Path to Higher Education: Combating Antigypsyism by Building Roma Students' Aspirations and Resilience
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Introduction
Within the educational system, a student's aspirations and access to higher education depends on teachers' expectations, experiences with teachers and peers, representation of themselves, and how much of their path to higher education is externally determined. The aim of this chapter is to develop an understanding of the manifestations and implications of antigypsyism in education; more specifically, it aims to describe the antigypsyism Roma students face in the development of their higher educational aspirations and persistence inside and outside the classroom (e.g. family background, social and physical network, ethnicity, and social interaction). In order to identify the experiences of antigypsyism which hinder Roma students' higher educational aspirations and success, we use the Institutional Departure Model by Vincent Tinto and an additional framework on the development of aspirations created by Debraj Ray. The analysis is based on surveys and interviews with Roma students from Central and Eastern Europe. The findings show that students who were successful in enrolling and persistent in their higher education studies, demonstrate high levels of resilience to the adverse experiences of antigypsyism.

Antigypsyism, Educational Aspirations and Persistence
Antigypsyism in the educational system is well documented within the academic literature. During the communist era Roma were excluded from being part of the majority society with the creation of Roma neighbourhoods or ghettos, and Roma only schools were also established in these neighbourhoods. These schools provided poor quality education which was geared towards employment in low skilled work (Rostas, 2012). School segregation and poor-quality education within localities predominantly populated by Roma persisted in the post-communist era and continue to this day. Aspirations are developed through an individual's society, physical

or virtual neighbourhood, and networks. Thus, if the Roma community has experienced low educational attainment due to generations of oppression, a Roma student's low aspirations will be shaped by this experience. Educational systems and teachers need to understand and internalise their roles in assisting Roma students to expand their aspirations through positive enforcement of what is achievable and introduce them to those (few) Roma who have successfully participated in higher education.

The main theory which we use in our research is Vincent Tinto's Institutional Departure Model (IDM). This theory describes the process of drop-out from college, which "can be viewed as a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual, and the academic and social system of the college during which a person's experiences in those systems (as measured by his normative and structural integration) continually modify his goal and institutional commitment in ways which lead to persistence and/or varying forms of dropout" (Tinto, 1975: 93). While we do not discuss drop-outs in this chapter, we will use the concepts of the theory to map out the determinants of success in the educational system (secondary and higher education), and how experiences of antigypsyism both within the educational system and within the society influence a student's educational aspirations and persistence.

As seen in Figure 1, Tinto's theory outlines the process a student goes through in deciding to drop out of school or not. The three main aspects of the model are the processes of academic integration, social integration, and the student's background. Tinto defines academic integration as "grade performance and intellectual development", as well as quality of faculty/staff and student interactions. Grade performance reflects meeting certain academic system standards, while intellectual development reflects the individual's "identification with the norms of the system". Social integration represented in Tinto's theory is defined as the "interactions between the individual with a given set of characteristics (background, values, and commitments, etc.) and other persons of varying characteristics with the college". The pre-entry attributes describe background characteristics like the development of aspirations, social status, ethnicity, high school experiences, and their interactions which develop an individual's goals for higher education.
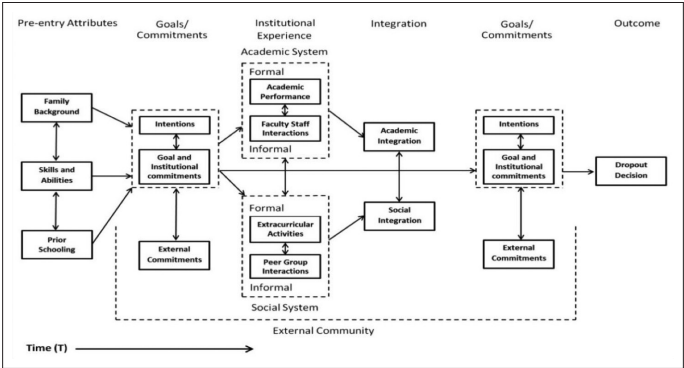
Figure 1: Tinto's Institutional Departure Model.

In the above description of the IDM, a Roma student is likely to have experienced manifestations of antigypsyism within the academic and social systems, as well as in the external society. Because of these antigypsyist experiences and interactions, a Roma student will not follow the longitudinal process that is necessary for the development of higher educational aspirations and persistence.

In Tinto's model, educational goal commitment is defined as "information on both the level of expectation (e.g. two or four-year degree) and the intensity with which the expectation is held", which we define as a student's higher education aspirations. In addition, Tinto describes that a student's prior school experience has a direct impact on an individual's aspirations, expectations and motivations for higher education. While Tinto describes the importance of developing higher education aspirations in high school, we wanted to explore how these aspirations are established over time. Therefore, we incorporate a separate theory on aspirations which is based on the field of behavioural economics. In Ray's theory of aspirations, the individual and collective decision to aspire for higher education is determined by an individual's "aspiration window" and "aspiration gap" (2003). A student's aspiration window is determined by achievement and standards of an individual's peers, information about others who have achieved higher education, evaluating the probability of participating in higher education, the real or

perceived educational mobility, and the relationship between these determinants. A student's aspiration gap is the distance between where they are now and where they aspire to be. Thus, for a Roma student, their window represents all the known and feasible education attainment possibilities and the aspiration gap represents the distance from where they are now and the amount of perceived effort it takes to obtain the education they want.

In order to identify the experiences and main challenges Roma students encounter before and during their higher education studies and how their aspirations are formed, a mixed-methods approach was employed in this study. Online and face-to-face interviews were conducted with nine Roma students and graduates with the aim of investigating their pre-university educational experiences and their influence on further university studies, whereas an online questionnaire focused only on the university experiences of Roma students. This questionnaire was sent out to the Roma Education Fund 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 scholarship recipients' cohorts, focusing on those countries with a high percentage of beneficiaries, most of which are countries from Central and Eastern Europe with a relatively high Roma population. The questionnaire was designed in English and, with the help of the Roma graduates, translated into local languages (Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, Serbian, Slovak and Macedonian). 400 questionnaire invitations were sent out and the response rate was around 30% – i.e. 117 responses (self-selection of the respondents), distributed as follows: Bulgaria 35, Romania 35, Slovakia 22, Serbia 11, Hungary 7, and Macedonia 7 respondents. The average age of the respondents was 24 years old. In terms of gender, 58% of the respondents were female and the rest male, with two respondents choosing not to disclose their gender. Most of the respondents were enrolled in Bachelor studies, nine of them in Master studies and one student enrolled in a PhD programme.

Based on the above framework, the chapter proceeds to apply the above framework to the Roma youth case. However, instead of following one by one the IDM's components, we first analyse the prior schooling experiences followed by the university experiences.

Pre-University: Development of Aspirations and Conditions for Access to University

Prior to university, a student's background (family, ethnicity, social status) and their experiences outside the educational system have an impact on the development of higher education aspirations, as well as their integration within the educational academic and social systems. Through the interviews and survey, we collected information on the development of students' aspirations based on their community, family, neighbourhood and other characteristics, then we analyse how a student's aspirational window and gap are determined outside the educational system. One of the limitations of this study is the lack of individual student data (such as grade performance, social status) but also no perspectives from teachers or educational staff.

Aspirations

Most of the students interviewed stated that they did not have a family member, peer or other community member who was a role model for access and completion of higher education. Their motivation came from their family, with the incentive to have financial stability and a better life than that of their parents:

> I don't have a role model in that way [education], but have a role model with the speeches of my father and mother… my father was and is a role model with a sentence, 'You can see how we live now. You don't want to live that way'. (Interviewee 9)

Historical discrimination, polarisation, and social and economic isolation of Roma lead to the community not including the majority group in their aspirational window. With Roma being targets of state sponsored injustices causing economic, social and educational inequalities, as well as segregation, violence and fear, they will develop aspirations that are similar to the conditions of their Roma peers, who for centuries have had lower educational attainment outcomes than non-Roma.

Students we interviewed expressed how and why some of their Roma peers did not have the same opportunities to build their aspirations or continue to higher education. From the quotes below and in other interviews, we understood that students whose parents and/

or community were not able to support their process through the educational system or were raised in a segregated area and educated in poor quality schools, have had limited aspirations and commitment to higher education:

> There was a school and kindergarten there [in the neighbourhood] and the education in that school was not that good. Those who could get out of that school, they went to high school, the rest finished with eight grades, segregated school. There are other minorities living in the village, but when a lot of Roma children attended, the other minorities left the school. (Interviewee 6)

The literature on academic achievement has consistently shown that parents' education is an important factor in predicting children's achievements. In a similar fashion, the existence of positive role models or personalities strengthens one's ambitions in pursuing further studies. Most of the interviewed students referred to such contributing factors:

> We lack models in the community. We had just one family who had higher education and they were the examples in the neighbourhood. The woman is a doctor, another is a doctor, another a lawyer and the other brother is a school mediator. In my family I am the only one who accessed higher education. (Interviewee 1)

Despite their low socio-economic background and previous educational experiences, Roma students showed resilience during their pre-university studies, and became high achievers within their classes. Their individual characteristics and skills made them successful candidates for higher education.

> All of my success is because of my hard work and my personality. (Interviewee 1)

> The Business Academy was difficult for me. Here were those children who do not go to gymnasium and who are children of prominent families. I was the first and the only Roma, I came from a poor family. (Interviewee 3)

Once students have formed their aspirations and make it into further studies they encounter numerous challenges when it comes to their academic and social integration. On the one hand, these challenges help explaining the reasons for dropping out, or conversely what Roma students have to deal with and how they overcome such challenges.

Academic Integration
Teachers' Expectations
Discrimination reduces Roma students' and parents' aspirational window through the development of social isolation, as well as increases the education aspiration gap by having to cope with stressors associated with participation in the educational system. Teachers' low expectations of Roma students and their lack of self-efficacy in Roma students' education can be seen as the strongest manifestation of antigypsyism that impacts Roma students' participation in higher education. Teachers overall expect less from Roma students than from non-Roma students (Peče, Čuk and Lesar, 2008). Poor quality education for Roma is related to teachers' expectations of students' success and the teacher's beliefs on students' and parents' motivations, learning capabilities and trustworthiness. One of the interviewed students clearly summarises this aspect:

> The way we were working was very weak because most of my classmates were not able to read and write mainly because of the low interest of the teachers and their tolerance regarding this. They accepted this as normal instead of pushing us to study more. If we would have been encouraged and had better results, we would believe that we can make it and we would respond to that. (Interviewee 1)

Such instances increase the likelihood that the student will not invest (academic effort) to pursue higher education. With lower expectations, Roma students receive a lower standard of education compared to their peers, limiting their educational outcomes and any capability to qualify for participation in higher education.

Representation of the Self
The curriculum and the academic environment can create a sense of alienation for a minority student by reinforcing false narratives,

stereotypes, and standardising social interest and values of the dominant society (Abdou, 2018). Therefore, experiences in the academic system that create a separation of Roma students' values and backgrounds from that of the dominant society will limit their ability to develop higher education aspirations and their overall academic and social integration.

Based on the survey and the interviews conducted, Roma students had either little or no formal representation of Roma in the institution, neither as Roma peers, teachers or in the curriculum. The instances where Roma were mentioned in the curriculum reinforced stereotypes and false narratives on the Roma population. Roma students also had experiences of students expressing their views and understanding of the Roma population, which replicated the dominant society's false narratives and stereotypes. Through these experiences, the Roma students not only felt alienated, but they also encountered identity issues, as they felt they needed to hide their ethnic identity to be successful in their academic and social integration:

> In high school I was not at all displaying my identity; you do not realise until you grow up and then you start to express your identity. I hid it and tried to avoid this in order to be accepted. They try to make you feel down because of your origins but they do not have any other argument because you are as good as they are. (Interviewee 4)

Social Integration

First, it is noteworthy here that educational segregation of Roma students is an aspect of antigypsyism which impacts Roma students' social integration into the educational system, which is not fully outlined in this chapter, although it is significant in a Roma student's social integration. Due to factors that reduce aspiration prior to secondary school, Roma students will not aspire to higher education, thus stopping education or choosing a secondary school focused on vocational training. Accordingly, Roma students follow an educational path that does not include opportunities for higher education and have limited chances of shifting their secondary school trajectory if they aspire to enter higher education (Horn, 2016).

I attended a normal elementary school, but it was a big fight for my mom because I was supposed to go to a special school because I hear badly, and none in my town wanted to accept me. My mother was risking jail, she was visiting every school in my hometown, and they did not want to accept me. […] In the first four years of primary school I was in a segregated Roma school, then my parents decided to move me to a better school. […] The psychologist asked me where I want to apply, I said medical school, she said "No, you cannot do that''. She said that I would kill people, that I would change the tubes and I will not manage the Latin language - she broke my world. She was sending me to vocational school but not the normal one but a special vocational school, for early leavers. (Interviewee 3)

Moreover, from the students interviewed, it was clear that the level and quality of social interactions with other students had an impact on their social and academic integration. All the interviewed students had experiences of peer discrimination in their pre-university education. In addition, it was clear that their resilience to these adverse experiences, and in some cases internalisation of the discrimination, led to their social integration:

Since entering kindergarten, I faced those problems, and they have never stopped. Eventually, I outgrew the bullying and discrimination. I don't pay that much attention to that right now. I know that those people don't share the same mentality as I do, and I don't want to hang out with those people. (Interviewee 8)

I was labelled as a Roma by some of the kids – it was uncomfortable, but this changed because I was performing well, and this defeated the stereotypes. I coped with it within myself, it did not affect me a lot, in a few days I was fine. This made me work extra to show that I am the same, that I learn better. (Interviewee 2)

The educational experiences of Roma students in their primary to upper secondary education, backed up by family support and individual characteristics, are crucial in students' decision to pursue further studies. An interesting aspect here is the gap between those Roma students who could adapt in the face of such "adverse conditions" and those who could not. This gap is constantly increasing, since those left behind have a higher risk of exclusion.

Within University:
Persistence, Motivation and Identity

The last two decades show that despite the difficulties Roma young-sters experience in secondary school, there is a steady increase when it comes to access to higher education for Roma students; once in a higher education setting a student's aspirational window grows due to experiences and interactions with a community of people that aspire to things outside of the student's current aspirations (Ray, 2003). The fact that a low percentage of Roma participate in higher education (1-4% in Central and Eastern Europe) shows that Romani students are resilient, that is they have been successful – both from a process and from an academic results perspective.

Following the theoretical model employed, this part of the chapter reflects on the academic and social integration of Roma students in higher education institutions and compares their experiences from lower and upper secondary education.

Academic Integration
Teachers' Expectations and Faculty Staff Expectations
As in primary and secondary education, teachers have a signifi-cant influence in either limiting or expanding Roma students' as-pirations. However, this process introduces elements which instil a newly acquired social status among the Roma students which dif-ferentiates them from other Roma. One interviewee who reported manifestations of antigypsyism from a teacher clearly demonstrates how certain academics contribute to making Roma students in-ternalise stereotypes and downplaying the role of students' Roma identity by creating further boundaries between them and other members of their community:

> I had one teacher who was really pushing me, sometimes she was telling me stereotypes but I felt that she really wanted the best for me. I started to be active and when I got not so good grades she would tell me 'You are smart, you should study better otherwise you will end up like all those Gypsies that are sitting here without a job'. (Interviewee 3)

Another manifestation of antigypsyism can be seen in cases where teachers express paternalistic discrimination towards Roma:

> We were 30 students, teachers did not really know us, but while I was working on my thesis I got close to my supervisor and her grade for the thesis was extra high. (Interviewee 2)

Last but not least, in one interview a Roma student who was among the first Roma to study in that university described an incident in which he was singled out:

> One unpleasant experience was when we had accountancy and the professor was reading the names from the students' book and he wanted to look at your face and see who you are, it was the first class 'Stand up! Are you the Roma student? I would like to see you'. (Interviewee 3)

The academic integration of a student depends on his/her interactions with the teachers and the level of support provided. Students' resilience is showcased in their response to questions about teacher support. One student's story highlights that teachers are reluctant to provide equal support to Roma students, an aspect which is contrasted with the academic tutoring support by a Roma NGO:

> They [teachers] won't treat you differently until they know who you are and what is your [family] name…you can always see their facial expression when they hear some foreign name… but RomaVersitas arranges classes and one-to-one consultations where we discuss academic issues of interest; there is nothing like this in the university. (Interviewee 9)

The academic integration of a student and his/her interactions with the academic space are crucial for ensuring student retention. However, academic integration at the higher education level also implies that the student does not feel alienated in such spaces and there is representation of Roma both in the taught material but also on the campus.

Representation of the Self in Higher Education

When asked whether they agree or disagree on there being (at least) five other Roma students in their university, a high percentage of the questionnaire respondents reveal that universities are slowly becoming familiar spaces for Roma students. Around 70% of the respondents claim that they know about other Roma studying in the same university. 23% of the respondents claim that they are not in contact with the other Roma, whereas 26% are rather neutral, and the rest declare that they are in contact with other Roma studying in the same university:

> Back home I was the only dark-skinned student, the others are white, very homogenous… very few minorities. Here [referring to the current university] you see many people… and I did not have this feeling in my BA, here you – like Roma – you feel equal. (Interviewee 3)

Considering the school environment in which Roma pupils developed (oppression, discrimination), there might be a tendency to distance themselves from other Roma once in a university setting. Once they have a newly acquired status (even though ideational), some Roma students differentiate themselves from the other Roma who could not make it into higher education, but also from those Roma who are in higher education but have different "traits":

> And with my Roma friends I was disconnected from them. They were going to discos, they had free time. I was alone all the time. (Interviewee 3)
>
> I had another Roma colleague – he was noisy – there were claims in the classroom that I am not that type of 'gypsy'. (Interviewee 2)

The survey also showed that Romani teachers are missing from academia, even in programmes which had a Romani studies component:

> I decided I wanted to go for Romani studies. In my class we were 25-26 students and we were around five Roma. There I was in the seventh heaven. We had gadje professors, but they spoke two-three Romani dialects. We do not have Roma teachers, it is such a pity. (Interviewee 3)

It is widely accepted in the literature that teachers from the same ethnicity as the student can serve as role models, mentors, advocates, or cultural translators and at the same time encourage Roma students to use their full potential. For the Roma students, this was not the case:

> In another university with a Romani studies component, I met here a Roma professor, an educated Roma person. He was pushing me, giving me tasks that helped me go forward and reach what I have to do. (Interviewee 6)

Not only do Roma lack representation in universities as students or teachers, there is also a lack of representation of Roma in the academic material:

> In the intercultural communication course that we had, I was raising the question. Ok, we talk about these groups but what about Roma, they are near here. Once the teacher started to notice that I am Roma, and I am interested in this, she made a class just on Roma. (Interviewee 1)

As far as the course content is concerned, 43% of the questionnaire respondents say they have discussed Roma related topics, 31% declare they have not and 26% neither agree nor disagree. Among those who did, 40% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree that the representation of Roma in course material and textbooks was positive, 33% claimed that the representation was positive, and the rest disagreed with the statement. Some of the additional comments the students referred to show that it also depends on the field of study (most of the Roma students are enrolled in social sciences and humanities) or that it is very much a choice of the teacher:

> I study Economics, there is nothing about Roma […] We have not discussed Roma during the classes – and this is because no one raises the topic, and the professors are just coming and doing their job; there are some professors who make reference to such aspects however only when the classroom is half empty. (Interviewee 2)

Interestingly enough, the fact that "no one raises the topic" about Roma is a sign that even the Roma students within those courses do not have the courage to discuss Roma related topics, or how certain theories or concepts relate to Roma. This could be also an issue of feeling safe, or not wishing to single themselves out more generally.

The lack of representation of Roma in both the course content and the campus, leads to both the Roma and non-Roma students coming to the conclusion that this minority is not important. These perceptions can negatively affect inter-group relationships. For the Roma students, a lack of representation or discussion about their own ethnicity also means a lack of pride in their cultural heritage and a lack of positive models they need to be visible.

When asked in which contexts they identify themselves as Roma, 74% of the questionnaire respondents claimed that they identify themselves as Roma regardless of the situation, 15% of the respondents choose to selectively identify themselves as Roma, whereas the remaining 11% neither agree nor disagree with the statement "I choose not to identify myself as a Roma in my university in certain situations".

Roma students are confronted with an "institutional attitude" through which they are "being watched" and therefore have a constant reminder that they need to perform better than the other non-Roma students, and that they have to professionalise not only on Roma but also on mainstream topics:

> By focusing on Roma topics other people start to think you are only good at this because you are the Roma girl good on Roma topics. You need to work hard to get out of that category. (Interviewee 6)

Social Integration
The literature on students' ethnic identification argues that the social context is one of the main factors when it comes to negotiating identity, and depending on the strength of their identity students can either strengthen their identification or, on the contrary, perceive more threats in the environment (e.g. the Central and Eastern

European region remains a "predominantly white" area with majority students, and a negative perception of the Roma cultural capital) and tend to distance themselves further from the group, avoiding alienation by becoming fully absorbed into the dominant culture, breaking away from their traditions, customs, etc (Ethier and Deaux, 1994).

> My best friend from university does not even know I am Roma. I was privileged because I came from an Albanian neighbourhood. They would rather accept an Albanian student from a rural area than a gypsy from the capital. (Interviewee 4)

While some studies claim that Roma students who succeed in higher education distance themselves from Romani culture and identity, other studies conclude that Romani students strengthen their identity through education and develop a sense of belonging to the Roma community:

> I was always saying I am Romanian Roma and maybe for the others it was disturbing to say this but in a place where you need Roma, at least the good ones have to stand up. Here [referring to current institution] it was totally different to meet so many Roma from so many countries and cultures, and at the same time have so many things in common. This strengthened my identity in terms of enriching my culture within Roma knowledge. I feel this university is so inclusive that you can be whomever you want, you have a place here… (Interviewee 1)

When asked whether Roma students observed discriminatory words, behaviours or gestures directed at Roma in their institutions, questionnaire responses show that opinions are mixed: 33% of the respondents agree, 45% disagree and 23% neither agree nor disagree. This shows that Roma students might encounter subtle forms of discrimination and racism which are rather ambiguous and indirect. However, when it comes to gender differences, 20% of the women claimed they observed discriminatory attitudes compared to 15% of men, reflecting the intersectional discrimination they are exposed to (see also Figure 2).

When asked whether students encountered racism while attending their study programmes, 63% of the respondents disagreed with the statement while 20% of the students said they encountered racism. One of the respondents from Bulgaria further developed the questionnaire answer by saying that "Some students compare the Roma with Indians, unclean, second-class people, and scums which they do not want to touch". In a similar fashion, when asked whether the students feel that there is a general atmosphere of prejudice among students, 41% of the respondents did not agree with this statement whereas 38% of them agreed: "I have not been and I am still not sufficiently close to my colleagues; we have small groups and churches around; everything is coloured", said a Romanian respondent, referring to the fact that most of the social groups are already formed and it is difficult to become part of one of them.

Peer discrimination persists at the university level; however, as the interviews show, it is highly dependent among others on whether the student responds to it, whether the university is diverse, or whether there is a Roma teacher in the university:

> In a higher education and a higher culture, people are not the same. In primary school you have children, in higher education you have grown-up people. (Interviewee 9)
> I do not think people dare to say certain things as they would say in other situations because the teacher was Roma, because I was there; they self-regulated but there were racist comments. (Interviewee 6)

Generally speaking, it can be claimed that Roma students who socialise with the majority students are also less likely to experience anxiety and alienation. The extent to which Roma students spend time socialising with other Roma students influences their relationships with the majority students. Roma students are isolated from the majority students in part due to the strong relationships that they maintained with the other Roma students from the same university:

> I engaged in extracurricular activities, to meet some people and do other things because you need more… and I had some connections with non-Roma people. But most of the Roma colleagues did not

do that. They spend most of their time with the other Roma colleagues… (Interviewee 1)

Interestingly enough, around 80% of the questionnaire respondents claimed that since enrolling at their institution, they have developed close personal relationships with students who have similar traits as they have (e.g. ethnic background, socio-economic status, etc.):

In my group there were two other students looking like Roma – one Jewish maybe, and a German Polish – there is a band called The Black Train [Fekete Vonat] and we were calling ourselves like that. (Interviewee 6)

This can be understood as an issue of integration within the school community and student life of the university, where students feel more comfortable with students who better understand their cultural and social background, but at the same time it is a sign of self-exclusion from the dominant social group of the university.

Discussion

This chapter has shown that antigypsyism is present at all stages of the development of higher educational aspirations for Roma students, as well as at all stages of higher education persistence once within a higher education institution. Students who were successful in enrolling and persistent in their higher education studies, show high levels of resilience to the adverse experiences of antigypsyism. Additionally, Roma students internalised some aspects of antigypsyism as a way to integrate into the educational system and succeed. This oppression has led to some of the students having issues around identity, feeling the need to silence their ethnicity, and avoiding social interactions with other Roma within the educational system. Thus, we argue that the manifestations of antigypsyism in the development of higher educational aspirations and access, has led to low enrolment rates of Roma in higher educational institutions. Further, the Roma students who are enrolled into higher education are successful because of their experiences prior to entry. Nevertheless, antigypsyism in higher education threatens their success and can lead to low rates of persistence.
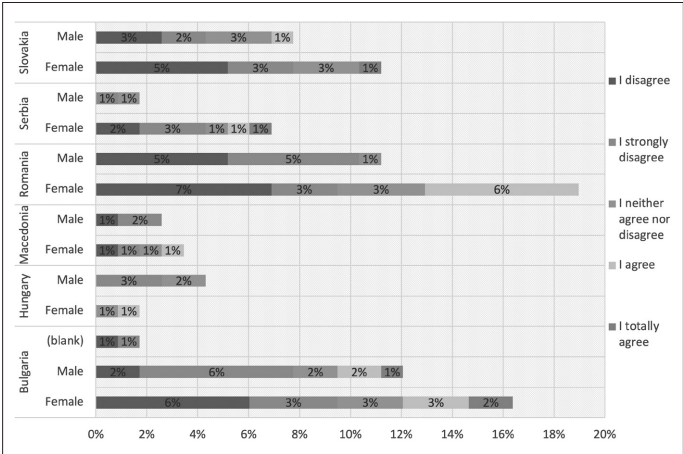
Figure 2: I have encountered racism while attending this institution

Prior to enrolment in higher education, students highlighted the impact of their parents' and community's support for higher education. Every student interviewed stated that their parents had the largest impact in building their motivation for higher education. This aspiration was not developed based on their parents being role models for higher education, as almost all the interviewees' parents did not have a higher education degree. Their motivation came from the idea of creating intergenerational mobility through their children receiving a university education.

While in higher education institutions, Roma students' identity continues to be threatened by their need for academic and social integration within the system. Through the interviews, it was clear that students felt that being Roma was very important during their studies. This shows that their integration within academic and social systems in education was not compatible with their Roma identity.

A non-Roma has experiences in each of the stages described in Tinto's Institutional Departure Model, which can lead to low aspirations or persistence in higher education. Roma students face additional antigypsyist experiences and life characteristics based on

their ethnicity, in each of the stages of the same model, leading to a limited ability to have development within and transitions between stages.

A student's aspirations and persistence in education stem initially from their family and references in their community. The initial school integration experiences are critical in Roma students' aspirations and persistence. For Roma students who are in a social situation that limits the reference points within their family and community, it is critical for education institutions to first understand the mechanism within the institutions that limit Roma students' aspirations and persistence, then foster their development. Teachers and educational policy makers display an absence of self-efficacy or internalisation of responsibility in the development of aspirations. Although these actors play a significant role in the development of aspirations, they tend to place all the responsibility on the individual, student, parent and community. Actions by teachers and policy makers to address institutional and systemic antigypsyism in the school integration process, can decrease individual experiences that limit opportunities in building aspirations and persistence for Roma students.

Specific and targeted educational interventions that address antigypsyism in the school integration process need to be included within National Roma Inclusion Strategies (or other policy initiatives) to increase higher educational attainment. The strategies need to incorporate initiatives that go beyond financial interventions such as scholarships. Possible strategies could include mentorship, community and leadership building, activities to strengthen Roma identity and open expression in educational institutions. Measures which address the conscious and unconscious bias of educational staff and policy makers are particularly important. Anti-bias training can be included as a mandatory course in professional training for teachers. Additionally, it is imperative that curricula for future teachers integrate an understanding of the educational integration process and how an ethnic identity creates additional layers that lead to challenges in educational motivations and persistence. The above-mentioned proposals do not solely benefit the Roma community. They will expand the understanding among teachers, staff

and educational policy makers of how the socio-economic situation of student communities interacts with educational systems, which impact access, aspirations, persistence and success. The National Roma Inclusion Strategies are perfect tools to incorporate the specific targeted implementation of mainstream educational policies, to ensure that higher educational gaps are reduced.

While students face discrimination within higher educational systems, their enrolment was dependent on their resilience to direct and institutional antigypsyism prior to higher education. When in higher education, the only way to succeed was to fully integrate into a system that suppressed their identity in the name of getting educated in academic and social systems created for white students. Thus, the transitions Roma students face to integrate are in fact creating assimilation by making their educational success dependent on their ability to be white in a system made for white students. Without the psychological resilience as well as the family, social, and (at times) academic support to foster their resilience, Roma students would not have the ability to overcome antigypsyism in the educational system and in society, which is hindering their higher educational aspirations and persistence.

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