts	1.107	.225	24.102	1	.000	3.025
rrural	2.874	.284	102.385	1	.000	17.706
lastorpenultimateseat	-.410	.176	5.420	1	.020	.663
kindergartenoneyear	.309	.174	3.140	1	.076	1.361
kindergartentwoyears	.021	.263	.006	1	.938	1.021
kindergartenthreeyears	-.695	.233	8.891	1	.003	.499
between11and25booksathome	-.782	.227	11.844	1	.001	.457
morethan25booksathome	.011	.247	.002	1	.964	1.011
likesgoingtoschool	-.463	.272	2.908	1	.088	.629
intentionoffriendstodropoutofschool	-1.118	.295	14.362	1	.000	.327
communityappreciatesschool	-.043	.025	3.009	1	.083	.958
communityneutraltowardsschool	.581	.280	4.312	1	.038	1.789
communityneutraltowardsschool	-.031	.209	.022	1	.881	.969
Constant	-.368	.438	.704	1	.401	.692

a. Variable (s) entered at Step 1: lowersecondaryeducationparents, vocationaleducationparents, highschoolhighereducationparents, Roma, pls, rural, lastorpenultimateseat, kindergartenoneyear, kindergartentwoyears, kindergartenthreeyears, between11and25booksathome, morethan25booksathome, likesgoingtoschool, intentionoffriendstodropoutofschool, communityappreciatesschool, communityneutraltowardsschool.

5. Reference group influence – friends / schoolmates

The research also revealed the extent to which students are exposed to ideas, opinions, thoughts from friends in the sense of leaving school. Noteworthy differences are once again present among the sampled groups: the influence of friends considering to drop out of school when completing the lower secondary education cycle is significantly less in the case of non-Roma students compared to Roma students and early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences. Thus, about one in three non-Roma students revealed that having friends who would very much like to leave school (30.9% of them rated the item from 1 to 4 on a scale of 1 to 10 - 1 meant that they had friends who would definitely like to leave



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school and 10 meant that under no circumstances would the do so). Similar answers were given by 45.5% of the Roma students and by 48.5% of the early school leavers.

Table 76. Correlation between the degree of exposure to the influence of friends who intend to drop out of school when completing the lower secondary education and group affiliation

Student selection group* Do you think some of your friends intend to drop out of school after completing the 8th grade?

			Do you think some of your friends intend to drop out of school after completing the 8th grade?									Total
			Yes, they definitely do	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	No, they definitely don't	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	79	37	43	19	39	29	23	41	205	576
		% within Student selection group	13.7%	6.2%	7.5%	2.2%	6.8%	5.0%	4.0%	7.1%	35.6%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	124	52	74	38	64	36	22	42	143	634
		% within Student selection group	19.6%	8.2%	11.7%	6.0%	10.1%	5.7%	3.5%	6.6%	22.6%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	54	26	23	28	35	9	15	20	49	270
		% within Student selection group	20.0%	9.6%	8.5%	10.4%	13.0%	3.3%	5.6%	7.4%	18.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	257	115	140	85	138	74	60	103	397	1480
		% within Student selection group	17.4%	7.8%	9.5%	10.4%	9.3%	5.0%	4.1%	7.0%	26.8%	100.0%

The influence of peers on the level of school absenteeism is also important. The following statistic model shows a significant relationship between students with friends wanting to drop out of school and their number of unmotivated absences. The greater the number of friends who wish to drop out of school, the higher the level of school absenteeism. It is therefore desirable that the mentors' intervention also focused on counselling the student with respect to his / her group of friends.

Table 77. Statistical model for assessing the influence of friends on school absenteeism

		B	S. E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1	a	.255	.237				
	vocationaleducationparents	.345	.261	1.165	1	.280	1.291
	highschoolhighereducationparents	.127	.286	1.754	1	.185	1.412
	Roma	1.106	.221	.196	1	.658	1.135
	pts	2.789	.273	24.955	1	.000	3.022
	rrural	-.449	.173	104.528	1	.000	16.270
	lastorpenultimateseat	.314	.169	6.742	1	.009	.638
	kindergartenoneyear	.020	.258	3.445	1	.063	1.369
	kindergartentwoyears	-.662	.227	.006	1	.939	1.020
	kindergartenthreeyears	-.762	.222	8.485	1	.004	.516
	between 11 and 25 books at home	.032	.244	11.807	1	.001	.467
	more than 25 books at home	-.487	.264	.017	1	.897	1.032
	likes going to school	-1.067	.279	3.392	1	.066	.614
	intention of friend to drop out of school	-.054	.024	14.650	1	.000	.344
	Constant			5.110	1	.024	.948



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	-.187	.400	.218	1	.641	.830
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a. Variable (s) entered at Step 1: lowersecondaryeducationparents, vocationaleducationparents, highschoolhighereducationparents, Roma, pls, rural, lastorpenultimateseat, kindergartentwoyears, kindergartentwoyears, kindergartentwoyears, between11and25booksathome, morethan25 booksathome, likesgoingtoschool, intentionoffriendstodropoutofschool.



Research results – Wave 2 (2013)

Research methodology

The study conducted in Wave 2 of the research was based on quantitative data collected in a longitudinal sociological surveys (panel) – the same samples of respondents were interviewed at two different moments in time, in March - April 2011 and April -May 2013. One of the main challenges when conducting this type of research is maintaining the highest possible number of respondents from the initial wave of the research to the following one. Hence, it is important to see the percentage of respondents interviewed during both waves of this longitudinal research - see the table below.

Table 78. Retention rate in Wave 2

Student selection group* Sample retaining of subjects from Wave 1					
			Sample retaining of subjects from Wave 1		
			Student interviewed in the 2011 Wave 1 as well	Student interviewed only in the 2013 Wave 2	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	539	91	630
		% within Student selection group	85.6%	14.4%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	570	129	699
		% within Student selection group	81.5%	18.5%	100.0%
	Early school leavers	Count	223	76	299
		% within Student selection group	74.6%	25.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	1332	296	1628
		% within Student selection group	81.8%	18.2%	100.0%

As indicated in the table, approximately 82% of the respondents participated in both waves of the research. There were various reasons why Wave 1 respondents could no longer be included in Wave 2, such as the fact that they could no longer be found (due to family migration, change of residence etc.) or they simply refused to be interviewed for Wave 2. Since no such research (namely, a longitudinal study focusing on Romanian students as the universe of the investigation) has been conducted before in Romania, there is no benchmark to evaluate the retention rate between the two research waves. At a European level there was the "Longitudinal Study of Young People in England" (LSYPE) with a retention rate of 85% for the second wave¹⁶. However, the retention rate recorded within the present study, initiated within the project "Equal opportunities in education for an inclusive society", consents further data analysis in order to investigate the

¹⁶ <https://www.education.gov.uk/ilsype/workspaces/public/wiki/LSYPE#10.1>



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dynamic of the sampled groups of students in relation to the topics addressed in research. A significantly lower rate of retention (74%) could be noticed among the non – randomly selected sample of students with a high ESL risk. It is a natural outcome since the respondents from this group presented a greater risk of dropout at the moment of the study and, consequently, there were greater chances of residence change (either by migration or simply moving out to another place). Similarly, it was among the profiles of this group that the higher rate of reluctance or refusal to participate in the second research wave was registered – which is also the effect of a weak relationship with the school environment. However, presently the focus will be on analysing the different dynamic of the two groups of randomly selected respondents (Roma and non-Roma students). The retention rate among the latter was approximately 83%, significantly lower among Roma respondents - the Pearson Chi -Square coefficient = $0.05 < 0.1$. The difference is not very large, but the chosen statistical threshold significance is a high one - see below. For these reasons the comparative analysis between the two samples will not be affected by the different retention rates from one research wave to another.

Table 79. Retention rate for randomly chosen samples from Wave 2

Student selection group* Sample retaining of subjects from Wave 1

			Sample retaining of subjects from Wave 1		
			Student interviewed in the 2011 Wave 1 as well	Student interviewed only in Wave 2, for the first time in 2013	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	539	91	630
		% within Student selection group	85.6%	14.4%	100.0%
	Roma students	Count	570	129	699
		% within Student selection group	81.5%	18.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	1109	220	1329
		% within Student selection group	83.4%	16.6%	100.0%

Objectives of the research

1. Highlighting the explanatory mechanisms of ESL / school dropout using unique data (longitudinal data) collected throughout the research. The added value of longitudinal studies compared to transversal studies (data collected only at a specific time) or qualitative data - based studies is already acknowledged in social sciences, so this aspect will not be dealt with here. The data collected in this study come from representative samples of students. Moreover, the research design took into account the collection of data from two ethnicity defined samples – a sample of Roma students, respectively a sample of non-Roma students. Roma

children were identified through the hetero-identification method by resorting to teachers' cooperation. All these elements led to the gathering of a data capital and an analysis framework with a high added value compared to the other studies carried out so far on school dropouts.

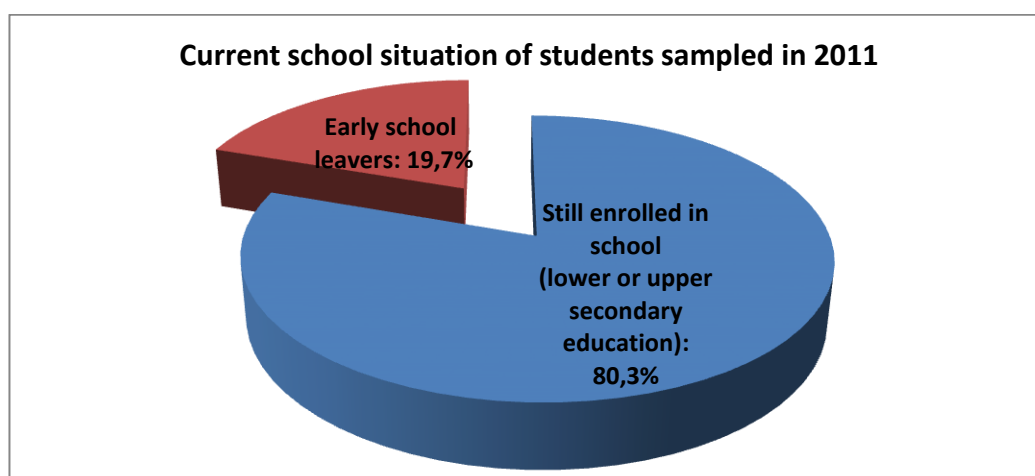
2. In assessing the results obtained by sampled students throughout their education cycle, the research focused on their academic performance by turning to the results from the National Capacity Examination, used as a common nominator. The 2011 sample included students from all four lower secondary levels (5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grades). Therefore, three cohorts of students (the exception being the 5th grade) sat or should have sat the National Capacity Examination (provided there were no cases of repetition, failed subjects, abandonment etc.). Therefore we will also assess school performance in a comparative manner, according to the different categories of students. In this way the school dropout analysis - the risk of leaving the educational system – will be completed by analysis of the degree of educability generated by participation in the educational process. There are two facets for characterizing the educational inclusion.

We shall deal, in extenso, with each of the analytical perspectives opened up by the research objectives. In order to meet the objectives we shall elaborate several analyses on the field data – there is a strong empirical approach to this endeavour. Data analysis will allow for extracting relevant conclusions and recommendations that will outline the framework for a ESL strategy in Romania.

Dropout rate and explanatory mechanisms

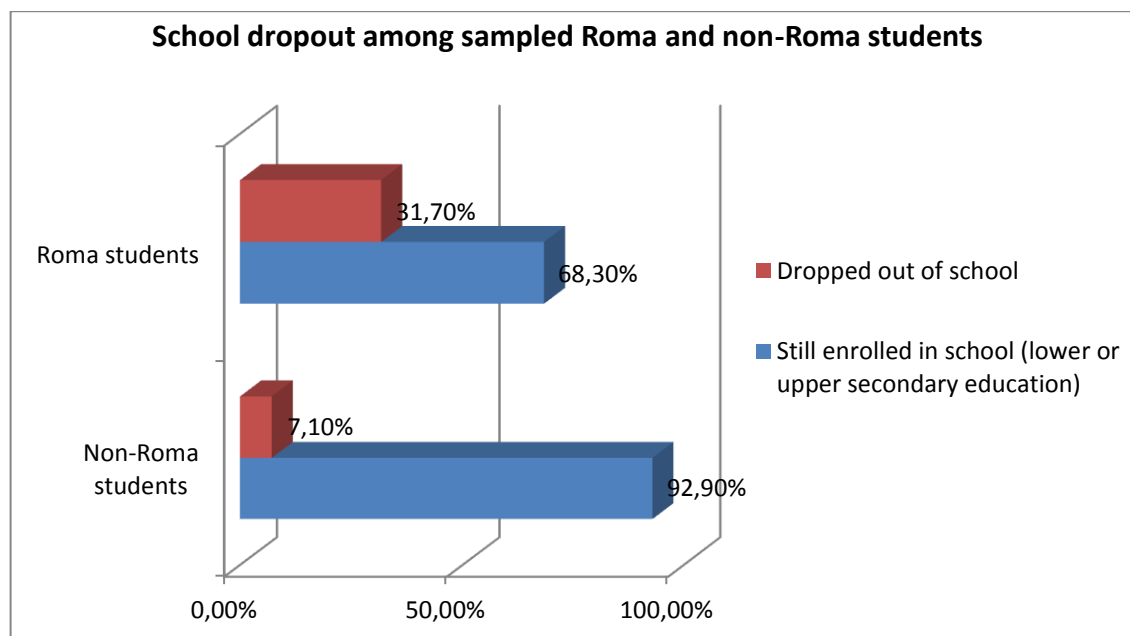
The collected data show the percentage of early school leavers in the two years since the completion of Wave 1 – see the table below.

Table 80. School situation in 2013 for students surveyed in 2011



Thus, out of the students interviewed in both waves - selected according to a random sampling procedure and considering the known current educational situation - about one in five (19.7%) dropped out of school. No specific definition was considered when characterizing the dropout (neither the ROFPEI definition, nor the one from The Annual Report on the National Education drawn up by the Ministry of National Education) except for the statements from school headmasters and families that confirmed that the student no longer attended school, that he has dropped out. The dropout was detected by the field operators who visited either the school where the student used to be enrolled or his / her household. When students could no longer be identified and no information could be gathered regarding their educational status, we remained on the fence regarding their uncertain situation - these cases were not included in the statistics presented above. One of the vulnerable groups whose situation has been addressed as a priority was that of Roma students. The data allowed us to separate the dropout rate of Roma students from that of the non-Roma ones. According to the previous studies the difference was to the detriment of Roma students. The study we conducted confirmed this difference.

Table 81. Dropout rate among sampled Roma and non-Roma students



School dropout among sampled Roma and non-Roma students

Student selection group Wave 1* CURRENT SITUATION

			CURRENT SITUATION		Total
			Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Dropped out of school	
Student selection group Wave 1	Non-Roma students	Count	494	38	532
		% within Student selection group Wave 1	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	56.4%	17.7%	48.8%
	Roma students	Count	382	177	559
		% within Student selection group Wave 1	68.3%	31.7%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	43.6%	82.3%	51.2%
Total	Count	876	215	1091	
	% within Student selection group Wave 1	80.3%	19.7%	100.0%	
	% within CURRENT SITUATION	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Only one in fourteen (7%) non-Roma students interviewed in both waves of the research dropped out, compared to almost one in three (31%) Roma children dropping out just two years after the initial interview. From another perspective, over 80% of the early school leavers from the two analysed samples are Roma students. In light of these results the higher risk of ESL among Roma students becomes irrefutable. Nonetheless, the main challenge is to identify the social mechanisms that explain the situation and identify solutions to reduce the existing gap. Other studies have also addressed this issue, but the available data were nearly as close to the ones extracted within this project. Therefore, the previous explanations have always been partial and the matter was never entirely resolved. This study offers the opportunity for real results providing the appropriate guidelines for school dropout prevention and ESL reducing educational policies.

What is the explanation for school dropout?

The starting point for the present research was a series of assumptions, some of which have already been mentioned in the previous sections, as possible causes for school dropout, as already highlighted in the specialized literature.

Limited family support is the basic cause behind one of the hypotheses predicting a high risk of dropping out. It may take the form of low educational capital of parents / guardians and, hence, reduced capacity to guide the student along the educational "maze". Family support can also be characterized by low cultural capital. For example, the number of books available in the household is an indicator of the student's family cultural capital, an aspect that according to previous studies represents a strong predictor of a child's



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cognitive skills - see the PISA study¹⁷.

An *unfriendly, non-inclusion school environment*, is another factor that predisposes to school dropout. Such an environment is reflected in the extent to which students enjoy going to school, the extent to which they feel integrated into the schoolmates group. In this respect we used the classroom seating arrangement indicator, since last row seating may be the consequence of a marginalization tendency. Non-attendance or low attendance of preschool educational kindergartens is another factor that may predispose to marginalization and school maladjustment, especially when there are situations of limited family support.

Another assumption was that *class performance* is also a school dropout predictor. This happens because on one hand the transition from one educational cycle to another depends on the grades and, on the other hand, the individual grades obtained by the student can make him / her feel comfortable or uncomfortable about school (they may influence the student's self-esteem, his / her level of social integration, his / her understanding of school participation). Basically they represent the self-assessment tool for a student, the indicator for possible academic performance, the benchmark for the student's confidence in his / her ability to organize his / her life around the educational process. Career and future life course can be organized based on academic success and educational certifications or independently from school. The grades obtained by the student are also an indicator in building this representation and valuing education itself. On the other hand grades may simply be the reflection of a certain social situation the student is experiencing (family circumstances, economic aspects etc.) and that may actually be the true cause behind school abandonment. In order to verify which of these perspectives is more accurate, it is necessary to resort to the statistical regression technique .

The hypothesis of *dropout rate increasing in the transition process from one education stage to another* due to specific conditions, high economic and integration difficulties in adapting to a new school environment, outside the community, was also investigated. School dropout is expected to be higher at the end of the 8th grade and among Roma students and students from rural areas.

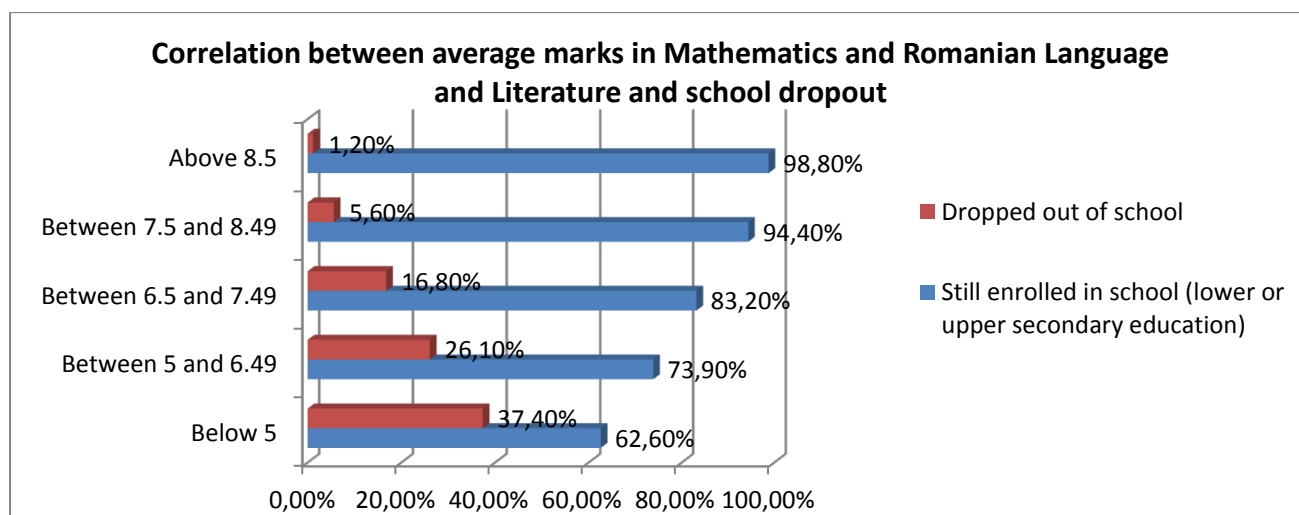
The research also tested the hypothesis that *belonging to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups* could be an explanation for the high rate of school dropout. The characteristics of the vulnerable groups in Romania, namely Roma children, children from monoparental families, children with disabilities, children from poor families or families with a low educational stock, children from rural areas, are well-known and stipulated in the programming public policy documents.

¹⁷ <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>

The results largely confirm the hypotheses stated above.

First of all, data show an association between the quality of the grades obtained and school dropout risk - see the chart below. Therefore, the higher the average grade in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature, the lower the risk of school dropout before completing the compulsory education (10 grades). For students with an average grade in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature above 8.5 the dropout risk was virtually zero, but among students with average grades between 5 and 6.5 the dropout rate was as high as 26%, equivalent to one in four students.

Table 82. Correlation between average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature and school dropout



Correlation between average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature and school dropout

Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries* CURRENT SITUATION

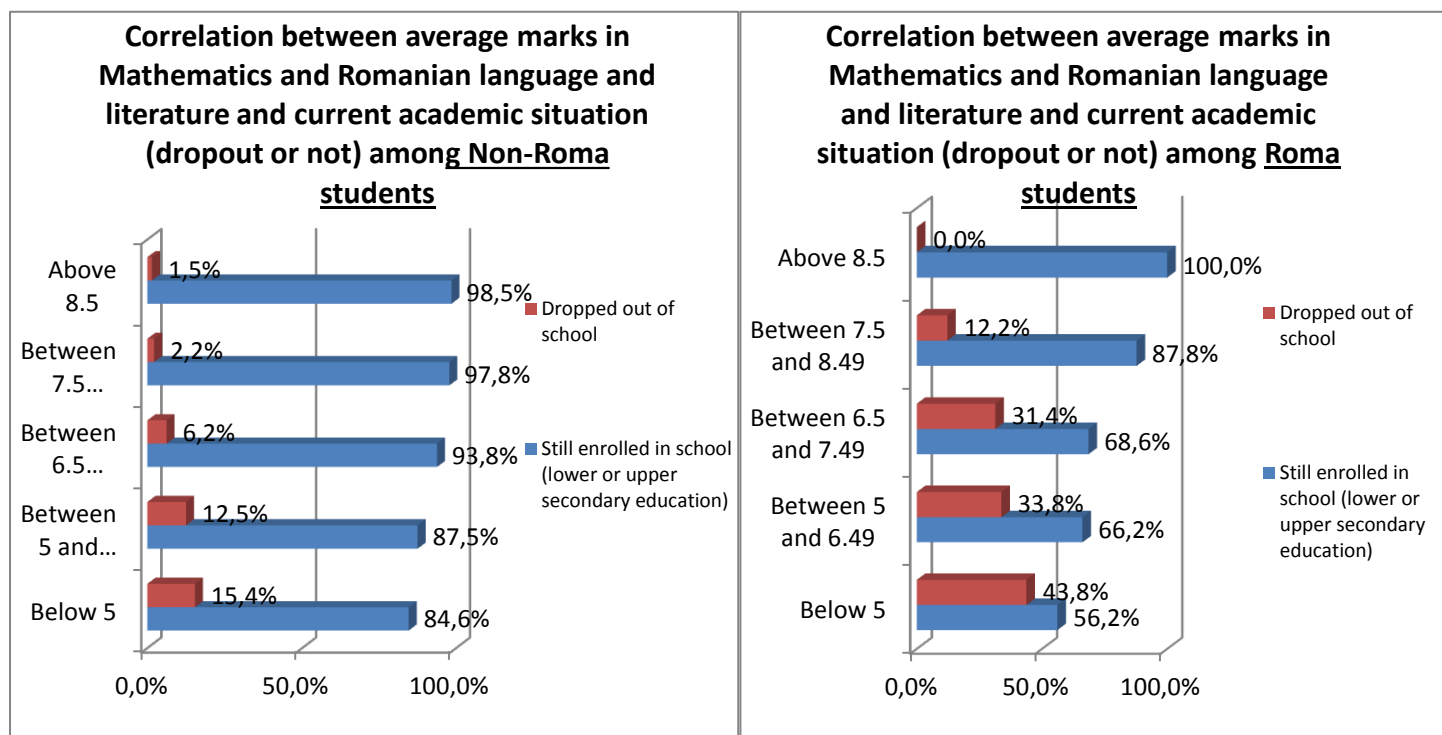
			CURRENT SITUATION		Total
			Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Dropped out of school	
Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	Below 5	Count % within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	72 62.6%	43 37.4%	115 100.0%

Between 5 and 6.49	Count % within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	343 73.9%	121 26.1%	464 100.0%
Between 6.5 and 7.49	Count % within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	139 83.2%	28 16.8%	167 100.0%
Between 7.5 and 8.49	Count % within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	134 94.4%	8 5.6%	142 100.0%
Above 6.5	Count % within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	161 98.8%	2 1.2%	163 100.0%
Total	Count % within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	849 80.8%	202 19.2%	1051 100.0%

Normally, grades should not lead to abandonment unless they are below 5 and forbid the transition to the next educational stage. Even so, students can still continue their education by sitting a special exam on the subject they failed, by repeating the entire academic year etc. The data, however, show a high rate of dropout among students with grades from 5 to 7.5. For these cases there must be other explanations, outside the discomfort or school marginalization, that could lead to low grades.

As it can be seen in the table below, the situation is different when the analysis is being ran only on the Roma, respectively non-Roma groups of students. Among Roma students with average grades under 5 in 2011 the share of dropouts was of 43.8%, compared to 15.4% among non-Roma students. This shows that the impact of school performance on school dropout is much higher among Roma students - probably a more acute effect of lack of family and school support in improving the students' school situation and easing the scholastic integration of Roma students experiencing school difficulties.

Table 83. Correlation between average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature and current school situation



Data show that school dropout is higher among Roma students, compared to non-Roma students, even when their grades are above 5 (except for those with average grades above 8.5 in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature). One interpretation of these data is that Roma students with the intellectual potential to continue their education drop out of school because of their social conditions or the non-inclusive school environment – basically, factors that go beyond their personal control. An illustrative example is that of Roma students with average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature between 7.5 and 8.5 that recorded a dropout rate of 12% - compared to a 2% rate among non-Roma students; the dropout rate among this group of Roma students is similar to that of non-Roma students with average grades below 6.5.



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Table 84. Correlation between average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature and current school situation (dropout or attendance) among non-Roma students

Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries* CURRENT SITUATION

			CURRENT SITUATION		Total
			Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Dropped out of school	
Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	Below 5	Count	22	4	26
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	84.6%	15.4%	100.0%
	Between 5 and 6.49	Count	147	21	168
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	87.5%	12.5%	100.0%
	Between 6.5 and 7.49	Count	91	6	97
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	93.8%	6.2%	100.0%
	Between 7.5 and 8.49	Count	91	2	93
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	97.8%	2.2%	100.0%
	Above 6.5	Count	130	2	132
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	98.5%	1.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	481	35	516
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	93.2%	6.8%	100.0%

Table 85. Correlation between average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature and current school situation (dropout or attendance) among Roma students

Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries* CURRENT SITUATION

			CURRENT SITUATION		Total
			Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Dropped out of school	
Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of	Below 5	Count	50	39	89
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	56.2%	43.8%	100.0%
	Between 5 and 6.49	Count	196	100	296
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds defined by the selection of beneficiaries	66.2%	33.8%	100.0%



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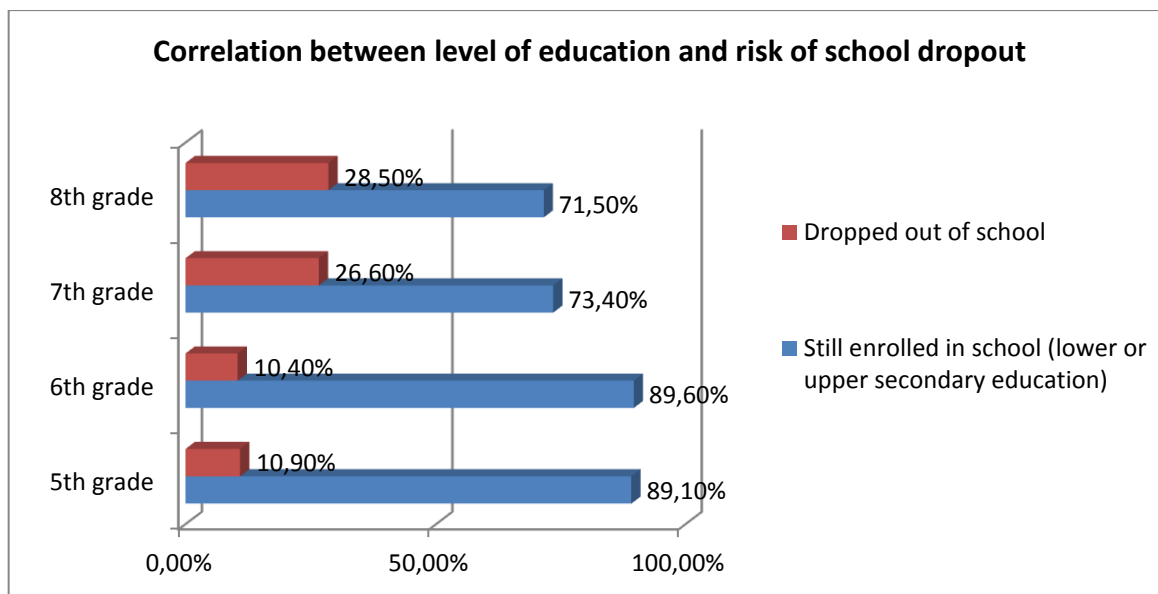
beneficiaries	defined by the selection of beneficiaries				
	Between 6.5 and 7.49	Count	48	22	70
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds	68.6%	31.4%	100.0%
	defined by the selection of beneficiaries				
	Between 7.5 and 8.49	Count	43	6	49
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds	87.8%	12.2%	100.0%
	defined by the selection of beneficiaries				
	Above 6.5	Count	31	0	31
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds	100.0%	0%	100.0%
	defined by the selection of beneficiaries				
Total		Count	368	167	535
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature in thresholds	68.8%	31.2%	100.0%
defined by the selection of beneficiaries					

The data show that the dropout rate among Roma students with grades between 6.5 and 7.5 was 31%, compared to only 6% among the non-Roma students in a similar situation. In this case the effect of belonging to a vulnerable group (Roma students) is evident, thus confirming another one of our assumptions. However, in both situations remains the hypothesis of the influence of grades on the risk of ESL.

Theoretically nowadays a student can continue his / her high school education until the 10th grade with minimum passing grades (5 being the minimum passing grade in the Romanian system). The national final examination is no longer an impediment in acceding to higher secondary education, as long as the students who failed to pass on a certain subject, but graduate from the 8th grade and sit on the special examination session, can enrol in upper secondary schools on the vacant seats – this is currently happening in Bucharest in certain less popular high schools where there are teachers with vacant seats in their classroom and where students are enrolled, despite not having sat the national final examination, provided that they completed the lower secondary education. The cohorts of students surveyed in the first wave in 2011 were enrolled in 5th to 8th grades, so in 2013 they were still within the range of compulsory education (10 grades) – namely the students enrolled in the 8th grade back in 2011 that should have been in 10th grade in 2013. Naturally, the question that comes to mind is if school dropout simply derives from students' inability to obtain the minimum passing grade or whether there are other possible explanations for this situation. If obtaining the minimum passing grade were the main problem, then school dropout should be the same each year – assuming that the degree of scholastic difficulty is similar for each educational level - or it should increase with each educational stage – once again, assuming that the degree of difficulty increases

with each educational stage. Therefore, dropout rate among 6th graders should be less or similar to that of 7th graders, among 8th graders higher or similar to that of 7th graders and so on. But is that really the situation? What do the data say?

Table 86. Correlation between level of education and risk of school dropout



Correlation between level of education and risk of school dropout

What grade are you in?* CURRENT SITUATION

			CURRENT SITUATION		
			Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Dropped out of school	Total
What grade are you in?	5th grade	Count	212	26	238
		% within What grade are you in?	89.1%	10.9%	100.0%
	6th grade	Count	242	28	270
		% within What grade are you in?	89.6%	10.4%	100.0%
	7th grade	Count	199	72	271
		% within What grade are you in?	73.4%	26.6%	100.0%
	8th grade	Count	223	89	312
		% within What grade are you in?	71.5%	28.5%	100.0%
Total	Count	876	215	1091	
	% within What grade are you in?	80.3%	19.7%	100.0%	

The data support the idea that the main cause for school dropout is determined by the difficulty of obtaining the minimum passing grade 5. For the cohorts of students enrolled in the 5th and 6th grades (back in 2011) the dropout rate should be relatively similar to that of students enrolled in the 7th and 8th grades. However, there is a sharp difference in terms of dropout rate between the two cited cohorts (5th and 6th on



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one hand, 7th and 8th on the other hand). What is the explanation behind this? The main difference lies in the fact that the younger generations have not yet made the leap to high school, while 2011 7th and 8th graders have already experienced the high school education by 2013 (or they could have experienced it). Essentially the transition from lower secondary education to higher secondary education is a milestone for a large share of students who fail to pass despite their capacity to obtain the minimum passing grade required for the transition.

Example of a statistical analysis:

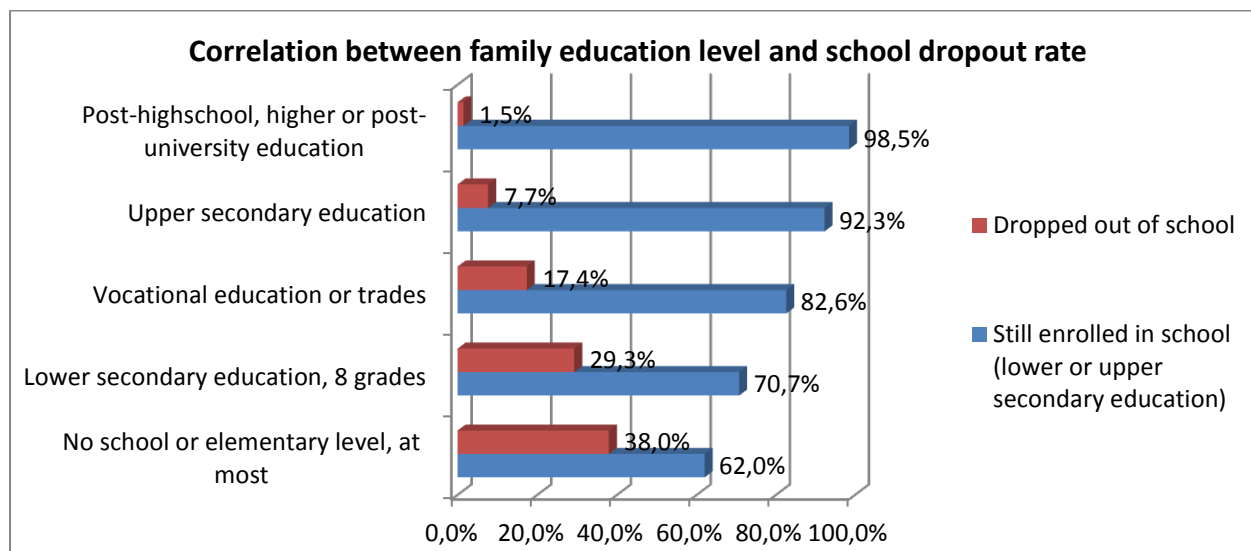
Dropout probability for 8th graders: 0399

Dropout probability for 5th graders: 0122

Odds ratio: $0.399/0.122 = 3.27$. This means that the risk of drop out over the next two years among the 8th graders from the sampled schools where the study was conducted in 2011 was 3.27 times higher than for the students who were enrolled in the 5th grade back in 2011. The explanation lies in the difficulty of completing the 9th grade which represents a harsh filter in the educational process. A similar difference in dropout risk can be encountered when comparing 8th graders with 6th graders. However, there is no significant difference regarding school dropout risk among 8th graders and 7th graders (ODDS RATIO = 1). It is a clear indicator that school abandonment actually happens during the first year of high school.

Data confirm that the dropout rate depends on the family support. Hence, students whose parents completed the upper secondary or even higher education show a significantly lower probability of dropping out than students whose parents have a primary education level, at most (ODDS RATIO = 40).

Table 87. Correlation between family education level and dropout rate



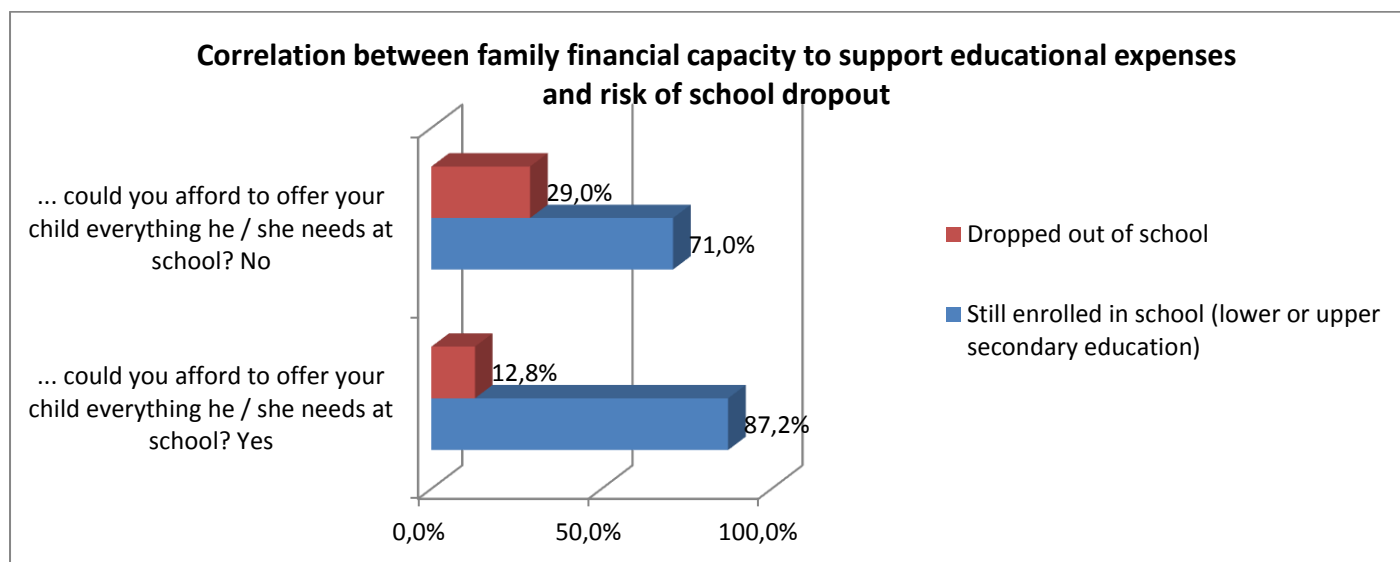
Correlation between family education level and dropout rate

Parents education* CURRENT SITUATION

			CURRENT SITUATION		
			Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Drooped out of school	Total
Parents education	No school or elementary level, at most	Count	101	62	163
		% within Parents education	62.0%	38.0%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	11.5%	28.8%	15.0%
	Lower secondary education, 8 grades	Count	183	76	259
		% within Parents education	70.7%	29.3%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	20.9%	35.3%	23.8%
	Vocational education or trades	Count	251	53	304
		% within Parents education	82.6%	17.4%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	28.7%	24.7%	27.9%
	Upper secondary education	Count	274	23	297
		% within Parents education	92.3%	7.7%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	31.3%	10.7%	27.2%
	Post-high school, higher or post-university education	Count	66	1	67
		% within Parents education	98.5%	1.5%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	7.5%	.5%	6.1%
Total	Count		875	215	1090
	% within Parents education		80.3%	19.7%	100.0%
	% within CURRENT SITUATION		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Data also show that students whose parents stated that they could not afford to give the child everything he / she needs at school have a significantly higher rate of dropout compared to those whose parents can afford to provide everything the child needs at school.

Table 88. Correlation between family financial capacity to support educational expenses and risk of school dropout

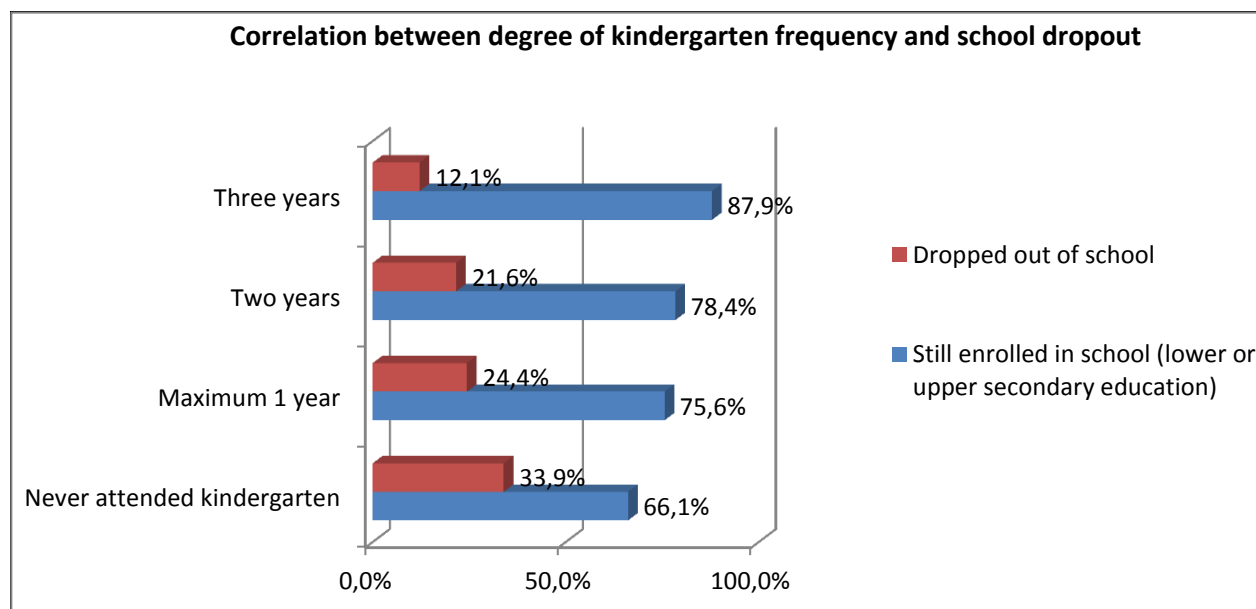


Considering your financial situation, could you afford to offer your child everything he / she needs at school? * CURRENT SITUATION

			CURRENT SITUATION		Total
			Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Dropped out of school	
Considering your financial situation, could you afford to offer your child everything he / she needs at school?	YES	Count	551	81	632
		% within Considering your financial situation, could you afford to offer your child everything he / she needs at school?	87.2%	12.8%	100.0%
	NO	Count	323	132	455
		% within Considering your financial situation, could you afford to offer your child everything he / she needs at school?	71.0%	29.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	874	213	1087
		% within Considering your financial situation, could you afford to offer your child everything he / she needs at school?	80.4%	19.6%	100.0%

The fact that preschool education influences heavily the educational process of a students is already considered a truism. Therefore, a higher dropout rate is expected among children with fewer years of preschool education attendance. The survey data confirmed this assumption: the dropout rate was significantly higher among children who never attended kindergarten compared with those who attended it for three years.

Table 89. Correlation between kindergarten attendance and school dropout

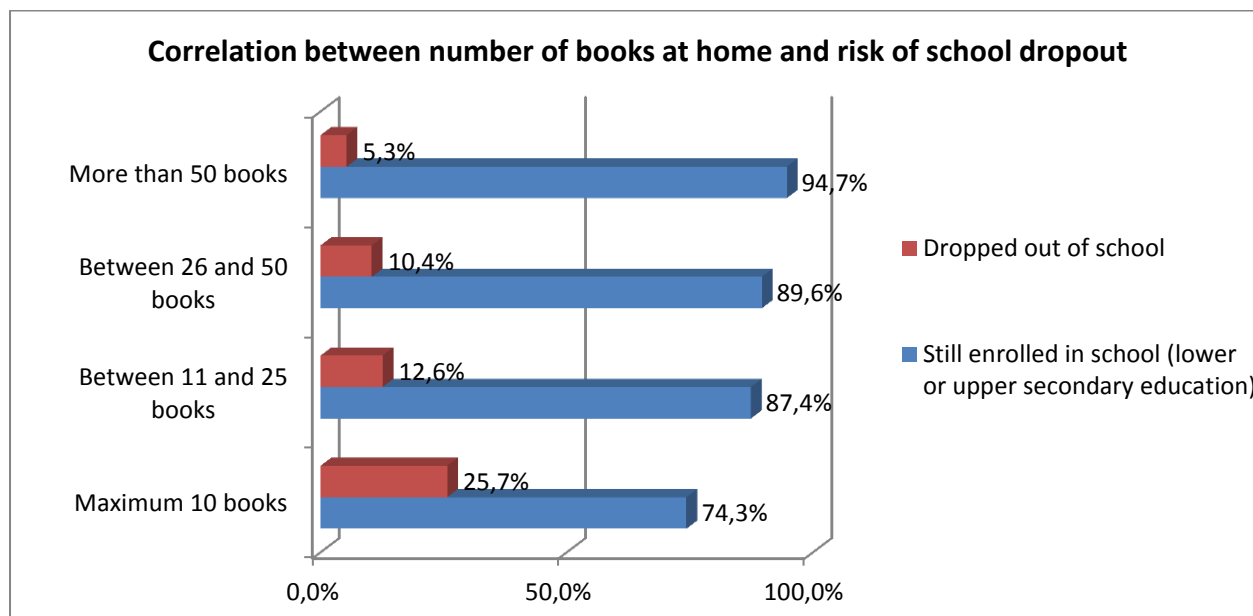


kindergartenattendancesstudent* CURRENT SITUATION

			CURRENT SITUATION		
			Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Drooped out of school	Total
kindergartenattendancesstudent	Never attended kindergarten	Count	113	58	171
		% within kindergartenattendancesstudent	66.1%	33.9%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	12.9%	27.8%	15.8%
	Maximum 1 year	Count	93	30	123
		% within kindergartenattendancesstudent	75.6%	24.4%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	10.6%	14.4%	11.4%
	Two years	Count	211	58	269
		% within kindergartenattendancesstudent	78.4%	21.6%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	24.1%	27.8%	24.8%
	Three years	Count	457	63	520
		% within kindergartenattendancesstudent	87.9%	12.1%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	52.3%	30.1%	24.8%
Total	Count	874	209	1083	
	% within kindergartenattendancesstudent	80.7%	19.3%	100.0%	
	% within CURRENT SITUATION	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

The relevance of the cultural capital of the family (indicated by the number of books in the family) for the student's school performance and the development of his / her cognitive abilities has already been proven by previous studies conducted in this field. Our study confirmed it, as students with less than 10 books at home (other than textbooks) had a higher dropout rate than those having more than 50 books at home.

Table 90. Correlation between the number of books at home and risk of school dropout



Number of books at home corrected according to parents and students' answers* CURRENT SITUATION

			CURRENT SITUATION		
			Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Drooped out of school	Total
Number of books at home corrected according to parents and students' answers	Maximum 10 books	Count	482	167	649
		% Number of books at home corrected according to parents and students' answers	74.3%	25.7%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	55.5%	79.5%	60.1%
	Between 11 and 25 books	Count	167	24	191
		% Number of books at home corrected according to parents and students' answers	87.4%	12.6%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	19.2%	11.4%	17.7%
	Between 26 and 50 books	Count	12	13	125
		% Number of books at home corrected according to parents and students' answers	89.6%	10.4%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	12.9%	6.2%	11.6%
	More than 50 books	Count	108	6	114
		% Number of books at home corrected according to parents and students' answers	94.7%	5.3%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION		2.9%	10.6%
Total		Count	869	210	1079
		% Number of books at home corrected according to parents and students' answers	80.5%	19.5%	100.0%
			100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION			

One of the key issues addressed in the research considered the importance of belonging to a



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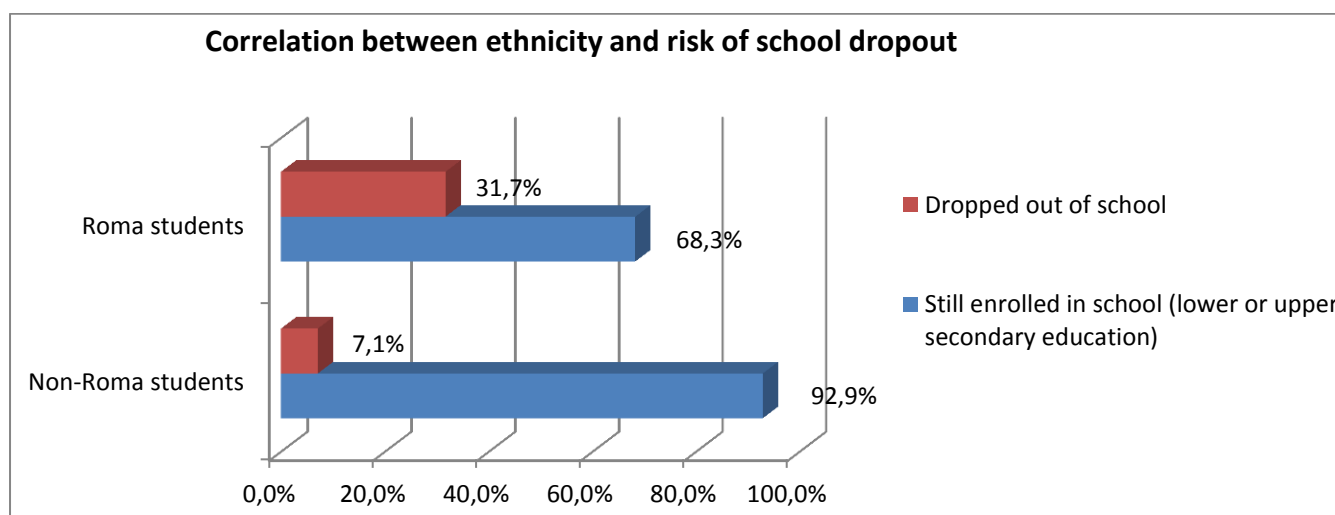
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vulnerable group in relation to school dropout. The data show, without the shadow of a doubt, that the Roma students sampled in 2011 had a significantly higher dropout rate than the non-Roma students, two years later. Thus, about one in three (31%) Roma students interviewed in 2011 has become an early school leaver in 2013, compared with one in fourteen (7%) non-Roma students - see the table below. The significance of the correlation between ethnicity and dropout risk remained even after controlling the effect of other relevant socio-demographic variables.

Table 91. Correlation between ethnicity and risk of school dropout



Example of a statistical analysis:

Dropout probability for Roma students: 0.46

Dropout probability for non-Roma students: 0.07

Odds ratio: $0.46/0.07 = 6.5$. This means that the risk of drop out over the next two years among the Roma students from the sampled schools where the study was conducted in 2011 was 6.5 times higher than for the non-Roma students enrolled in the same schools back in 2011.

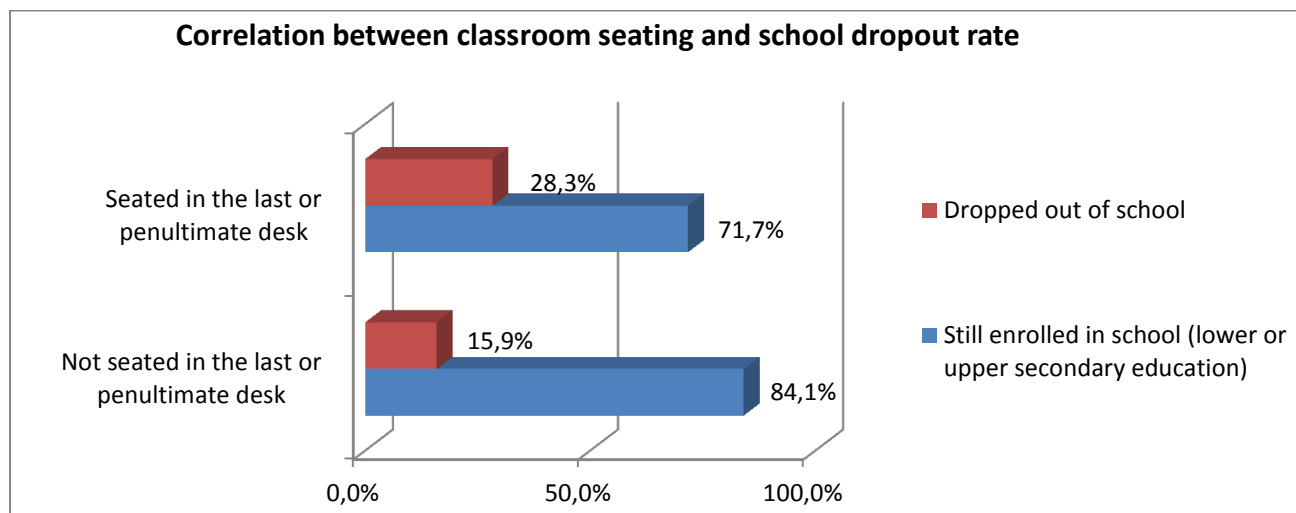
Correlation between ethnicity and risk of school dropout

Student selection group* CURRENT SITUATION

			CURRENT SITUATION		Total
			Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Dropped out of school	
Student selection group	Non-Roma students	Count	494	38	532
		% within Student selection group	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	56.4%	17.7%	48.8%
	Roma students	Count	382	177	559
		% within Student selection group	68.3%	31.7%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	43.6%	82.3%	51.2%
Total	Count		876	215	1091
	% within Student selection group		80.3%	19.7%	100.0%
	% within CURRENT SITUATION		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The study also examined the influence of school environment on the school dropout rate. A school environment perceived as unfriendly or marginalizing favours truancy and, further on, school dropout. An indicator for characterizing the student's positioning within the school environment was his / her sitting in the classroom, which allowed for a dissociation of the sampled students in two large categories: the students sitting in the back of the class and the others. Our results showed a noteworthy association between the risk of dropout and the classroom seating arrangement – students occupying the last rows of seats present a higher risk of dropout. This indicator we resorted to is a new one, as it hasn't been used in previous studies, but we strongly feel that it should be taken into consideration and tested in further studies. Occupying the back seats in the classroom may reflect a marginalizing, more or less careless or superficial treatment from the teachers (less concern for class stimulation, student involvement, active learning etc.).

Table 92. Correlation between classroom seating and school dropout rate



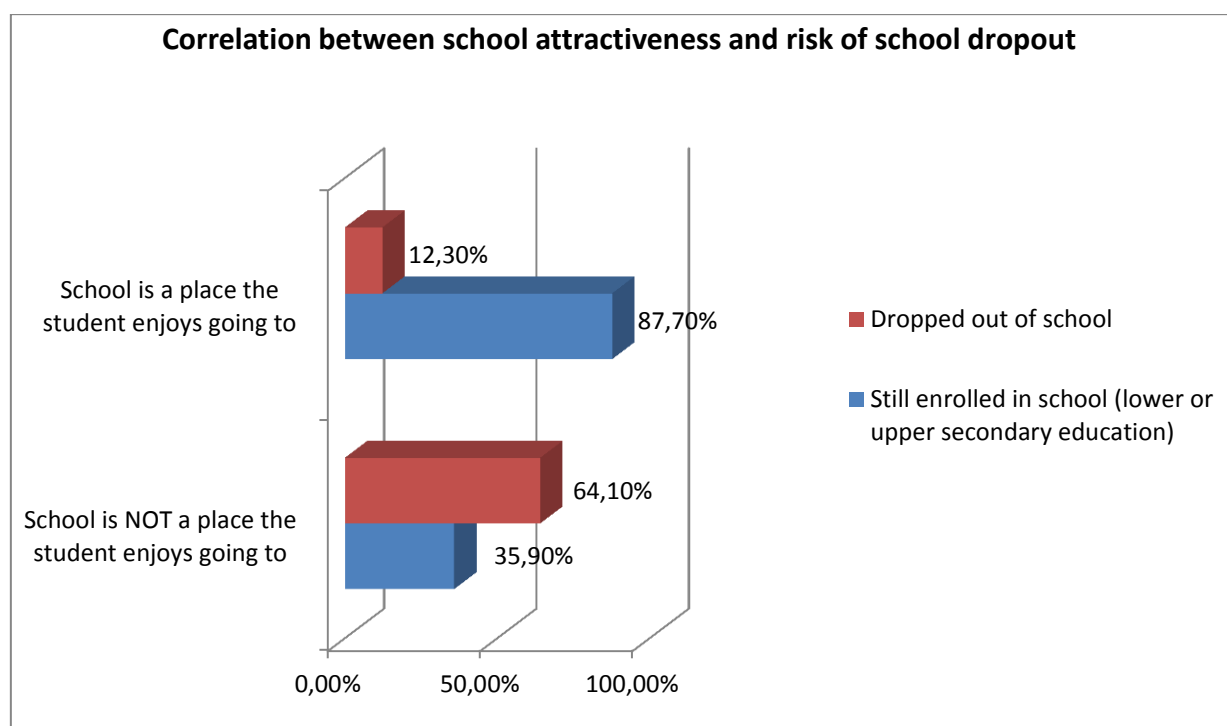
last or penultimate desk* CURRENT SITUATION

			CURRENT SITUATION		
			Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Dropped out of school	Total
last or penultimate desk	Not seated in the last or penultimate desk	Count	649	123	772
		% within last or penultimate desk	84.1%	15.9%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	74.4%	58.3%	71.3%
	Seated in the last or penultimate desk	Count	223	88	311
		% within last or penultimate desk	71.7%	28.3%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	25.6%	41.7%	28.7%
Total	Count	872	211	1083	
	% within last or penultimate desk	80.5%	19.5%	100.0%	
	% within CURRENT SITUATION	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Another indicator reflecting students perception towards school environment that we resorted to was the degree to which students like to go to school. Generally speaking adults can choose between one activity or another, based on the pleasure or comfort given by that particular activity; it is only natural to avoid activities or situations that make us feel uncomfortable. As adults we have this option, that of choosing our working place, our living area, our group of friends, the place where we spend our free time etc. When school is not perceived as a friendly place, when it fails to provide a comfortable setting and to arouse the student's interest, then his / her only alternative is either to drop out of school or "reluctantly" keep attending it (the alternative of transferring to another class or school and actually improving the situation is quite rare). The school can provide high quality courses, the teachers can provide high quality academic

knowledge based on their flawless teaching skills, but the school can still be perceived as an unfriendly, uncomfortable environment for certain students or categories of students (such an environment does not necessarily have to be generated by teachers, sometimes classmates can do this through their behaviour and attitude, however teachers remain responsible in this case for allowing it). This aspect regarding the degree to which school actors manage to allure students, to arouse their interest, to ensure a friendly environment is less valued during school inspections and educational quality assessment. Nonetheless, the research revealed that whether or not students like going to school is a relevant factor for school dropout – the dropout risk is higher among students who do not like going to school.

Table 93. Correlation between school attractiveness and risk of school dropout



The initial form of the item: ***What do you think? Is the school where you are learning a place where you like to go?*** Available answers: YES / NO

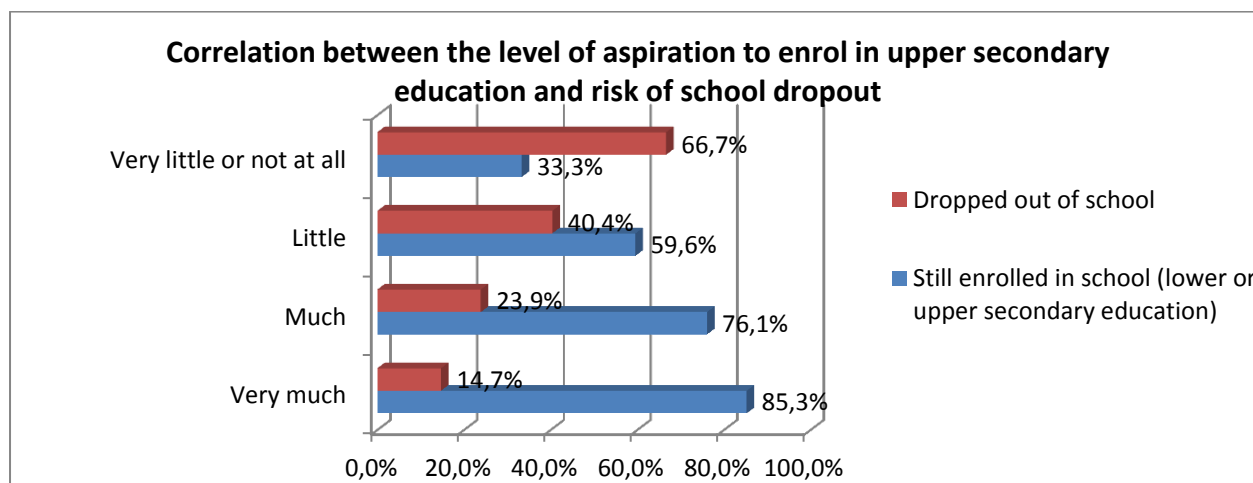
likesschoolFIN* CURRENT SITUATION

			CURRENT SITUATION		
			Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Dropped out of school	Total
likesschoolFIN	School is NOT a place the student enjoys going to	Count	56	100	156
		% within likesschoolFIN	35.9%	64.1%	100.0%
		% within CURRENT SITUATION	6.4%	46.5%	14.3%

School is a place the student enjoys going to	Count	820	115	935
	% within likesschoolFIN	87.7%	12.3%	100.0%
	% within CURRENT SITUATION	93.6%	53.5%	85.7%
Total	Count	876	215	1091
	% within likesschoolFIN	80.3%	19.7%	100.0%
	% within CURRENT SITUATION	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The study also showed that students who want to continue their upper secondary education were less likely to drop out of school. This is only natural, since the desire to continue the education process is associated with an increased motivation to learn, to attend school and to assimilate knowledge. It should be bore in mind that both family and school (teachers, school counsellors, schoolmates) may influence the degree to which students want to continue their studies. One source of influence may originate in the media and the prevalent successful social models. As long as school attendance is part of the student's life project, it becomes a cardinal point in the student's future development and his willingness to further his education is high. As one of the previous analyses indicated, school abandonment occurs among students with grades above 5 as well, despite their performance that should be sufficient to motivate them to further their education. One of the school dropout ingredients in such cases is certainly the students' lack of motivation to continue his / her studies.

Table 94. Correlation between level of aspiration to enrol in upper secondary education and risk of school dropout



How much do you want to enrol in upper secondary education?* CURRENT SITUATION

		CURRENT SITUATION		Total
		Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Dropped out of school	
Very much	Count	649	112	761
How much do you want to enrol in upper	% within How much do you want to enrol in	85.3%	14.7%	100.0%



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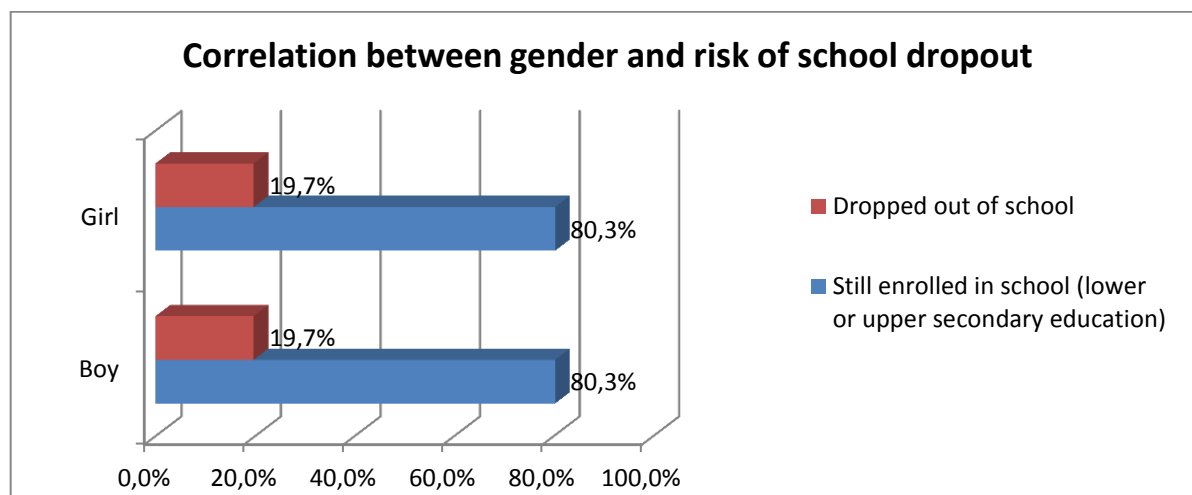
secondary education?	upper secondary education?	75.0%	52.3%	70.5%
	% within CURRENT SITUATION			
Much	Count	169	53	222
	% within How much do you want to enrol in upper secondary education?	76.1%	23.9%	100.0%
	% within CURRENT SITUATION	19.5%	24.8%	20.6%
Little	Count	34	23	57
	% within How much do you want to enrol in upper secondary education?	59.6%	40.4%	100.0%
	% within CURRENT SITUATION	3.9%	10.7%	5.3%
Very little	Count	13	26	39
	% within How much do you want to enrol in upper secondary education?	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
	% within CURRENT SITUATION	1.5%	12.1%	3.6%
Total	Count	865	214	1079
	% within How much do you want to enrol in upper secondary education?	80.2%	19.4%	100.0%
	% within CURRENT SITUATION	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The gender effect on school dropout was also tested. The data showed no direct association between gender and risk of dropout among sampled students. The conclusion remains the same even when the analysis is being ran separately for each subsample defined by the ethnic criteria (group of Roma / non-Roma students). This seems to contradict the stereotype, frequently invoked in the public space, of increased risk of school abandonment due to the custom of early marriage among Roma girls. But when the variable is introduced within the regression model and several relevant variables are being controlled (such as individual class grades, the financial capacity of the family to support the student throughout school, the students' feeling regarding school attendance, the student's educational level) the genre issue becomes a variable significantly associated with school dropout. The explanation could actually be that there are different variables favouring school abandonment among girls and, respectively, boys, but these variables act differently, thus cancelling each other. Consequently, on one hand girls obtain higher grades - and this reduces the risk of abandonment, but on the other hand girls from families with a difficult financial situation or who perceive school as an unfriendly environment have a higher risk of dropping out of school than boys experiencing the same situation - faced with factors that predispose to school abandonment, girls tend to drop out of school easier than boys.

It should be noted that the national ESL rate is higher among boys than girls (according to Eurostat data ESL rate in 2012 among young people aged 18 to 24 who were not enrolled in any type of education was 18% among males and 16.7% among females). From this point of view the relatively similar dropout rate among our sampled groups of boys and girls actually reflects a weaker position of girls in relation to their national dropout rate. However, the relationship between gender and dropout remains a theme that

deserves further investigation.

Table 95. Correlation between the gender of the respondents and risk of school dropout

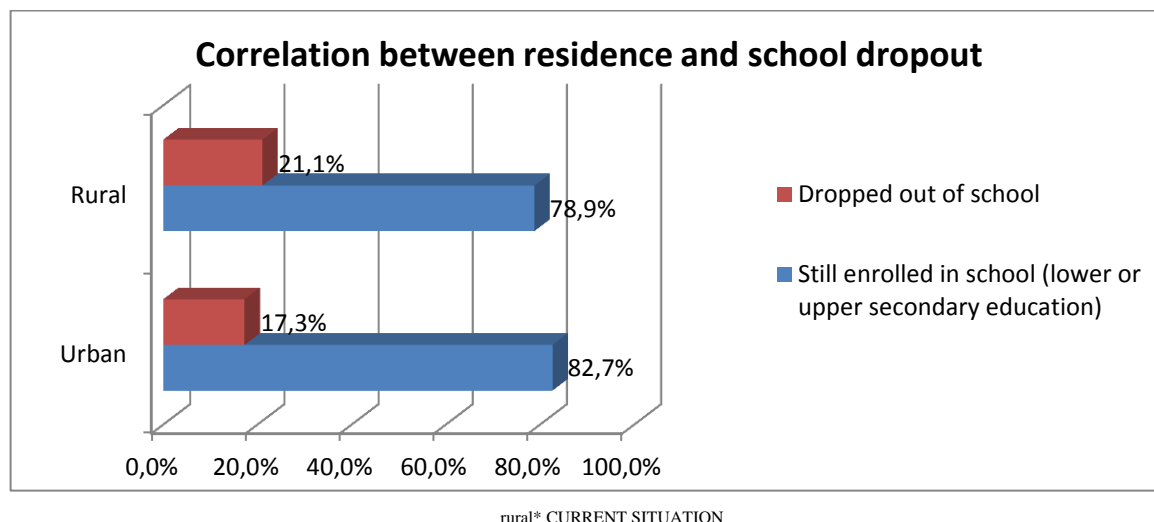


feminine gender* CURRENT SITUATION

			CURRENT SITUATION		Total
			Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Dropped out of school	
feminine gender	Boy	Count	440	108	548
		% within feminine gender	80.3%	19.7%	100.0%
	Girl	Count	436	107	543
		% within feminine gender	80.3%	19.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	876	215	1091
		% within feminine gender	50.3%	19.7%	100.0%

The risk of school abandonment among students from rural areas compared to those from urban area was also examined. The interpretation of the results must also consider the research universe and the profile of the sampled schools. As already stated the interviewed students were selected from schools with a significant percentage of Roma students (at least 5-10%). Experience in working with such schools also taught us that they are usually located in the urban periphery areas, in marginal urban areas, in rather small cities. Consequently, the urban / rural comparison in our study did not cover the whole urban and rural areas, as national polls do, but only parts of the two areas – namely, the schools where the percentage of Roma students is significant. Under the circumstance it is understandable that according to our research there is no significant difference between students enrolled in urban and rural schools in terms of dropout rate. The conclusion that could be drawn is that schools with a significant number of Roma students have similar profiles and dropout rates, regardless of their rural or urban location.

Table 96. Correlation between residence and school dropout



			CURRENT SITUATION		Total
			Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Dropped out of school	
rural	,00	Count	326	68	394
		% within rural	82.7%	17.3%	100.0%
	1.00	Count	550	147	697
		% within rural	78.9%	21.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	876	215	1091
		% within rural	50.3%	19.7%	100.0%

Up to this point the set of results were presented as tables of association between dropout rate and certain relevant variables. One of the methodological and interpretation problems of such correlation tables is that they can hide significant "false" relationship because of lack of control over the effect of other relevant variables. That is precisely the reason why we developed a logistic regression analysis including the independent variables presented to describe school dropout (we ran a logistic regression because the variable is a categorical one) - see the table below. The analysis shows that parental education, ethnicity, classroom seating, family cultural capital, school perception in terms of friendly / unfriendly environment, academic performance, student's educational level and willingness to continue the upper secondary education remain relevant variables in correlation with ESL. Among them the most relevant in explaining school dropout are: the degree to which students perceive school as a place where they like to go, ethnicity (Roma students definitely are at a higher risk for dropout) and the educational level of students (the dropout percentage is significantly higher among students who have completed their lower secondary education and have experienced or could have experienced the upper secondary education than among those who have not



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yet completed their lower secondary education).

This finding translates into an important conclusion for educational policies: school dropout derives from family characteristics (such as parental education, cultural capital etc.), but also, and mainly, from mechanisms originating in characteristics of the school environment (school attractiveness, school's ability to provide students with a friendly, familiar, comfortable and interesting environment), ethnicity and the challenge of transition from lower to upper secondary education. Policies aiming to tackle ESL should focus more on these issues. The good news is that public intervention can influence and recalibrate, if there is a will to this effect, the most important mechanisms causing school dropout.

Table 97. Logistic regression analysis of dropout mechanisms

Variables in the Equation						
	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Educationlowersensecondaryparents	-.328	.300	1.202	1	.273	.720
Educationvocationalparents	-.384	.330	1.350	1	.245	.681
Educationupperhighschoolparents	-.908	.393	5.350	1	.021	.403
Roma	1.159	.280	17.123	1	.000	3.187
Rural	.275	.228	1.462	1	.227	1.317
Lastpenultimateseat	.409	.224	3.327	1	.068	1.505
Kindergartenoneyear	-.480	.349	1.889	1	.169	.619
Kindergartentwoyears	.327	.310	1.115	1	.291	1.387
Kindergartenthreeyears	-.104	.303	.118	1	.731	.901
Between11and25booksathome	.010	.315	.001	1	.974	1.010
Morethan25booksathome	-.709	.344	4.236	1	.040	.492
LikesschoolFIN	-2.458	.258	90.804	1	.000	.086
Averagegradebelow5	2.123	.803	6.985	1	.008	8.360
Averagegrade5_6.5	1.979	.760	6.782	1	.009	7.233
Averagegrade 6.5_7.5	1.843	.784	5.524	1	.019	6.317
Averagegrade 7.5_8.5	1.035	.840	1.515	1	.218	2.814
Grade5	-1.498	.330	20.580	1	.000	.224
Grade6	-1.890	.326	33.577	1	.000	.151
Grade7	-.361	.256	1.977	1	.160	.697
Lessornowishhighschool	.435	.226	3.707	1	.054	1.544
Familycansupporteducation	-.528	.224	5.583	1	.018	.590
Femininegender	.431	.216	3.987	1	.046	1.539
Constant	-1.247	.934	1.783	1	.182	.287



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Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Educationlowersencondaryparents	-.328	.300	1.202	1	.273	.720
Educationvocationalparents	-.384	.330	1.350	1	.245	.681
Educationupperhighschoolparents	-.908	.393	5.350	1	.021	.403
Roma	1.159	.280	17.123	1	.000	3.187
Rural	.275	.228	1.462	1	.227	1.317
Lastpenultimateseat	.409	.224	3.327	1	.068	1.505
Kindergartenoneyear	-.480	.349	1.889	1	.169	.619
Kindergartentwoyears	.327	.310	1.115	1	.291	1.387
Kindergartenthreeyears	-.104	.303	.118	1	.731	.901
Between11and25booksathome	.010	.315	.001	1	.974	1.010
Morethan25booksathome	-.709	.344	4.236	1	.040	.492
LikesschoolFIN	-2.458	.258	90.804	1	.000	.086
Averagegradebelow5	2.123	.803	6.985	1	.008	8.360
Averagegrade5_6.5	1.979	.760	6.782	1	.009	7.233
Averagegrade 6.5_7.5	1.843	.784	5.524	1	.019	6.317
Averagegrade 7.5_8.5	1.035	.840	1.515	1	.218	2.814
Grade5	-1.498	.330	20.580	1	.000	.224
Grade6	-1.890	.326	33.577	1	.000	.151
Grade7	-.361	.256	1.977	1	.160	.697
Lessornowishhighschool	.435	.226	3.707	1	.054	1.544
Familycansupporteducation	-.528	.224	5.583	1	.018	.590
Femininegender	.431	.216	3.987	1	.046	1.539
Constant	-1.247	.934	1.783	1	.182	.287

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: educationlowersencondaryparents, educationvocationalparents, educationupperhighschoolparents, Roma, rural, lastpenultimateseat, kindergartenoneyear, kindergartentwoyears, kindergartenthreeyears, between11and25booksathome, morethan25booksathome, likesschoolFIN, averagegradebelow5, averagegrade5_6.5, averagegrade 6.5_7.5, averagegrade 7.5_8.5, grade5, grade6, grade7, lessornowishhighschool, familycansupporteducation, femininegender

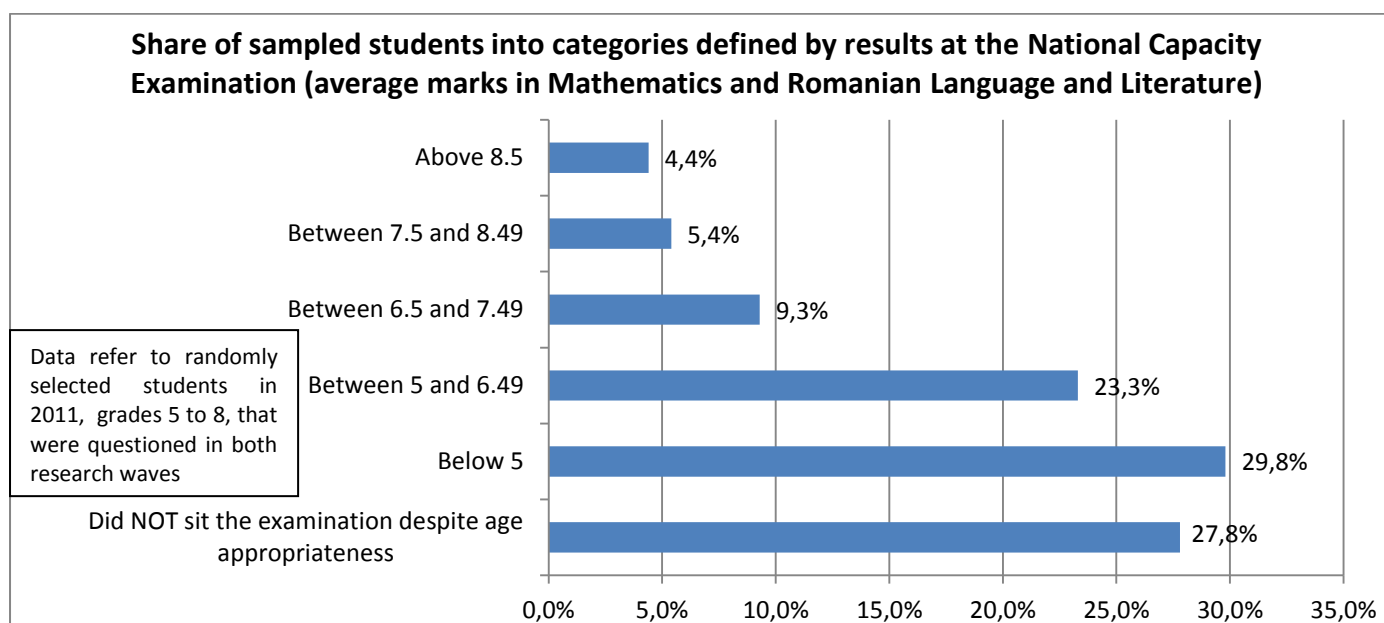
School results. School performance manifestation among different categories of students

Results from the National Capacity Examination

The analysis will focus on the scores attained by the randomly selected and interviewed students in both research waves at the National Capacity Examination. The sample designed in 2011 for Wave 1 included students from all secondary education grades – grades 5 to 10. Consequently, three cohorts of

students – grades 6 to 8 - have hitherto sat the National Capacity Examination. The data below relate to them. The sample used in the survey also included a cohort of 5th grade students, representing 21.6% of the total sample. The students were grouped into categories according to certain intervals predefined by the result. The selection of the intervals was similar to the one used in the methodology of selection of beneficiaries. In this manner they provide a synthetic image of how the grades obtained by the sampled students are distributed - see the chart below .

Table 98. Share of sampled students into categories defined by the National Capacity Examination

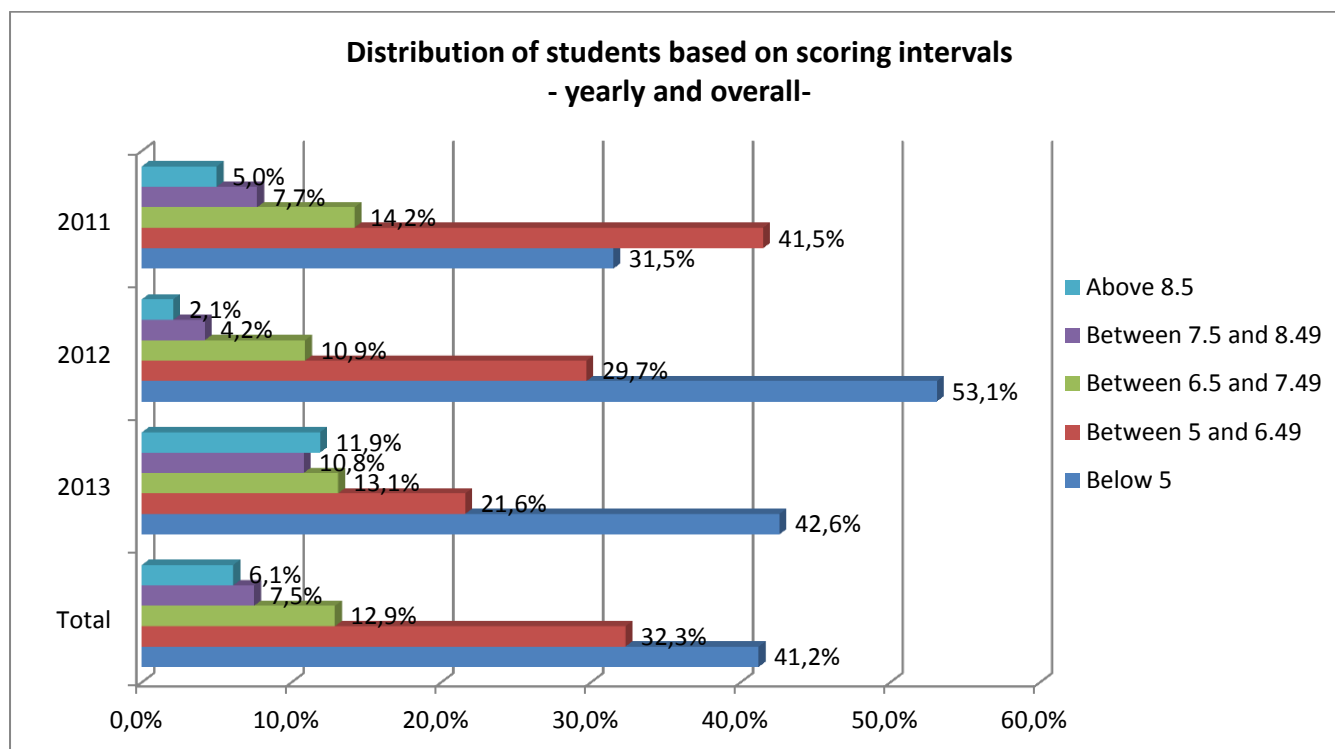


The results attained reflect a certain profile of the sampled schools, namely schools with a significant share of students from vulnerable groups (the sampling universe consisted of schools with a share of at least 5-10% of Roma students). Thus it can be noticed that only one in ten students (9.9%) in the sample managed to attain an average score above 7.5 and only 42.4% of the students attained a score above 5 at the national testing, when considering all students at the appropriate age to sit the National Capacity Examination.

Yet, official figures on the results attained at the National Capacity Examination take into account only the students who sit at the national examination at the end of the 8th grade, without any reference to the percentage of those who do not sit the national testing, despite being of the appropriate age. The distribution of sampled students by category of average scores attained among those who sat the National Capacity Examination is presented below – the distribution has also been broken down for the year in which students

sat the national examination:

Table 99. Distribution of students based on scoring intervals



testingyear* Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories

			Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories					Total
			Below 5	Between 5 and 6.49	Between 6.5 and 7.49	Between 7.5 and 8.49	Above 8.5	
testingyear	2011	Count	82	108	37	20	13	260
		% within testingyear	31.5%	41.5%	14.2%	7.7%	5.0%	100.0%
	2012	Count	102	57	21	8	4	192
		% within testingyear	53.1%	29.7%	10.9%	4.2%	2.1%	100.0%
	2013	Count	75	38	23	19	21	176
		% within testingyear	42.6%	21.6%	13.1%	10.8%	11.9%	100.0%
Total	Count	259	203	81	47	38	628	
	% within testingyear	41.2%	32.3%	12.9%	7.5%	6.1%	100.0%	

Thus, the proportion of sampled students who had grades above 5 was about 68% in 2011, it fell to merely 47% in 2012 and rose to about 57% in 2013. All these variations reflect the variations registered at the national level and are influenced by public policies interventions in the educational area.

As in 2012 video surveillance was introduced for the National Capacity Examination, the percentage of students who passed the national examination in 2012 dropped dramatically:



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Testing year	Percentage of students with average scores above 5
2011 – official national results	81.7%*
2011 – study sample results	68.5%
2012 – official national results	66.1%*
2012 – study sample results	46.9%
2013 – official national results	75.8%*
2013 – study sample results	57.4%

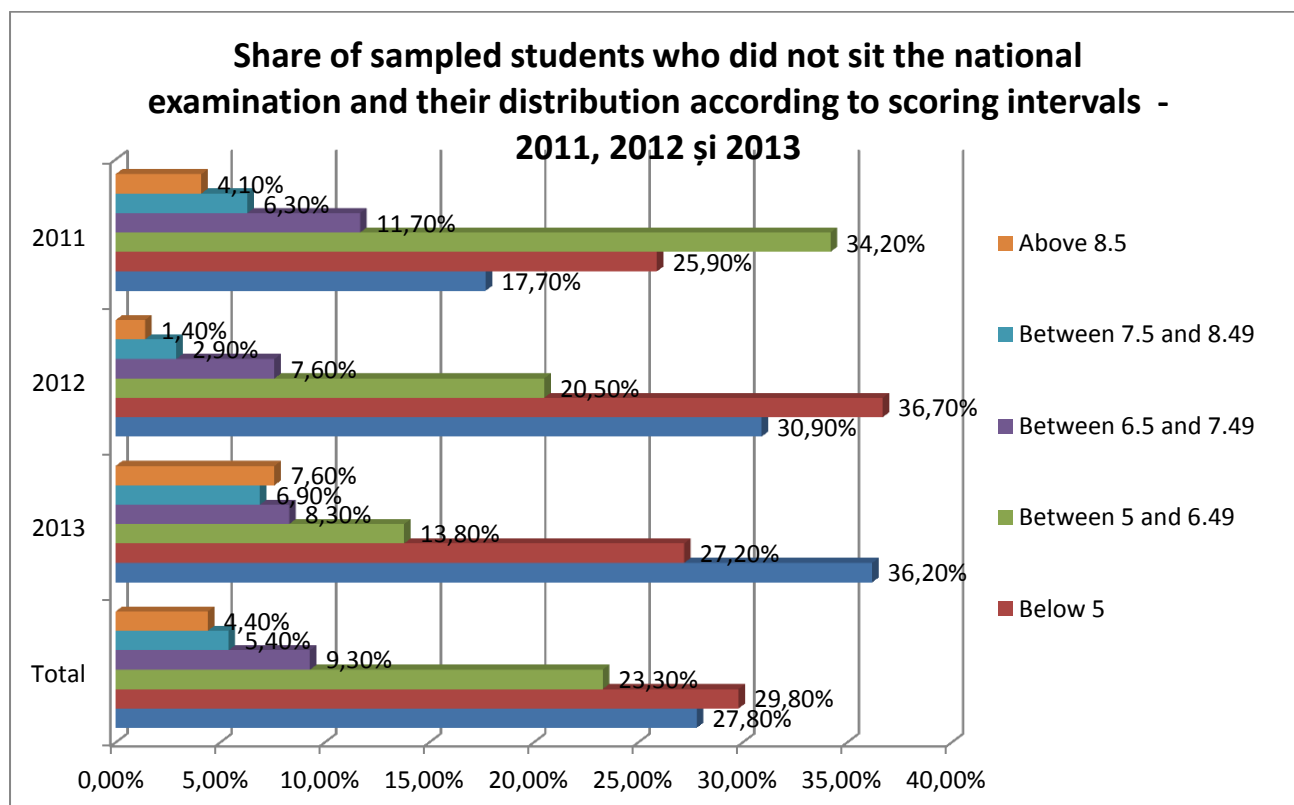
*Source: www.edu.ro

In 2013 results have improved significantly, without, however, reaching the level attained in 2011. On one hand this confirms the quality of the sample and its sensibility to real variations in the education system. On the other hand the data support the profile of the sampled schools - schools with a high percentage of students from vulnerable environments –, while also highlighting the significantly lower results recorded at the sampled schools' level as against those at the national level. Under the circumstances the matter remains whether the higher percentage of students who passed the national examination in 2013 is due to a substantial improvement in the quality of educational services provided at the national level – following the poor results from 2012 – or the consequences of other mechanisms.

A possible explanation lies in the level of difficulty of the tests in each of the two years. It is not our intention to elaborate on the matter, such an assessment would require different data and a different approach and it would go beyond the present discussion.

Another explanation lies in a less (or even at all) publicly debated phenomenon. Thus, a significant share of students fail to sit the National Capacity Examination, despite reaching the appropriate age for completing the 8th grade. This happens mainly because students fail to pass a certain subject, so they have to resit the subject examination or, sometimes, repeat the entire year. However, there are cases when students simply fail to sit the National Capacity Examination because of carelessness or negligence. As seen in the chart above 27.8% of the sampled students who have reached the appropriate age to sit the national examination failed to do so. According to our research data the percentage of those who failed to sit the national testing increased steadily from 2011 up to the present time among our sampled students.

Table 100. Share of sampled students failing to sit the National Capacity Examination in 2011, 2012 and 2013



testingyear* Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories

				Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories					
				Did NOT sit the examination despite age appropriateness	Below 5	Between 5 and 6.49	Between 6.5 and 7.49	Between 7.5 and 8.49	
testingyear	2011	Count	56	82	108	37	20	13	316
		% within testing year	17.7%	25.9%	34.2%	11.7%	6.3%	4.1%	100.0%
	2012	Count	86	102	57	21	8	4	278
		% within testing year	30.9%	36.7%	20.5%	7.6%	2.9%	1.4%	100.0%
	2013	Count	100	75	38	23	19	21	276
		% within testing year	36.2%	27.2%	13.8%	8.3%	6.9%	7.6%	100.0%
Total		Count	242	259	203	81	47	38	870
		% within testing year	27.8%	29.8%	23.3%	9.3%	5.4%	4.4%	100.0%

The share of students who failed to sit the National Capacity Examination in 2011 was 17.7% as against 30.9% in 2012 and, respectively, 36.2% in 2013. Those students who remain outside the national testing - despite being enrolled in the 8th grade – have obviously recorded lower grades than the average scores attained by those sitting the examination and would pull down the average scores attained both at



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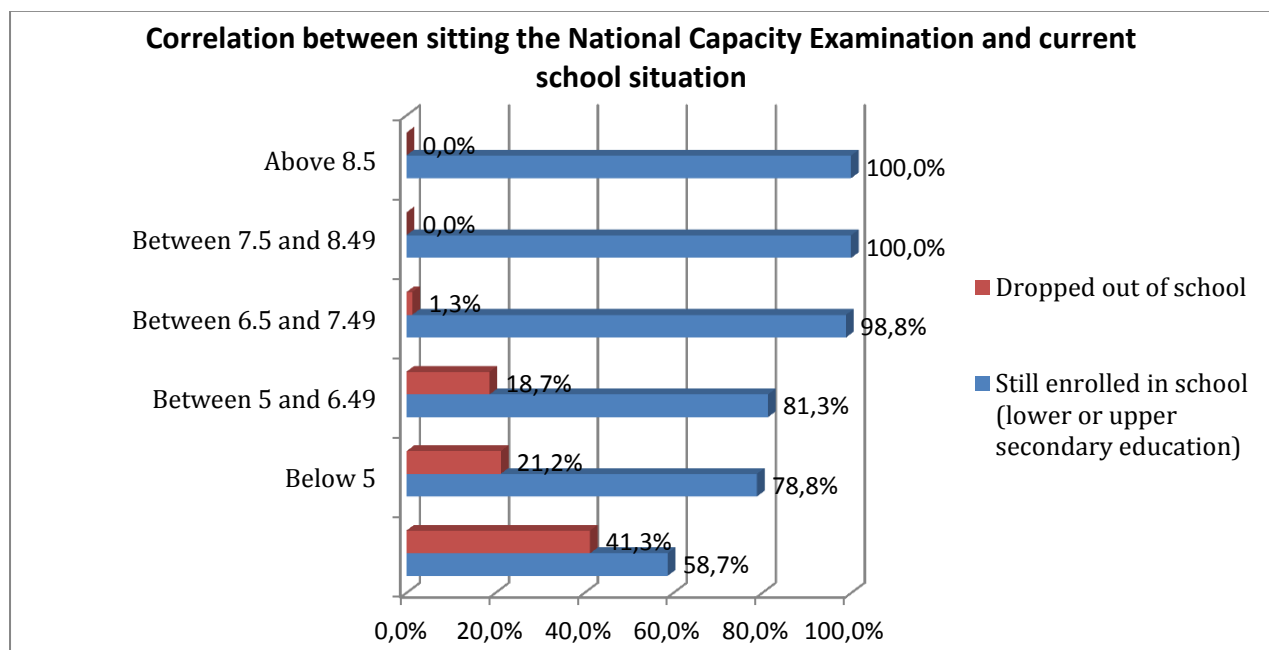
school and system level. Therefore, the increased share of students who scored above 5 at the National Capacity Examination from 2013, as compared to 2012, may, in fact, simply reflect the fact that fewer students with poor academic results sit the national examination.

Then again, it may be also be a response of the system (namely, schools) seeking to adjust to the new realities of the national standardized tests - representing an instrument for evaluating the results of school services – and to avoid rendering their image vulnerable because of a high rate of students who fail to attain the passing grade or score really low at the national examination, despite having passed all the subjects. Still, students who do not sit the National Capacity Examination can still enrol in an upper secondary education school, provided they pass the special exam for the failed subject, by signing up for the unoccupied seats. In our sample there was an unexpected percentage of 27.8% students who have reached the appropriate age to sit the national testing, but failed to do it. The fact that one in four students did not sit the national examination is worrying. Anyhow, assuming that these students had sat the examination, they would have been serious candidates for the category of students scoring below 5 at the national testing .

57.6 % of the sampled students at the appropriate age to sit the National Capacity Examination failed to score an average grade above 5 or simply did not sit the examination. It is worrying that six out of ten students enrolled in these schools could not attain the passing grade 5 at the national examination. Nevertheless, as already argued, an average scoring below 5 at the national testing (in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature) does not block the students' access to further education, as this average grade is cumulated with the average individual grades attained in class, and besides, there are many high schools lacking candidates, so they accept candidates with low grades or who failed to sit the national testing, as long as they manage to complete their lower secondary education. In theory even the students who failed to sit the National Capacity Examination can attend high school the same year they failed the examination, provided they passed the special subject examination or completed their lower secondary education even without sitting the examination and enrolled in an upper secondary school with available seats. As it can be observed in the table below, the dropout rate recorded in our sample was higher precisely among the students who did not sit the National Capacity Examination. The dropout rate among them is significantly higher as against students who sat the National Capacity Examination and scored an average grade below 5. Students who did not sit the national examination had a 2.7 times greater risk of dropping out of school without graduating from the 10th grade (odds ratio being 2.7) than those who did and scored below 5; the risk level is 3 times higher when compared to students who scored between 5 and 6.49. On the

other hand, the dropout rate among students who scored above 6.5 at the national examination is virtually 0.

Table 101. Correlation between sitting the National Capacity Examination and current school situation



Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories* CURRENT SITUATION

			CURRENT SITUATION		
			Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Still enrolled in school (lower or upper secondary education)	Total
Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories	Did NOT sit the national examination when age appropriate	Count % within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories	138 58.7%	97 41.3%	235 100.0%
	Below 5	Count % within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories	201 78.8%	54 21.2%	255 100.0%
	Between 5 and 6.49	Count % within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories	161 81.3%	37 18.7%	198 100.0%
	Between 6.5 and 7.49	Count % within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories	79 98.8%	1 1.3%	47 100.0%



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	the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories			
Between 7.5 and 8.49	Count	47	0	38
	% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories	100.0%	0%	100.0%
Above 8.5	Count	38	0	38
	% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	664	189	853
	% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories	77.8%	22.2%	100.0%

The important thing is to see the distribution of grades among different categories of students and formulate some explanations for students' academic performances. As the previous section focused on the dynamics of school exiting (school abandonment, early school leaving), the current one will concentrate on the results of the educational services among the children who remained integrated in the educational system - in other words we will analyse the "*educationalization*" of students, following their passage through the educational system.

Since the intervals for grouping the grades "fragmented" the sample at the top categories - students with grades above 6.5 – and that may impair the accuracy of the statistical analyses performed¹⁸, it was decided upon grouping them into one category - students with average grades above 6.5. Subsequently, the comparison will be among the profiles of students who attained average grades between 5 and 6.5 as against those with average grades below 5.

Relevant determinants of academic performance

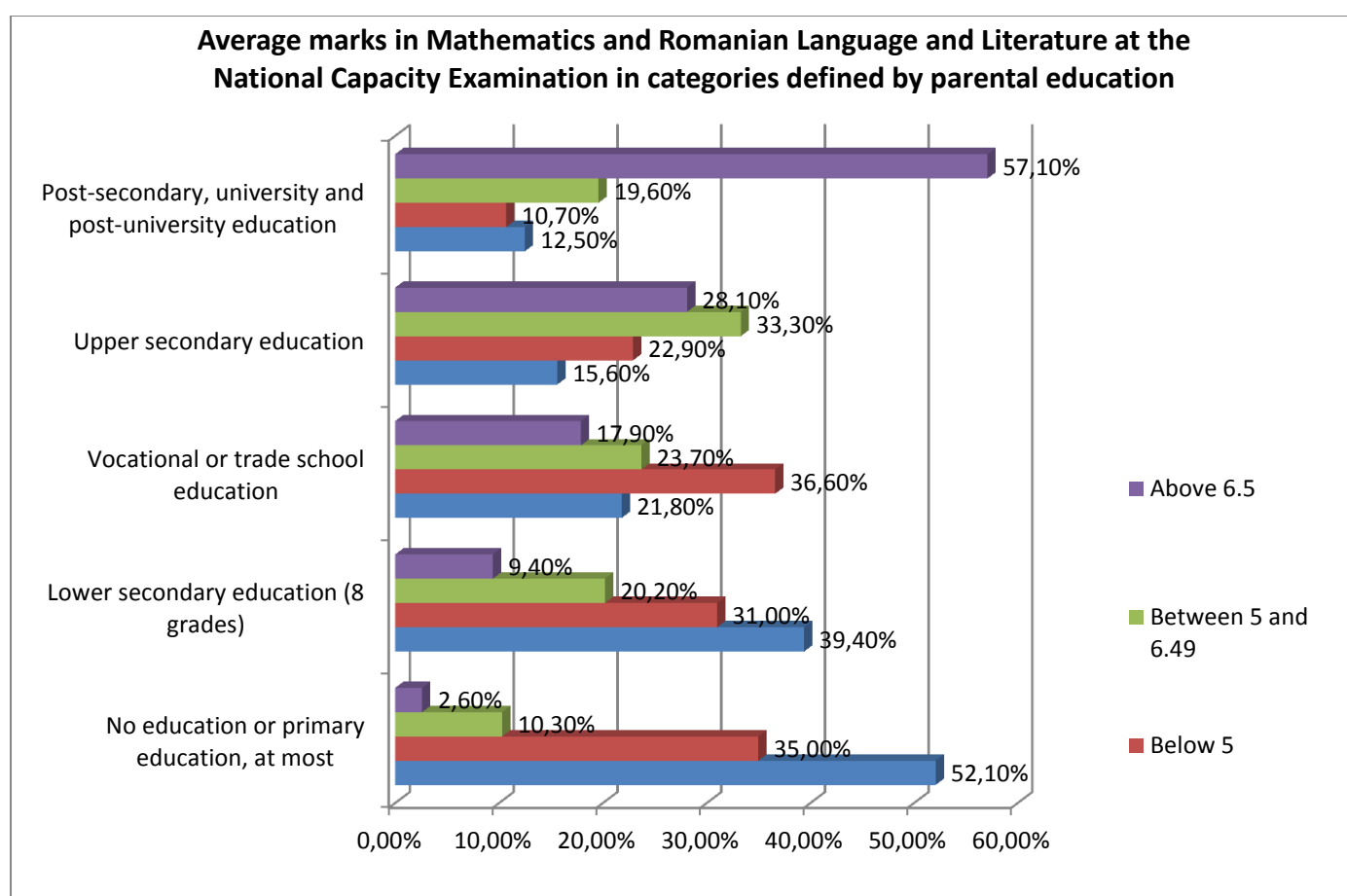
As follows, we shall present the distribution of grades obtained by students in accordance with specific categories defined by relevant variables to academic performance. All the associations presented below were also tested by means of logistic regression models by controlling the mutual effect in relation to academic performance and pursuing the potentially false relationships. For a better understanding only the graphic representations of the statistically relevant associations that also stood the test of the regression models, will be illustrated.

¹⁸ By generating cells in the association tables with a low number of cases.

Parental education

Parental education was coded in the research database as the highest level of education attained by one of the parents or guardians of the child. Parental education level is an established explanatory variable of academic performance, as confirmed by our research. The higher the parental education, the better the chance for the student to score a higher average grade at the National Capacity Examination - see the chart below. It can be observed that the students who failed to sit the National Capacity Examination, despite reaching the suitable age to do so, come from families with a low parental education - no education or primary school education, at best. Calculating the odds ratio indicates that students from families with the lowest educational level (maximum a primary school education) are seven times more likely not to sit the National Capacity Examination compared to students from families where parental education is post-upper secondary or university level.

Table 102. Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in categories defined by parental education

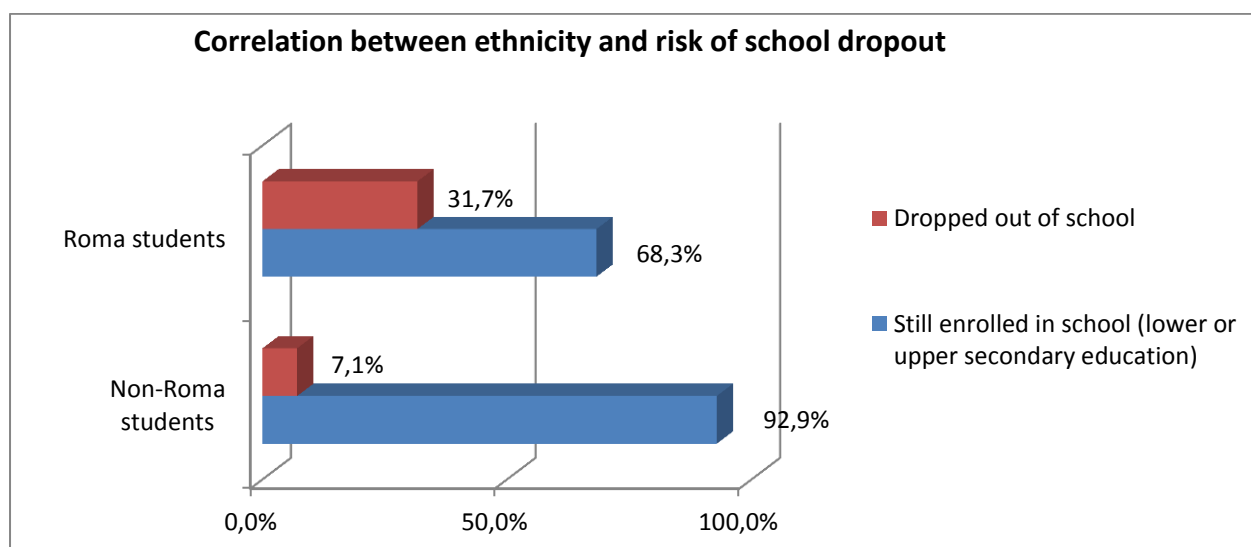




Ethnicity and academic performance

In this case, the data show that the percentage of Roma students who did not sit the National Capacity Examination despite reaching the suitable age to do so, is significantly higher. Four out of ten sampled Roma students (40%) who have reached the age to sit the national examination from the time of Wave 1 (March / April 2011) until the present time failed to sit the examination, as against one in six (15%) non-Roma students. The odds ratio shows that Roma children are 3.7 times more likely not to sit the national examination compared with non-Roma students. As far as Roma students who did sit the national examination are concerned, their results are slightly below the average scores attained. However, the logistic regression analysis shows that the poorer results of Roma students are rather due to lower grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature attained at class and also because the lower parental education in their families. Anyway, Roma children are twice more deprived of their equal educational chances: once because of their higher dropout rate (thus a greater number of Roma children are outside the educational system) and second because they benefit less from their passage through the education system (considering their poorer results) due to minor family support and low grades obtained in school. In addition, there is a striking phenomenon of no-sitting the National Capacity Examination among Roma students (probably mainly because failing to pass in certain subjects, but perhaps for other reasons as well).

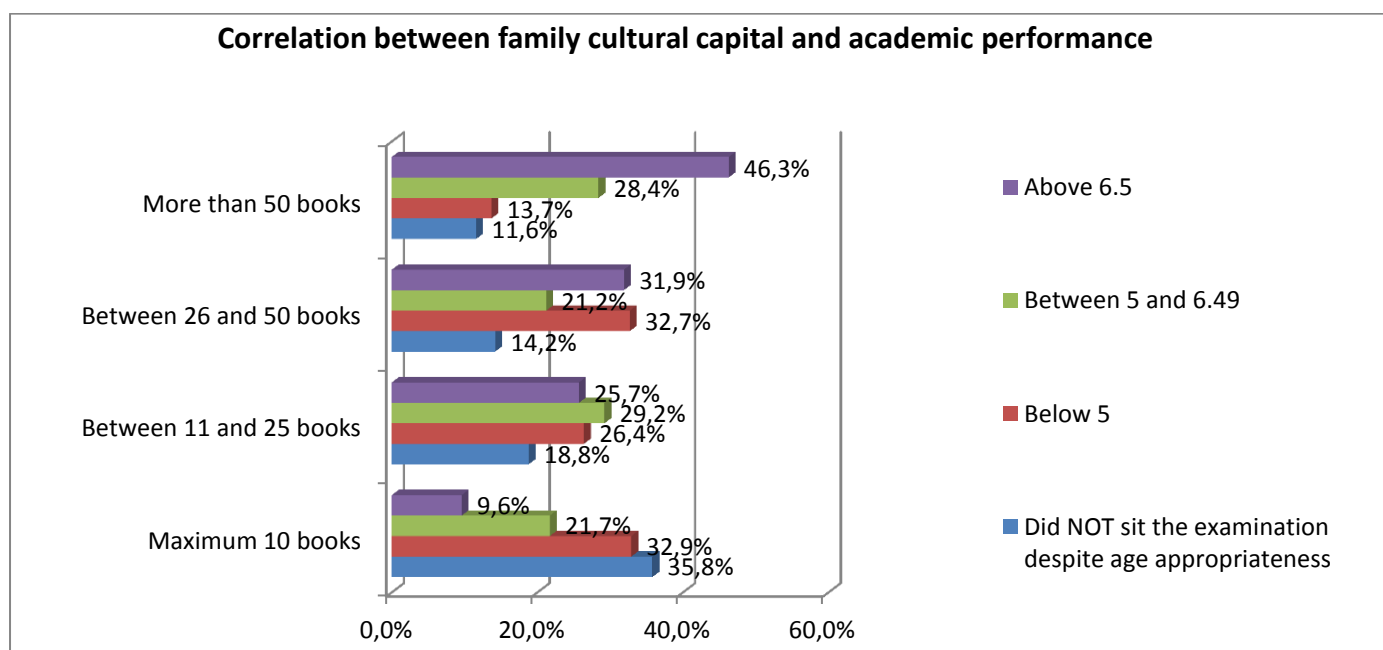
Table 103. Correlation between ethnicity and risk of school dropout



Student selection group Wave 1* Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories

			Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories				
			Did NOT sit the national examination when age appropriate ă	Below 5	Between 5 and 6.49	Above 6.5	Total
Student selection group Wave 1	Non-Roma students	Count	63	114	118	127	422
		% within Student selection group Wave 1	14.9%	27.0%	28.0%	30.1%	100.0%
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories	26.0%	44.0%	58.1%	76.5%	48.5%
	Roma students	Count	179	145	85	39	448
		% within Student selection group Wave 1	40.0%	32.4%	19.0%	8.7%	100.0%
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories	74.0%	56.0%	41.9%	23.5%	48.5%
Total		Count	242	259	203	166	870
		% within Student selection group Wave 1	27.8%	29.8%	23.3%	19.1%	100.0%
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

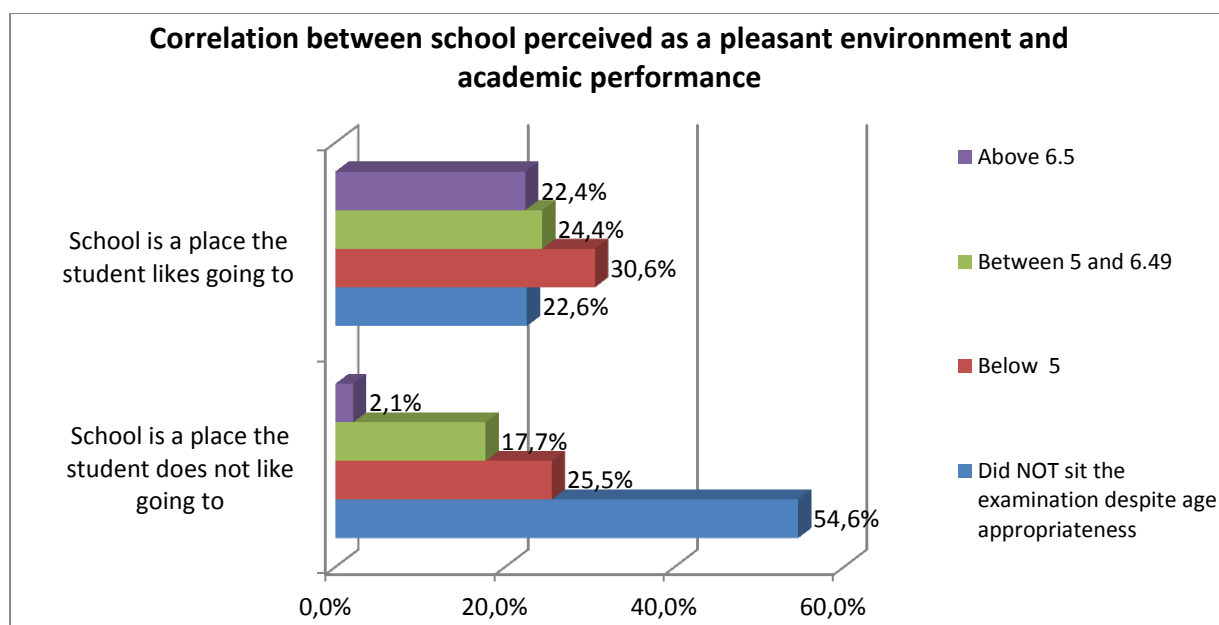
Table 104. Correlation between family cultural capital and academic performance



Number of books at home corrected by parents and students" answers * Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories

			Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories				Total
			Did NOT sit the national examination when age appropriate ă	Below 5	Between 5 and 6.49	Above 6.5	
Number of books at home corrected by parents and students" answers	Maximum 10 books	Count % within Number f books at home corrected by parents and students" answers	182 35.8%	167 32.9%	110 21.7%	49 9.6%	508 100.0%
	Between 11 and 25 books	Count % within Number f books at home corrected by parents and students" answers	27 18.8%	38 26.4%	42 29.2%	37 25.7%	144 100.0%
	Between 26 and 50 books	Count % within Number f books at home corrected by parents and students" answers	16 14.2%	37 32.7%	24 21.2%	36 31.9%	113 100.0%
	More than 50 books	Count % within Number f books at home corrected by parents and students" answers	11 11.6%	13 13.7%	27 28.4%	44 46.3%	95 100.0%
Total			236 27.4%	255 29.7%	203 23.6%	166 19.3%	860 100.0%

Table 105. Correlation between school perceived as a pleasant environment and academic performance





enjoysschoolFIN * Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories

			Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories				
			Did NOT sit the national examination when age appropriate ă	Below 5	Between 5 and 6.49	Above 6.5	Total
enjoysschoolFIN	School is a place the student does not like going to	Count	77	36	25	3	141
		% within enjoysschoolFIN	54.6%	25.5%	17.7%	2.1%	100.0%
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories	31.8%	13.9%	12.3%	1.8%	16.2%
	School is a place the student likes going to	Count	165	223	178	163	729
		% within enjoysschoolFIN	22.6%	30.6%	24.4%	22.4%	100.0%
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories	68.2%	86.1%	87.7%	98.2%	83.8%
Total		Count	242	259	203	166	870
		% within enjoysschoolFIN	27.8%	29.8%	23.3%	19.1%	100.0%
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 106. Correlation between class grades and grades attained at the National Capacity Examination

Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature defined at the selection of beneficiaries * Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories

			Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in predefined categories				
			Did NOT sit the national examination when age appropriate ă	Below 5	Between 5 and 6.49	Above 6.5	Total
Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature defined at the selection of beneficiaries	Below 5	Count	64	15	9	1	89
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature defined at the selection of beneficiaries	71.9%	16.9%	10.1%	1.1%	100.0%
	Between 5 and 6.49	Count	134	155	71	20	380
		% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian	35.3%	40.8%	18.7%	5.3%	100.0%



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	Language and Literature defined at the selection of beneficiaries					
Between 6.5 and 7.49	Count	19	36	51	32	138
	% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature defined at the selection of beneficiaries	13.8%	26.1%	37.0%	23.2%	100.0%
Between 7.5 and 8.49	Count	10	32	30	39	111
	% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature defined at the selection of beneficiaries	9.0%	28.8%	27.0%	35.1%	100.0%
Above 8.50	Count	7	6	30	71	114
	% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature defined at the selection of beneficiaries	6.1%	5.3%	26.3%	62.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	234	244	191	163	832
	% within Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature defined at the selection of beneficiaries	28.1%	29.3%	23.0%	19.6%	100.0%

The educational level in 2011 and the results attained at the National Capacity Examination

We initially expected to identify a certain constancy regarding the value of the scores attained by the sampled students over the three years of sitting the National Capacity Examination. As already pointed out there was a sharp drop, both in terms of actually sitting the examination and the scores attained, in 2012. In 2013 the sitting rate continued to decline, but the scores seemed to record a significant improvement. We have also put forward an explanation for this, namely the variation in terms of difficulty of testing and the fact that the system adjusted to the video surveillance examination method). Nevertheless, this situation is also the proof of a certain inconsistency in the management of education in Romania, a reflection of the permanent legislative changes. The effects of a certain educational measure can only be seen in time, in ten to twenty years' time, yet educational public policies change with every election cycle or even more often. From a statistical analysis perspective such a significant difference in sitting the National Capacity Examination requires the control of the testing year effect on the relationship between the other explanatory variables in the model and the dependent variable .



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Table 107. Correlation between the educational level in 2011 and the results attained at the National Capacity Examination

What grade are you in? * Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in 4 predefined categories

			Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in 4 predefined categories				
			Did NOT sit the national examination when age appropriate ă	Below 5	Between 5 and 6.49	Above 6.5	Total
What grade are you in?	6th	Count	100	75	38	63	276
		% within What grade are you in?	36.2%	27.2%	13.8%	22.8%	100.0%
	7th	Count	86	102	57	33	278
		% within What grade are you in?	30.9%	36.7%	20.5%	11.9%	100.0%
	8th	Count	56	82	108	70	316
		% within What grade are you in?	17.7%	25.9%	34.2%	22.2%	100.0%
Total	Count	242	259	203	166	870	
	% within What grade are you in?	27.8%	29.8%	23.3%	19.1%	100.0%	

Table 108. Gender effect on academic performance

femininegender * Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in 4 predefined categories

			Average grades in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature at the National Capacity Examination in 4 predefined categories				
			Did NOT sit the national examination when age appropriate ă	Below 5	Between 5 and 6.49	Above 6.5	Total
femininegender	Boy	Count	132	138	104	59	433
		% within femininegender	30.5%	31.9%	24.0%	13.6%	100.0%
	Girl	Count	110	121	99	107	437
		% within femininegender	25.2%	27.7%	22.7%	24.5%	100.0%
Total	Count	242	259	203	166	870	
	% within femininegender	27.8%	29.8%	23.3%	19.1%	100.0%	



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Conclusions and recommendations - guidelines for a strategy to tackle ESL

The first conclusion that clearly emerges from the survey data is that there extremely unequal results both in terms of school participation (school abandonment) and school performance (accumulation of knowledge by means of educational services) among the potential beneficiaries of the Romanian school system. The risk of school dropout is much higher among Roma students compared to the non-Roma ones – the study revealed that in 2011 the risk of dropping out of school in the next two years was six times higher for a Roma child enrolled in lower secondary school (in schools from South-Muntenia, Centre and North-Eastern Regions with a significant share of minimum 5 – 10% of Roma students enrolled). Also, there is a lesser benefit from school attendance in the case of Roma children (as reflected in the national test scores); in a nutshell, the educational opportunities for Roma students are definitely slimmer, also reflecting a situation of school discrimination: ethnically defined social groups have considerably different academic results. The statistical analysis carried out has shown that the gap remains even when the effect of other fundamental variables such as parental education level, residence place, family cultural capital (operationalized by the number of books existing at home), preschool education (the number of years attending kindergarten) is being controlled. In other words, the causes behind the existing gap between Roma and non-Roma students (in terms of lower academic performance, greater risk of dropping out) lie in the social barriers triggered by the fact of belonging to an ethnic group. To put it more clearly, there is a discrepancy in terms of educational opportunities for Roma and non-Roma, even when the social conditions are similar (identical level of education for the parents, similar cultural capital and length of preschool education, same residence place – urban or rural). Taking into consideration the relevant previous studies, any explanation based on native ethnic origin was put aside, as science assents that native intellectual abilities are evenly distributed among social strata; hence, the explanatory mechanisms are all of social nature. Fundamentally the research results suggest that Roma children are not equal beneficiaries of the Romanian institutional education (including preschool education), regardless of the identical educational cycle length and similar family and social capital. In this context, the matter of quality of the education received by a Roma student compared to a non-Roma student (despite being in the same class), the occurrence of covert discrimination mechanisms, the unequal treatment received from teachers because of negative stereotypes against Roma students are all extremely relevant. A significant result presented in the present report is worth mentioning at this point: one out of 50 Roma students (2.5%) said that he / she does



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not speak Romanian, while 3.9% know the language enough to get by – and these are Roma students enrolled in the Romanian lower secondary education system; according to their own statements, only three out of four Roma children (72.6%) know Romanian very well. Nearly one in four Roma children (22%) used to be spoken in Romani at home before going to school, the same share of Roma students who know very well Romani. What is more, every seventh Roma student (13.9%) still feels embarrassed to declare his / her ethnicity, choosing to declare another ethnic identity and, overall, Roma students feel misunderstood by their teachers to a greater extent than the non-Roma ones. The findings of the report confirm that school is not an equally friendly environment for all students, regardless of their ethnicity. There are multiple explanations to this and they are found at the crossroads of a mix of causes. One of them is simply the lack of effective mechanisms to facilitate the school integration for Roma students. **Based on the collected data the strategic recommendation is that the intervention to ensure equal educational opportunities for Roma children is necessary and it should not be directed only as a general support intervention for vulnerable social groups (marked by poverty, lower level of human and social capital etc.), but also specifically, in support of the Roma community, by addressing the social mechanisms that lead to the exclusion of Roma students at school. Therefore we consider that the core of educational policies should undertake providing equal opportunities in education (both in terms of school participation, as well as actual development of skills and abilities) by predominantly promoting an inclusive education (and only secondary an elitist education). In this process the role of the school must be defined as an entity primarily responsible for meeting the needs of all students and creating the proper conditions so that academic performance could actually depend on talent and individual work, rather than on factors beyond students' control range (financial status, ethnicity, parents' educational level etc.).**

Another conclusion, closely linked to the previous one, is that within the school area the unequal treatment of students based on their ethnicity is still very much present – hence, the school is still a medium that reproduces the existing social inequalities. As a general reminder, all Roma children included in the study were identified as such by their teachers (practically the selection of sampled Roma students was the result of the hetero-identification method applied by the teachers). Consequently, there was a constant state of consciousness of teaching Roma students that marked the student-teacher relationship. The answers given by Roma students and their parents / guardians is a reflection of students who have not experienced school by hiding their ethnicity from their school teachers - as frequently happens in other cases pinpointed in other programs and researches in the Roma education field. Our data show that a significant percentage of the



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parents consider the unequal treatment of Roma children as a school matter (15.2%), more than non-Roma parents do (17.3% vs. 12.5%). At the same time, at least one in ten interviewed parents (12%) thinks that Roma students are treated worse at school than non-Roma students are - among Roma parents the share is significantly higher (16.7% versus 3.9% among non-Roma parents). The research also showed that Roma children are seated in the last two rows rather than in the first ones, compared to non-Roma students - 23.9% of non-Roma students are seated in the back or penultimate desk (when there are at least 3 rows of desks in the classroom) compared to 34.9% Roma students. There is also a tendency for Roma students to sit next to one another, rather than be seated next to non-Roma students. The study also showed that taking pleasure into going to school (perceiving school as a place where the student enjoys going) was the strongest factor influencing dropout and academic performance. At the same time a greater number of Roma students consider that school is not a place where they like to go (20% vs. 8.7% of non-Roma students). **Under the circumstances, it is recommended that the intervention intended to ensure equal opportunities for Roma children should aim at fighting the negative attitudes against Roma students among peers or teachers and boosting their empathy towards the unfavourable social conditions of Roma students, conditions that are beyond their personal control. Also monitoring, reporting and discouraging ethnic discrimination cases manifested by non-Roma teachers and students are more than welcomed. Fundamentally, it is all about promoting a new approach in which the school, as a state representative, must undertake its responsibility for effectively ensuring the right to education. When there are obstacles in ensuring the right to education, the state (through schools and other institutions) should take the necessary steps to remove such barriers. From this perspective the school management must acknowledge its role and responsibilities in ensuring the proper exercise of the right to education for all children.**

The transition from the 8th grade to high school is a rough attempt in furthering studies. The survey shows that sampled students interviewed in 2011 and who have experienced the upper secondary education (students enrolled in the 7th and 8th grade during Wave 1) showed a significantly higher rate of school abandonment two years later, as compared with students who were still in lower secondary education in 2013. Thus, there was a significantly higher dropout rate among sampled students who had completed their lower secondary education in between the time of Wave 1 (in March - April 2011) and Wave 2 (April - May 2013). As a general reminder, schooling is compulsory in Romania up to the 10th grade. However, there are no significant differences between sampled students enrolled in the 9th and 10th grade at the time of the



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second research wave as far as dropout rates are concerned. This shows that students who manage to complete the 9th grade present a lower dropout risk in the 10th grade. **In this context we recommend continuing the program of reserving the assigned seats for Roma children in upper secondary education, as a measure of diminishing the influence of structural factors on Roma students' attendance and academic performance on the long-term. Also, granting social grants, on a broad level, to children from vulnerable group so that they can continue their studies after completing the lower secondary school and ensuring their right to education in accordance with the national standard are more than opportune.**

The rate of student non-participation at the National Capacity Examination rose sharply in 2012, when the video surveillance testing was introduced, and it increased once again in 2013. This phenomenon requires a more careful analysis, since data study indicate that students who do not sit the National Capacity Examination have a higher tendency of dropping out of school. In addition, the promotion rate for the national examination provides decision makers with an inaccurate "feedback" regarding students' performance, as statistics disregard the students who do not sit the examination, despite being enrolled in the 8th grade. **Considering the aspects highlighted above, we recommend that all 8th graders be granted the right to sit the examination, regardless of their academic situation at the end of the school year; if the student manages to get a passing grade at the national examination in Mathematics and Romanian Language and Literature (minimum a 5 grade), then he / she should be giving a passing grade in the failing subjects, thus giving the student the chance to further his / her studies at least until completing the mandatory education cycle. Sitting the National Capacity Examination Capacity would no longer be a potential obstacle in furthering one's education and there would be a better recording of school attendance in students' transition from lower to upper secondary school.**

The research also confirmed a series of aspects that were perhaps already intuited regarding the Roma community and Roma students, but were hardly supported by evidence. Thus, an important part of the gap between Roma and non-Roma children in terms of access to education lies in the fewer and poorer family resources (financial, educational, social, value) of Roma students.

The available income and financial resources are clearly lower among Roma children; the percentage of Roma students who come from families that can not provide a minimal living standard and welfare so as not to influence the children's schooling is significantly higher as against non-Roma students. For example, it is disturbing that among the sampled schools almost every third Roma student (29.2%)



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experienced, at least once over the past month prior to the study, the situation of going to school feeling hungry because there was no food at home - according to their own statements. The share of non-Roma students who have experienced something similar is three times lower: 10% of the entire population of non-Roma students. A quarter (25.5%) of the sampled Roma families live mainly on child benefits, as against only 11.1% of the non-Roma families. For one out of three families of Roma students (32.4%) the social benefits are the main source of revenue, as compared to merely 5.7% among non-Roma families! The focus group research part revealed that nowadays, in Romania, there are students who refuse to attend school because being ashamed of their clothes; the quantitative data confirm this idea, as one out of 20 Roma students (5.5%) often or very often feels ashamed because of his / her clothes, as compared to only 1.3% of non-Roma students who share the same feeling with the same frequency. There are other variables regarding the financial well-being of the student and his family that show, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the huge gap separating Roma and non-Roma students. **Our recommendation, in line with the research data, is that the intervention to support the education of Roma students should also target their financial conditions, ensuring their bare necessities, so that this aspect may not influence the normal school process.**

The educational capital is also lower among families of Roma children than among non-Roma families. The share of non-Roma children whose parents have "no education or primary education, at most" (the parent / guardian with the highest education in the family was the one taken into consideration) is 3.4% as against 29.1% among Roma students whose parents are in the same situation! There is a colossal difference that clearly shows the discrepancy between the two categories of students in terms of family support in the educational process – guidance through the school system, help with homework, parent's ability to empathize with the school-related difficulties encountered along the way, development of cognitive skills during the first years of life by enriching the child's vocabulary and associations of ideas etc. Since it is rather difficult to intervene on parents' level of education at this time, the intervention on Roma students enrolled in lower secondary school may consist of compensatory measures, such as additional hours of training after school and homework assistance, in order to counterbalance the lack of family support – it is easily understandable the kind of support a lower secondary student can get from parents with primary education at most, compared to a student whose parents are high school or university graduates.

The data also showed major differences as far as the amount of formal pre-school education received



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by Roma and non-Roma students is concerned. The data speak for themselves: 4.9% of non-Roma students never attended kindergarten, same as 26.7% of Roma students. Moreover, among those who were enrolled in kindergarten, the share of those attending it for only one year is 8.2% among non-Roma students, respectively 26.4% among Roma students. There shall be no mention as to the actual quality of pre-school education, since there are no available data on its assessment. The importance of pre-school training for academic performance and success in adult life is not only essential, but a common sense matter for all experts in the sociology of education. Considering the findings of our research, there is no surprise as to the huge gap separating the Roma and non-Roma students in terms of school performance, dropout rate etc. Since the disadvantage is already present at the starting point (at the 1st grade), it will only be perpetuated in all subsequent classes and educational levels largely influencing the length of the student's educational path. Therefore, **the recommendation is to compensate for the insufficient family support given to Roma students with extended and intensive preschool education measures, of the same quality as those applied in the case of non-Roma children. Some programs have already been implemented in this direction, but the intervention should be comprehensive and addressed at a national level for all Roma children, as a priority zero.**

There are significant differences between Roma and non-Roma students regarding the cultural capital of the family as well, reflected by the number of books (other than textbooks) the student has at home. Thus, among the sampled Roma families almost three quarters (74.7%) own maximum ten books (other than textbooks) as compared to only 37.7% of the sampled non-Roma families. The difference is striking in this case, too.

Under the circumstances, promoting programs (presently, as well as during the next 2014-2020 cycle of structural instruments) that provide integrated social services (approaching educational inclusion both in terms of schooling support for the student and in terms of supporting the economic integration of the family, children's health and living conditions) to effectively and efficiently support children from disadvantaged groups. In this context it is appropriate to introduce the "after school" programme in all primary and lower secondary schools (including providing a hot meal for all students enrolled in the education system), so that children from disadvantaged groups be exempted from paying the costs. In this case the following are required: a) a periodic review by the Board of Directors of schools of the measures intended to ensure equal opportunities to education; b) mentorship activities for students at a high risk of dropping out and for those with class performance



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below the average; c) transformation of educational school culture so that every student feels comfortable, valued and appreciated at school, regardless of their ethnicity, parents' social status and so on; d) introduction of specific mechanisms to tackle abusive, discriminatory and racist behaviour etc.

The values and aspirations that characterize the parents / guardians of Roma students are less likely to prevent their school dropout. One in ten Roma students (8%) was never admonished by any family member with the dictum "knowledge is power" (the share of non-Roma students in similar situation is 5%). Also, although nine out of ten parents of non-Roma students (90.9%) want very much to see their child attending high school, only seven out of ten Roma parents think the same (71.9%). There is only one in twenty non-Roma parents saying that they want "les", "very little" or "not all" to see their child attending high school (5.6%), compared to about one in seven (15.9%) Roma parents who think the same. Undoubtedly, the aspirations of the parents regarding the completion of their children's education also reflects on the different level of support given to students throughout schooling. **Therefore, mentors or school counsellors need to make serious efforts to improve, where deemed appropriate, the perception of Roma students regarding the value of education as induced by their family.**

So far the findings presented were related to the difference between Roma and non-Roma students who are still enrolled in the school system. However, throughout the research data has also been collected from a sample of students who have dropped out of school or have at least 20 unmotivated absences (thus, a high risk of dropping out). Naturally, the specific profile of adolescents in this situation also suggests the causes behind the ESL phenomenon. The research clearly showed that the profile of Roma students is definitely closer to that of adolescents who have left school or are at a high risk of doing so. All differences between Roma and non-Roma students presented in the present report support the idea that lower educational opportunities and increased risk of dropping out among Roma students are even more acute when comparing non-Roma students with early school leavers or students with more than 20 unmotivated absences. The degree of discrimination is more acute among these adolescents (a higher proportion are seated in the back rows and have poorer academic performances) and their financial, social and value capital are even lower compared to that of Roma students still enrolled in the school system. It is worth mentioning that 77.7% of the young people selected for the survey, who are early school leavers or have more than 20 unmotivated absences, are Roma. These data support the conclusion that Roma students within the sampled schools have a higher risk of dropping out.



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Another finding of the study is that there is a certain influence from peers and community regarding the level of school absenteeism. Students who have friends who are more inclined towards leaving school at the completion of the 8th grade are also more likely to record more than 20 unmotivated absences. Roma students are more exposed to such negative influences, as they have a significantly higher number of friends who intend to leave school at the end of the lower secondary education cycle. The way neighbours perceive those with higher education is another significant factor influencing the rate of school absenteeism. Students living among neighbours who do not have a good opinion about those with higher education have a higher probability to record more than 20 unmotivated absences. **In this respect, our recommendation is that the mentoring activity, when used as a means of intervention for preventing ESL, should also focus on the normative influences students are subjected to from their peers and community. Moreover, mentoring should also promote the value of education and its utility in life.**

All these data, that clearly prove the major discrepancy in terms of family, institutional and social support (from birth and then throughout the pre-school and schooling process), as well as educational opportunities between Roma and non-Roma students, point towards a strategic necessity, namely the urgent need for an intervention on a national scale in order to rebalance school opportunities for Roma and non-Roma students. Eventually, the family in which one is born is a matter of luck, but education is a public good - as stipulated in all programmatic documents of the European Union and Romania - which entails for responsibility from the public policy makers to intervene in order to rectify this social problem. **Therefore, it is strongly recommended to review the National Strategy for tackling school dropout rate and increasing school attendance. This strategy should pay particular attention to the situation of children who are vulnerable to educational exclusion in general and Roma students in particular. The strategy should revise the school dropout concept and develop a standard definition functioning as a benchmark, starting with recording school absences even after a short period of absenteeism (such as five consecutive days). The registration of a possible school abandonment should be notified within days to the responsible actors in order to intervene effectively to reintegrate the student in the school system. Basically, an early warning system should be introduced when students are absent from school for a certain number of days (not weeks, months or years).**



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