Strategic Regional Policy Analysis in Western Balkans and Turkey

Early Childhood Development and Primary Education

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

This strategic report is an output of the "EU Regional Action for Roma Education: Increased Education Opportunities for Roma Students and Roma Youth in Western Balkans and Turkey" project, funded by the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations of the European Commission and implemented by Roma Education Fund (REF) together with partners organizations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo[1], North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. The strategic analyses are thus situated within the context and conceptual frame of the project, which embodies the promotion of quality education for Roma at all educational levels (preschool, primary, secondary, tertiary), the improvement of educational outcomes of Roma with a focus on reducing the gender gap, the advancement of employability among Roma youth and smooth transition between school and labor market, and advocating for desegregation and systemic durable change for Roma in the education sector. The extensive research documents were drafted by Elona Dhëmbo and Veronika Duci with the involvement and the support of REF project team.

Early Childhood Development (ECD) and primary education have a strategic role for Roma Education Fund. In this area of interest, REF has developed special intervention models[2] that became *modus operandi* in achieving the mission of the foundation. Two of these intervention models are the following:

- Model 1 – Expanding Access to Preschool Education | Early Childhood Education
- Model 2 – Avoiding Early School Leaving in Primary Education

There is abundant evidence in the literature that early education is the most effective and important means of influencing a person's educational and social destiny. Following these indisputable research results, REF has developed special educational programs such as toy library (TL)[3], a community venue where children, their families and caregiver can go to borrow toys, games and books and bring them home and play together with them there. It is also a meeting place where families with young children can be supported in their parenting role. In addition, TL Program is also offering a complete package of activities for children, parents, grandparents like "Mothers'

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[1] This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

[2] See https://www.romaeducationfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/REFs-5-models.pdf (last accessed on 15.07.2021);

[3] toy_library_guidelines.pdf (romaeducationfund.org)

club | Literacy for Empowerment", "Story telling for children", "Handcraft | Toy making sessions for mothers and fathers", "Parental Club".

REF's primary education model intends to improve primary education outcomes, enhance access to primary education, prevent early school leaving, facilitate the transition to secondary education and improve parenting skills of Roma children aged between 6 and 14 by supporting primary education enrollment and providing additional/ remedial classes (school-after-school programs, tutoring and mentoring), strengthening the link between parents and schools, and offering professional support and guidance to school staff and authorities.

Early childhood education, access to preschool and primary education are key investments for successful learning outcomes and personal development. REF interventions focus on the equal access of Roma children and youth to the public education system, and on their performance, as the basis for their transition into the labor market and public/political leadership. The results obtained inspired and stimulated the replication of intervention models at systemic level, for all vulnerable groups of the society (e.g., children from single-parent families, poor children lacking or having a poor access to educational services, children from families where the parental support is insufficient and inadequate, etc.).

The geographical area covered by the interventions carried out by REF – i.e., 16 countries from Central and South-eastern Europe and the Western Balkans - triggered specific implementation challenges and finding of opportunities and conditions that can ensure the success thereof. In this way, REF has become, in this area, the main driver of stimulating initiatives aimed at ensuring equal opportunities in education and the educational inclusion of the Roma population. An argument for this conclusion is even this report supported by Roma Education Fund. Our hope is that the conclusions and recommendations advanced here are going to become a source of inspiration and a call to action for policymakers in all the countries covered by the research.

About the Authors

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and equal opportunities. Dr. Dhëmbo has ample records in researching Roma issues as well as contributing to policy-making processes for Roma inclusion at central and local level. Her most recent contribution in this respect is acting as national expert and leading the integration for the first of a standalone area on Antigypsyism in the recently approved new Action Plan for Roma and Egyptian Integration 2021-2025 in Albania.

Veronika Duci, Associate Professor, has been a lecturer for 17 years at the Department of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Tirana, where she has been also conducting research on social policies for children and advocacy. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, and a Master and a PhD from University of Tirana in Social Work and Social Policy. Prof. Duci has a rich experience as both international and national expert on the issues of inclusive education, child protection, social policies for children and social protection, migration and mobility, school dropout, etc. Prof. Duci has a strong research background and has been a lead researcher in several national and regional studies. Also, she has numerous records of academic publishing in distinguished journals. Roma inclusion and education issues has been part of Duci's research interest for several years.

ACRONYMS

ALMP – Active Labor Market Policies

BiH – Bosnia and Herzegovina

CSO – Civil Society Organization

EC – European Council

ECD – Early Childhood Development

ECE – Early Childhood Education

ECRI – European Commission against Racism and Intolerance

ERRC – European Roma Right Center

EU – European Union

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

FRA – European Agency for Fundamental Rights

KESP – Kosovo Education Strategic Plan

MICS – Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey

NER – Net Enrolment Rate

NGO – Non–Governmental Organization

NMC – National Minority Councils

OECD – Organization for the Economic Cooperation and Development

OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment

RCC – Regional Cooperation Council

REF – Roma Education Fund

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

VET – Vocational Education and Training

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education is the foundation for Roma inclusion across Western Balkans, Turkey and all countries and in all settings, urban and rural. Transnational and national policies have failed to ensure Roma inclusion and education equality, even though some progress has been made, particularly in primary education. Yet, most Roma children are struggling to continue, or participate at all, in some form of education. Education remains a significant cause of intergenerational discrimination and inequality towards Roma.

The purpose of this strategic policy analysis is to research and report on evidence from six countries of Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) and Turkey on policies' approach, their rationale and respective legal framework for early childhood development and primary education, taking a comparative perspective. Also, it aims to explore the common enabling factors and challenges that contribute to their implementation or lack of it.

Primary and secondary data collection was based on a thorough literature review for all targeted countries. After a country specific analysis common issues, challenges and practices were identified and analyzed from a regional perspective. Secondary data form official sources and primary qualitative data, collected via in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions with stakeholders and key informants, were utilized.

Some common regional contextual issues that have an impact on Roma children inclusion in ECD and primary education include poverty and poor parental educational levels, mobility, and migration of Roma families in Western Balkans and Turkey and political engagement and strengthening of Roma civil society. These should be addressed at policy/legal framework and implementation taking into consideration the specific needs of Roma minority.

The policy and legal framework had a steady advancement, influenced by the EU integration process. Even though this legal/policy infrastructure constitutes a solid base to shape and implement interventions for Roma children inclusion in ECD and primary education, the overall approach is fragmentized and sometimes incomplete, e.g. lack of bylaws, updated action plans etc.

Lack of budgets or lack of dedicated ones, gaps between national level policy – making and local level implementation with poor monitoring mechanisms across all levels add to the picture of policy rich – implementation poor countries. Lack of systematically collected data on Roma children inclusion in ECD and primary education makes it even more challenging to develop evidence – based policies and a compact monitoring/evaluation system.

In terms of policy outcomes, ECD and early exposure and enrolment of Roma children in education remains the Achilles heel, making it harder for them to have a safe and solid start. Low coverage of ECD facilities, uneven geographical distribution with higher concentration in urban areas, segregation and discrimination, hidden costs, and difficult enrolment procedures account for this low participation.

Primary education has tangible progress in the last years in all Western Balkan countries and Turkey. The gap between Roma and non – Roma children has narrowed, even though many of the former still continue to be out of the formal education system. When in school, often these are the children left behind by both teachers and parents, leading to a poor academic performance and making the need for support in these early years of utmost importance.

Segregation of Roma children persists both explicitly and implicitly, due to a lack of understanding of their needs – lack of mastery of mainstream language, lack of knowledge of Roma culture and history at school to name a few - or due to the fact that the residential area where Roma live and are schooled is segregated. Prejudice and harassment at school are common. Specific policy objectives targeting segregation and prejudice should be presented or strengthened.

There are several best practices and lessons learnt across the region – among them tutoring, mentoring, toy libraries, learning centers – which can and should be documented, shared, and scaled up. At policy making and implementation level, a holistic approach with complete legal framework, accompanied by a thorough data collection process to support the monitoring and evaluation system both at national and local level and eventually policy - making are crucial to move forward to effective policy implementation.

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Across the region of Western Balkans and Turkey, the coverage of education among Roma is narrow, and ethnic gaps are wide. Thus far, transnational, and national policies have failed to ensure Roma inclusion and education equality, even though some progress is visible[4]. A recent evaluation of a multi – country program in Western Balkan showed that though there was some improvement in enrolment and completion rates of Roma students, gaps between Roma and their non-Roma neighbors remain substantial, especially in upper-secondary and tertiary education. According to the same report, inequalities between Roma and non-Roma become apparent early in life and continue throughout tertiary education. Although governments include measures to raise preprimary enrollment in their National Action Plans for Roma Inclusion, access to preprimary education among Roma is low and in compulsory education there are still significant gaps in enrollments in schools, mostly driven by discrimination and restrictive social norms. Completion rates in compulsory education among Roma are generally low, and the gender gaps are large[5].

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development pledges to leave no one behind, envisaging "a socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met" and endeavoring to reach the furthest behind first (UN 2015). Both the global 2030 Agenda and the Europe 2020 strategy recognize that poverty, inequalities, and exclusion are among the greatest challenges that need to be addressed in order to achieve inclusive and sustainable development[6]. There are several SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) relevant to Roma inclusion in education, like SDG 4 on quality education, but also SDG 1 on ending poverty, SDG 2 on ending hunger, SDG 3 on healthy lives, SDG 4 on quality education, SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 6 on availability of water and sanitation, SDG 7 on affordable energy, SDG 8 on inclusive growth and employment, SDG 10 on reducing inequalities, SDG 11 on safe human settlements, and SDG 17 underlining the importance of data collection and monitoring, including disaggregated by ethnicity, gender and age.

[4] Alexiadou, N. (2019). Framing education policies and transitions of Roma students in Europe. Comparative education https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2019.1619334

[5] World Bank Group (2018). Breaking the Cycle of Roma Exclusion in the Western Balkans. Available at http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/642861552321695392/pdf/Breaking-the-Cycle-of-Roma-Exclusion-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf

[6] Dugarova, E., Slay, B., Papa, J., & Marnie, S., (2017). Leaving No One Behind in Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Roma Inclusion in Europe

Specifically, SDG 4 on quality education is composed of 7 outcome targets and 3 means of implementation. Two of its main targets are: (a) Universal primary and secondary education, which means the provision of 12 years of free, publicly-funded, inclusive, equitable, quality primary and secondary education – of which at least nine years are compulsory, leading to relevant learning outcomes – should be ensured for all, without discrimination and (b) Early childhood development and universal pre-primary education, meaning the provision of at least one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education is encouraged, to be delivered by well-trained educators, as well as that of early childhood development and care. Effective learning environments, scholarships and investment in teachers and educators are the main three means of implementation for this goal[7].

These goals reflect the need for holistic and intersectoral approaches for Roma children inclusion in educational systems.

Besides UN Sustainable Development Goals Agenda for 2030, there are important policy frames of reference for Roma inclusion in Europe. Firstly, the Decade for Roma Inclusion, a policy initiative of cooperation amongst governments, NGOs, and intergovernmental organizations, launched by the World Bank and UNDP, and aimed at combating discrimination against Roma in Europe. The Decade operated during 2005– 2015 and has now concluded its work. Major regional responses to the challenges of Roma inclusion can be traced back to the establishment of this initiative. Second, the European Union has taken on board the commitments of the Decade, but also the four priority areas of education, employment, health, and housing as the focus for policy, practice, and funding projects. The operating elements of the Decade are similar to the governance measures that the EU has adopted in areas of social and education policy, such as the creation of National Action Plans, exchange of knowledge, policy coordination, and the attempt to bring together governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and Romani civil

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[7] Global Campaign for Education. SDG 4. Available at https://campaignforeducation.org/en/who-we-are/the-international-education-framework-2/the-sustainable-development-goal-4/sdg4s-10-targets/?gclid=CjwKCAjwyvaJBhBpEiwA8d38vIR8Ks5aH3m0LvEQM5wzW71vNczvwEDQwXIvahMGTfLKwemVKXP9iRoCal0QAvD_BwE

society[8].Despite the progress in different areas during the implementation of the projects in Decade for Roma (like geographic coverage, participation of Roma in project cycles, reduction of gap between Roma and non - Roma) inclusion of Roma at the end of it was a distant objective, mainly due to insufficient efforts from the governments, which did not translate the high level commitment of Roma Decade into law or practice[9]. According to a Meta-analysis of Roma Decade project implementation and assessment, in order to achieve real inclusion, greater government engagement, scaling up and institutional incorporation of good practices are a must. Inclusion cannot be achieved by leaving the main role to civil society or international organizations, with their limited resources and reach[10].

Recently, EU has launched the EU Roma Strategic Framework for equality, inclusion, and participation for 2020 – 2030, which sets more ambitious, measurable targets focusing on inclusion, Antigypsyism and negative effect of COVID - 19. The Framework package includes a Portfolio of indicators coordinated by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and an Analytical Document where use of funds is highly recommended to support and add value to Member States Policies on equality for Roma population. Education, employment, health, and housing, remain core areas to be targeted by Member States through their National Roma Strategies, but three capital objectives are now included to be monitored and taken into action by MS: effective equality, Roma people effective and meaningful participation and socio-economic inclusion fighting persisting poverty rates. Its fourth sectorial objective related to education aims to increase effective equal access to quality inclusive mainstream education, and concretely to (a) Cut gap in participation in early childhood education and care by at least half, (b) Reduce gap in upper secondary completion by at least one third and (c) Work towards eliminating segregation by cutting at least in half the proportion of Roma children attending segregated primary schools. In July 2019, the Western Balkans prime ministers adopted a Declaration on Roma integration in the EU enlargement process, committing themselves to the concrete

[8] Alexiadou, N. (2019). Framing education policies and transitions of Roma students in Europe. Comparative education https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2019.1619334
[9] Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation (2014). Decade intelligence Report: Factors for success or failure of Roma inclusion projects. Available at:
 http://www.presenciagitana.org/Decade%20Intelligence%20Report%20FINAL.pdf
[10] Fresno JM, Lajčáková J, Szira J, Mačáková S, Karoly M, Rossi M (2019). A meta-evaluation of interventions for Roma inclusion, EUR 29847 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. ISBN 978-92-76-11047-7, doi:10.2760/641471, JRC117901

improvement of the situation of Roma as regards education, employment, health, housing, civil registration, and non-discrimination by the time of their accession [11]

An important event for the Western Balkans took place in July 2019. Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process was adopted within the Berlin Process. Unlike previous documents dealing with the Roma, this is the first time that leaders of Western Balkan societies have set clear goals that their governments intend to achieve by their EU accession. By adopting the Declaration, the economies committed themselves to continue and further enhance efforts to achieve equality and full inclusion of the Roma, as part of regional cooperation and the accession process to the European Union. In relation to education the Poznan Declaration asks countries to make a commitment to "*Increase the enrolment and completion rate of Roma in primary education to 90 per cent and the enrolment and completion rate of Roma in secondary education to 50 per cent*[12].

A recent report on Roma inclusion in Western Balkan countries showed that most Roma students report attended integrated schools, although significant proportions attended majority Roma schools, possibly signaling lower quality education. In 2017, between 10 percent (Serbia) and 40 percent (North Macedonia) of marginalized Roma students across countries reported attending majority Roma schools. In contrast, their non-Roma counterparts were less likely to attend such schools. North Macedonia stood out, with a 28 percentage point gap (only 12 percent of non-Roma attend majority Roma schools), whereas Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo exhibit gaps between 7 and 9 percentage points (there were no statistically significant gaps in Montenegro and Serbia).[13]

Though education may not be considered a lagging area in terms of the changes observed between the years, low coverage, and a lack of significant change in inequality signifies that more efforts

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[11] EU Roma Strategic Framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020 – 2030. Available at https://www.euromanet.eu/news/the-ec-launches-a-new-eu-roma-framework-for-equality-inclusion-and-participation-2020-2030/

[12] Western-Balkans-Declaration-on-Roma-Integration-and-EU-enlargement. Retrieved from https://www.romaeducationfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Western-Balkans-Declaration-on-Roma-Integration-and-EU-enlargement.pdf

[13] World Bank Group (2018). Breaking the Cycle of Roma Exclusion in the Western Balkans. Available at http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/642861552321695392/pdf/Breaking-the-Cycle-of-Roma-Exclusion-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf

and resources must still be applied to improve access. Although it is not easy to measure school achievement or quality of education there is reason to believe Roma students are behind their non - Roma peers in academic achievement, given the gaps in access to early childhood education, gaps in access to proper nutrition and sanitation, possible discriminatory practices in the classroom, and school segregation.[14]

Still, despite the progress achieved and considerable efforts of the national governments and relevant actors, Roma continue to experience multiple deprivations and face discrimination, with persistent segregation in education and housing and exclusion from the labor market. Many projects and practices have been rather limited in scope and scaling them up remains a major challenge.

1.1. Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this strategic policy analysis is to research and report on evidence from six countries of Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) and Turkey on the level of quality of policies related to the Roma early childhood and primary education, as well as on the factors that facilitate and block the effective development and implementation of these policies i.e. their specific objectives. Also, both country focus as well as common enablers and bottlenecks to policy implementation will be examined, learning from successful practices, and providing recommendations for strengthening policy development and implementation.

The main research questions for this strategic policy analysis are:
- What is the legal and policy state of art for Roma children early childhood and primary education in Western Balkans and Turkey?
- What are the main challenges and bottlenecks faced by Roma children in accessing and receiving quality early childhood and primary education?

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[14] Ibid

- What are the best practices in the region and what can be learnt in respect to access to and provision of quality education?

2. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology approach was employed for the development of this paper, consisting in a comprehensive literature review of relevant reports, articles and statistical indicators related to Roma children inclusion in education and primary data collection in the seven countries through interviews and focus groups discussions.

2.1. Study Participants

Key stakeholders that participated in the process of primary data collection were selected from each country based on their experience in Roma inclusion in education issues. They were representatives from REF project implementing partner organizations, representatives from central and local government, CSOs working in the field of Roma children and youth education, and international organizations/donors that prioritize Roma children and youth education. Besides them REF project team participated in a focus group discussion.

At least two interviews and one focus group discussion (ranging from 5 to 12 participants) were conducted per country with the above-mentioned stakeholders, as well as one focus group discussion with REF project team to discuss the regional perspective of these issues.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

The data collection methods used for this process are based on a preliminary extensive literature review. The focus of the primary data collection was in three different layers: (a) policies and legal framework, (b) interventions and approaches that are being used and (c) outcomes. A special emphasis was put in best practices and lessons learnt. Gender and geographical differences all three layers of analysis were cross – cutting issues. More specific, the two phases of developing

data collection tools were an initial literature review and then the drafting of qualitative research tools, as follows:

Phase 1. Literature review - a thorough examination of the current body of research about Roma Education Policies in Western Balkans, including REF documents. Legal and policy framework analysis was part of this process, during which National Roma and non – Roma policies and legislation on education was reviewed based on pre – defined criteria. Additionally, secondary data collection of statistical indicators was conducted by the experts focused on enrolment and completion rates of Roma students in the respective countries at all levels of education indicating the effectiveness and efficiency of Roma Education Policies and current state of the art.

Phase 2. Drafting of primary data collection tools - in – depth interviews and **FGDs** with key stakeholders. The major areas that were explored and analyzed from a policy analysis perspective were: legal and policy framework, operational structures/governance and funding, accountability, learning and teaching environment and support measures, besides the indicators mentioned above. A particular focus was paid to exploring challenges, bottlenecks as well as opportunities and recommendations for future improvements.

2.3. Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis was conducted based on pre – selected criteria, as described above: (a) policies and legal framework, (b) interventions and approaches that shape them and (c) outcomes. The process of data analysis included inputs from literature review, interviews and FGDs, as well as statistical indicators. During data collection through interviews and FGDs notes were kept some of them were recorded. These interviews and FGDs were transcribed and processed for data analysis. Confidentiality of the interviews is guaranteed. The qualitative data were coded and organized around the main themes of primary data collection. Sub-codes will be further developed, merged and rearranged based on the variations and new insights emerging during narrations.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Albania

In Albania the most recent available official source reporting on the overall population of Roma and Egyptian minorities in the county is that of the Census 2011. The data for Albania show it to be a predominantly ethnic homogeneous country where 83 percent of the population self-identify as Albanians (and 14 percent preferred not to answer) and less that 2 percent of the population was self-identified as belonging to an ethnic minority among which, the Roma population counts some 8,301 individuals and the Egyptians, around 3368 individuals – less than 0,5 percent of the 2,8 million of inhabitants of the country[15]. However, this data are often taken with caution given that the census drew a lot of criticism in terms of drastically undercounting the number of Romani in the country.[16] The European Roma Right Center (ERRC) estimates for a population of 120,000 Roma in Albania[17]. But beyond figures, both Roma and Egyptian communities are officially recognized as minorities and Roma and Egyptians live all over the country. Some of the biggest communities can be found around the capital, Tirana, as well as in some other major cities and their surroundings such as in Fier, Berat, Gjirokastra, and Korça.

The education system in Albania is organized around the following main pillars:

- Preschool education – starts from 0 to 6 years and it is not obligatory. Institutions offering preschool education are nurseries and kindergartens. Nurseries depend by local governance units and serve to children 0 to 3 years old. Kindergartens, on the other hand, which can be half- or full-board are under the auspice of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth and are frequented by children 3 to 6 years old.

- Basic education – starts at the age of 6 and ends at the age of 16 years old and is compulsory. It is composed by two cycles:

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[15] Simons, Galanxhi, and Dhono (2015) Roma and Egyptians in Albania: a socio-demographic and economic profile based on the 2011 census April 2015, UNDP Albania

[16] Qejvanaj G. (2021). Albanian National Action Plan for Roma Inclusion 2016–2020: A Study on the Program Achievements at the Halfway Mark. SAGE Open. July 2021. doi:10.1177/21582440211036107

[17] Ibid

- o Primary cycle – composed of five classes (classes I-IV); and
- o Lower secondary education – composed of four classes (classes VI-IX)[18].

- Upper secondary education – is not obligatory and starts at the age of 16 years old. Higher secondary education in Albania is composed by:
  - o General Upper Secondary education (gymnasiums) – which last three years. Pupils that are 23 years old but did not complete this type of education can follow it on part-time basis.
  - o Professional High schools – have a duration of two to four years. It is structured at three levels based on Albanian National Qualification Framework.
  - o Oriented Education Schools – include art schools, sport schools, foreign languages schools and schools oriented in other education areas. Admission in these institutions is done based on specific criteria set by specific Decision of Council of Ministers[19].

- Tertiary education – is typically a three – years Bachelor's degree, followed by a Professional Master or a Master of Science of a length of one or two years. Doctoral programs complete the university level panorama in the Albanian education system.

Data presented in the new Draft-Strategy on Education in Albania 2021-2026[20] report for the academic year 2018/19 that a total of about 5,000 Roma children and 11,100 Egyptian children were enrolled in Albanian schools, or three times more than a decade ago. Participation of children aged 7-15 in compulsory education increased from 48 per cent in 2011 to 66 per cent in 2017, however, the gap between Roma / Egyptian children and other children living in the same area remains a concern[21]. Children of Roma and Egyptian minorities have poor access to quality education too. There is evidence that Roma children perform poorly in the 5th grade, averaging 29 points, compared to the 45-point average in the assessment of primary school student achievement

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[18] The pupils that are 16 years old but did not complete primary education can complete it in part-time schools. Basic education for pupils with limited abilities is organized in special schools, in special classes within normal schools or integrated in normal classes.

[19] For more details visit https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/albania_en
[20] Published for public consultation at
https://www.konsultimipublik.gov.al/Konsultime/Detaje/349?fbclid=IwAR2VOzuezu0mVFMEriOtE9dAt3-LR6U8ExRumFHSwC-SehgjwNNQY8niEL0
[21] European Commission, "Albania 2019 Report - Communication on EU Enlargement Policy," 2019.

VANAF)[22]. Insights on these Roma education related issues are further provided in the following sections.

3.1.1. POLICY & LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Particularly during the last 10 years, the Albanian Government has intensified its efforts to improve the living conditions of the Roma and Egyptian Minorities, and to enable their inclusion into the Albanian society. In addition to the ratification of international conventions for the protection of fundamental human rights, the national legal framework has also been developed in line with European standards, dictated by the acquisition of EU candidate status.

Policy logic targeting the Roma and Egyptian minorities prioritizes education and in particular the early enrolment of Roma and Egyptian children in preschool and compulsory education as well as increasing the number of Roma and Egyptian educators and teachers in the education system[23]. This is materialized in the main strategic document, the Action Plan for Integration of Roma and Egyptians in Albania 2016-2020, which proposes a number of measures in the area of education, expected to be followed by the new Action Plan 2021-2025, currently being designed through a participatory process and including for the first time Antigypsyism as a standalone priority area.

Education of Roma and Egyptian children is affected, explicitly or implicitly, by a number of other strategic and legal documents, including:

- Action Plan for Integration of Roma and Egyptians in Albania 2016 - 2020[24]

- Strategy on Pre – University Education 2014 – 2020[25]

- National Strategy on Social Protection 2019 – 2022

- Action Plan for Children in Street Situation 2019 – 2021

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[22] UNICEF, *Albania - The Cost of Underinvestment in Education: And ways to reduce it,* 2017.
[23] Regional Cooperation Council (2021). Mainstream policies targeting Roma integration in the Western Balkans. P.8
[24] Currently the new strategy is being drafted
[25] Currently the new strategy is being drafted

Relevant laws that affect the inclusion of Roma in different educational levels are:

- Law on the Protection of National Minorities in Albania (2018)

- Law on Pre – University Education (2013)

- Law on Social Housing (2018)

- Law on Rights and Protection of Child (2017)

Besides these policy and legal provisions, it remains that the framework is fairly generic, does not provide concrete measure for Roma and Egyptian minorities in particular and (often) fails to provide for an adequate response to their needs, which is reflected in the relative progress in terms of achievements in this area.

The main institution responsible for implementation of education reform and the majority of measures aimed at the inclusion of minorities is the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Other institutions play a crucial role in particular activities, such as the Ministry of Interior in the registration of all school age children into the system and other line ministries, such as the Ministry of Health and Social Protection when the economic status of the person is in question (which in most cases is of crucial importance to Roma and Egyptian parents and children). When it comes to changes to the education curriculum and the implementation of concrete measures in the field, besides the Ministry of Education, other key institutions are the Institute of Educational Development, the Agency of the Quality Assurance of Pre-University Education, and the Regional Directorates of Education.

3.1.2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Based on the latest EU progress report there is a positive trend in relation to the participation of Roma and Egyptian children in mainstream education, with 14,515 students in the pre-university education system and 2,996 children in kindergartens[26]. However, disaggregated data for Roma

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[26] EU (2021). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/default/files/albania_report_2020.pdf

and Egyptians are still lacking. Primary data collected in the frame of this assessment also confirm an overall positive trend perceived by most of the relevant stakeholders. Growing efforts have resulted in a more integrated approach in tackling issues of Roma education in the country.

However, there is a perceived tendency of the policy logic to operate in a more implicit way rather than an explicit one. Specifically, Roma and Egyptian children are typically targeted as part of the general category of the vulnerable groups. Some of the traditional problems related to lack of dedicated budgets for Roma inclusion, poor inter-institutional coordination, lack of human recourses / high turnover rates, as well as lack of or poor levels of transparency, were reported in the primary data as main inhibitors to a more successful implementation of the policy and legal framework. There is concern that the pandemic might has undone some of the achievements and the donor withdrawal/changing priorities might result in less opportunities for progress. Nevertheless, the new Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptian Minorities 2020-2025, is appreciated as an opportunity to address issues and challenges faced in the implementation of the previous action plan. Furthermore, including Antigypsyism as a standalone area in the new action plan, adds more to the optimism for the future policy interventions.

When it comes to the level of measures implemented and actions taken, the provision of free textbooks, transportation for children living in a distance greater than 2km are singled out as impactful in improving the enrolment and attendance of Roma children in compulsory education, from grade 1 to 9. However, the gap between Roma/Egyptians and other non-Roma children living in the same areas remains significant. In primary education this gap reaches 31%, with only 66% of Roma children being enrolled[27]. According to key-informants participating in the FGD, dropout levels jump after grade 6. Some of the reasons for this range from issues of poverty to discrimination and bullying in schools. Lack of role-models (or role models who are willing to serve as such for their communities) adds to the picture.

Participants in this study shared data and case stories to illustrate for gender differences not to be significant in ECD and primary education, but they start to grow in the higher levels. Also, a gap is reported in terms of the differences between urban areas and the more rural/remote ones, where

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[27] Report on the Implementation of Roma Integration Public Policy in Albania For 2019 www.romalb.org

the mentality is stronger and working with parents and (extended) family is necessary in overcoming barriers of Roma children early enrollment.

However, accounting for Roma children enrollment in kindergartens, preschool, and even compulsory education (starting at the age of 6) is challenging. Official statistics on Roma children school enrollment report on a 100% passing rate, but this refers to the children already in the system. There are no data accounting for unregistered children, those out of the system, and in the move (in the country and abroad). Roma children enrollment in kindergartens is particularly low, however, up-to-date and reliable data is lacking. Besides the fact that preschool year is not mandatory, the overall low capacities and poor infrastructure in the preschool system is a main concern for enabling higher participation of Roma children in preschool. Poor awareness on the importance of ECD and hidden discrimination further lower the chances of Roma children for an early enrollment in preschool services. For example, an interview provided the example of Shkodra where out of around 400 Roma children, only 35 (or less than 10%) were in kindergarten. Last but not least, a miss-coordination between central and local level governance in terms of provisions and responsibilities has made it difficult for the Roma children and their families to access provisions and benefits (for example, the legal provision which entitles Roma children to attend kindergartens free of charge was not implemented in all municipalities).

Despite trends of increasing educational level of the Roma and Egyptian population in Albania, there are still cases of *segregation* and other forms of discrimination in relation to members of the Roma and Egyptian minorities[28]. However, primary data from interviews with stakeholders valued these issues of segregation to be somehow a primary concern. In the recent years, wherever there has been a red flag of segregation, there has been a strong reaction and immediate measures/actions to address the case. Kindergartens and schools dominated by Roma children are rarely featuring in areas with homogenous Roma community. This could be used as an opportunity to practice similar approaches as with other minorities in the country, such as the Greek minority and, for example, provide Romani language.

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[28] As reported in the new Education Draft-Strategy 2021-2026
https://www.konsultimipublik.gov.al/Konsultime/Detaje/349?fbclid=IwAR2VOzuezu0mVFMEriOtE9dAt3-LR6U8ExRumFHSwC-SehgjwNNQY8niEL0

3.1.3. BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNT

At the institutional level, RomAlb system of data collection on Roma and Egyptian minorities is listed as a best practice. The system is operational since 2016, systemically collecting and reporting on Roma and Egyptian inclusion-related indicators, hence helping in boosting monitoring and evaluation progresses as well as enabling a more evidence-based approach in policymaking in the area.

In terms of more tailor-made and explicit interventions targeting ECD and primary education for Roma children, participant in the primary data-collection process reported the following to have proven efficient:

- *Early enrolment*: case stories and data on Roma children who have progressed to higher levels of education correlate with an early enrollment of the child in preschool services. Preschool enrollment sets solid foundations of confidence and interest in the other levels of education. It is in this light that a combination of measures to improve access of Roma children to preschool, kindergarten and nurseries as well as making of preschool year mandatory, would result in higher levels of early enrollment of Roma children in the education system.

- *Tutoring and extra/additional classes*: for most children it has proven very effective to have tutoring and/or extra classes in order to cover for language difficulties, gaps from previous education years/experiences, and/or lack of parental guidance/support. This is particularly important for children who are part of families on the move or returning from migration.

- *Scholarships*: when combined with other provisions such as tutoring, scholarships have proven very effective, enabling education of children form deprived economic settings. However, it is important that such types of support are sustainable for the child to progress and climb up the education levels. (If discontinued they might dropout and the investment done that far is lost).

- *Parenting programs:* they are particularly encouraged for young parents and/or non-educated ones.
- *Toy library:* a very successful practice of REF is setting these toy libraries where Roma children and parents would come together and engage in reading, play, as well as borrow books and toys. An early exposure to books and creative toys and games encouraged a greater interest of Roma children and parents in education.
- *Participation of Roma parents in school boards*: when present, they have been perceived to boost the connection between the community and school and also foster a greater level of trust in institutions.

In the list of things that could have worked better and/or that would help if practiced in the future, interviewed stakeholders identified the following:

- Roma and Egyptian Integration Plans developed by many municipalities at the local level have been reported by the interviewed stakeholders to have generally failed to be successfully implemented. Lack of monitoring and evaluation reports on the level of implementation of these plans makes it difficult to provide evidence on the level of success/failure and the reasons behind;
- A still high level of dependency on donors' funds continues to be a serious threat to sustainability;
- Poor inter-institutional coordination, restructuring and reassigning of duties and responsibilities without due information, a tendency for centralization (for example scholarship scheme is administered by the National Agency for the Protection of Children), and high turnover of the specialized staff in relevant institutions/positions.

3.2. Bosnia and Herzegovina

The 2013 census in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) registered 12,583 Roma in the country. However, the Roma led civil society organizations and Roma leaders claim that the average estimate on the number of Roma living in Bosnia and Herzegovina is at around 76,000[29]. As in

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[29] Regional Cooperation Council Roma Integration 2020 Action Team (2018) Potentials For Roma Employment In The Enlargement Region
https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/456df932ca6433b78cfb328d31d76035.pdf Page 15

other countries of the region, a large number of Romani individuals are undocumented[30]. As a result, they are unable to enjoy the full scope of citizenship or receive any governmental assistance.[31] This has a direct impact also in the areas of EDC and primary education, be it in terms of enabling Roma inclusion but also in terms of monitoring and evaluating processes, outcomes, and impact.

In an overview, the education system in BiH is structured as follows:

- **Primary education** is mandatory and it lasts 9 years. Public primary education is free and the only admission criterion is the age – all children have to be enrolled in primary school between 5 ½ and 6 ½ years old.
- **Secondary education** is not compulsory but is available to everyone under equal conditions. Secondary education is available primarily in forms of general secondary education schools (grammar schools), vocational secondary education schools, and art schools. General secondary education lasts 4 years and vocational secondary education lasts 3 or 4 years. Students are usually 15 years old when they enter secondary education and they are admitted to schools on the basis of primary school achievements and final exam results.
- **Higher education** is organized in three cycles leading to bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees.
- **Youth and adult education** can be formal, non-formal and informal learning and aims at achieving the least basic education and boosting chances of employability.[32]

The most comprehensive data on Roma education in BiH are those provided by the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey - Roma Settlements (2011). While it is usual for children to develop skills with increased age the data indicated that the ECDI of Roma children aged 48-59 months (85 per cent) was the same as that of children aged 36-47 months (85 per cent). [33] Overall, poor

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[30] See for instance http://www.errc.org/press-releases/lack-of-birth-certificates-leaves-romani-children-in-balkans-at-risk-of-statelessness-and-without-healthcare-or-education

[31] In Romani Poverty in Bosnia and Herzegovina
https://borgenproject.org/romani-poverty-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina/

[32] See also https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/bosnia-and-herzegovina_en

[33] UNICEF (2011) Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2011 - Roma Settlements

achievements were recorded in terms of being on track in the literacy-numeracy domain, but while the score for this domain in the total population was at 25 percent, for Roma children did not pass the level of 8 percent[34]. It was estimated that of all children starting grade one three quarters (75 per cent) will eventually reach the last grade. This percentage was lower amongst children from households where the mother tongue of the household head was Romani compared to those where the household head spoke another mother tongue (68 per cent versus 81 per cent)[35]. Gender differences were recorded in terms of the net primary school completion rate that was higher amongst boys (46 per cent) than girls (34 per cent).[36]

3.2.1. POLICY & LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a strategic platform for Roma inclusion endorsed by the Council of Ministers since 2005 and valid until the completion of the inclusion of Roma and fulfilment of all objectives[37]. Action plans are prepared for the period of 3 to 4 years, with the most recent one covering the period 2017-2020. A dedicated Framework Action Plan on Education Needs of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina is to be completed next year (2018-2022)[38]. Action plans are also being developed and implemented at the entity or municipal level[39].

The policy logic in terms of Roma inclusion with a focus on the area of education aims to:

a. Improve the educational attainment by preventing early school-leaving.
b. Encourage completion of secondary education and continuation to tertiary education.
c. Provide tuition, financial or other support to compensate children of war veterans, those with disabilities and the holders of war honors for material disadvantage.[40]

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[34] See for a comparison the general MISC for BiH 2011 and that on Roma Settlements of the same year.

[35] UNICEF (2011) Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2011 - Roma Settlements

[36] Ibid. p.84.

[37] Meliha Kozaric Fanning (2017) Analysis of The Priorities And Budget Of The Official Roma Integration Policies In The Areas Of Employment And Housing In The Western Balkans And Turkey

[38] For more details, see "Framework Action Plan on Educational Needs of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina" available at http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/PDF/djeca/Okvirni%20Akcioni%20Plan%20fin%20verzija.pdf

[39] One example is the Action Plan of the Municipality Zavidovici for Advancing Position of Roma Population in the Field of Education, Health and Social Care, Employment and Housing and Culture for the Period 2019-2023, http://www.zavidovici.ba/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/akcioni-plan.pdf.

[40] Regional Cooperation Council (2021). Mainstream policies targeting Roma integration in the Western Balkans. https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/bc683d69caea951b0ba571874161cc27.pdf Page 13

Several sectorial strategies are relevant to the education enrollment and achievements of Roma children and youth. The most recent ones being the "Revised Action Plan on the Educational needs of Roma" and the "Platform for the Development of Preschool Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2017–2022".[41] The implementation of the policy framework and its monitoring were expected to improve due to the adoption of the new Framework Action Plan on Educational Needs of Roma 2018-2022[42]. For the purpose of monitoring in education, Bosnia and Herzegovina prepared a monitoring template explicitly on education, compliant with the regionally adopted template for reporting on Roma inclusion policies prepared by the Roma Integration Program 2020. However, a recent assessment on the mainstream Roma integration policies in the BW and Turkey, finds that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the implementation of the Revised Action Plan on the Educational Needs of Roma is yet fragmented, with only few steps forward and limited achievements [43]. In particular, policy differences form canton to canton shape an uneven implementation of the foreseen measures in different areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This uneven implementation of the policy and legal framework unfolds in an overall context which is pictured to lack of adequate policies and programs which are budgeted and up-to-date. It is observed that adequate policies and programs with allocated funds that would effectively address the issue of Roma and other vulnerable groups do not accompany strategic developed documents at the state level. The most recent Framework Action Plan on Educational Needs of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018-2022 is about to expire next year but monitoring reports were not available to document/report on its implementation progress.

According to the legal framework regarding Roma and education in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are two framework laws:

- Law on Preschool Education[44];

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[41] Part of the strategic frame has been the already expired document of the Strategic Directions for the Development of Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina within the Implementation Plan 2008–2015.

[42] Roma Regional Cooperation (2019) 2018 National Platform On Roma Integration Bosnia And Herzegovina 28 September 2018, Sarajevo
https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/c6b644fd035a8fa2f2a90f4e34a3b3d3.pdf

[43] Ibid. Page 13

[44] Framework Law On Preschool Care And Education In Bosnia And Herzegovina (2007)
http://www.esteri.it/mae/doc/ba%2009%20ib%20ot%2001%20framework%20law%20on%20preschool%20education.pdf

- Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina[45];
- Law on Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina[46].

All education laws mainstream respect for human rights and ban all forms of discrimination. In particular, Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina stipulates through its provisions the need to ensure accessibility and the obligation of primary education for all children without discrimination on any basis. The cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina have the competence to adopt regulations that will ensure consistent implementation of the provisions of the Framework Law as well as to implement them in educational practice. Education institutions differ from canton to canton in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Republika Srpska. As many as 14 different layers of bodies regulating education in the country make it extremely challenging for well-harmonized interventions and progress throughout the country[47].

The division of responsibilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina is such that the Board on Roma discusses questions of interest for Roma inclusion and provides policy proposals to the Government and has an advisory role, while the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR) are tasked with decision-making and implementation and it is claimed that the institutional cooperation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is continuously improving[48]. But increased support from the Ministry of Civil Affairs (responsible for education at the federal level) is required to ensure successful implementation of the Framework Action Plan.

The entities and cantons are expected to follow up by adopting entity/cantonal action plans on education. In line with the national policy logic and priorities, they should aim to: a. include Roma

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[45] Framework Law On Primary And Secondary Education In Bosnia And Herzegovina (2003)
https://aposo.gov.ba/sadrzaj/uploads/Framework-Law.pdf
[46] Framework Law on Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2007)
http://www.cip.gov.ba/images/pdf/okvirni/Okvirni.eng.pdf
[47] Primary data – FGD.
[48] Roma Regional Cooperation (2019) 2018 National Platform On Roma Integration Bosnia And Herzegovina 28 September 2018, Sarajevo
https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/c6b644fd035a8fa2f2a90f4e34a3b3d3.pdf

children in compulsory primary education; b. motivate Roma children to continue with secondary and tertiary education[49]. A third aim refers to preserving Roma language and culture.[50]

3.2.2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Policies, laws and regulations which are overall assessed to be well written and in line with the EU guidelines, have been difficult to implement and monitor. Thus, achievements have been difficult to monitor and report. The monitoring process (in particular in reference to the implementation of the Action Plan 2017-2020) has been challenged by the fact that Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR) did not have the mandate over education policy, leading MHRR to submit requests for information to line ministries at entity levels and informed them of the obligations of Bosnia and Herzegovina under the Roma Integration Strategy, but with limited success and incomplete information[51].

The official information on the number of Roma children in all levels of education is not available. While the number of Roma children enrolled in primary education is claimed to have increased, information for children enrolled in secondary education is not at all available[52]. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is compulsory to attend education up to 15 years of age and children are being formally and automatically enrolled in schools until they turn 15. This automatic enrollment does not make it possible to account for dropouts, making official data (even when available) not relevant to describe the reality. Likewise, the information on the exact amount of funds spent is not readily available as the MHRR does not have mechanisms and sometimes even the capacities (e.g. being understaffed) to properly monitor spending of the budget allocated for Roma Integration.

The Agency for Statistics was expected to develop a methodology to improve data collection on the number of Roma beneficiaries and the collection of impact indicators. In 2018 IPA funds were allocated for social mapping as well as for monitoring social inclusion of vulnerable groups

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[49] With reference to the later, two specific measures are expected: - providing free of charge school books and transportation for Roma high-school students, and - providing scholarships to Roma high-school students who regularly attend school. Both have only partially implemented.

[50] However, no activities were reported to be implemented under this aim, at least until 2018 (apart from Roma language being expected be taught at the University of Philosophy form the academic year 2018-2019).

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

through centers for social work and employment offices. The lack of support from the Ministry of Civil Affairs is considered an obstacle in funds programming. Performing social mapping and establishing an effective system for monitoring social inclusion is necessary for evidence-based policy planning and prioritization (also a condition for further access to future IPA funding).[53]

While there is progress and good practices at some municipalities, they remain rare and insufficient and lack of a systemic approach and uniformity in implementing the legislation is the main challenge in advancing Roma inclusion in mainstream education in Bosnia and Herzegovina[54].

Awareness of the importance of ECD and early enrollment is still to be achieved (in the Roma communities but other communities too). ECD is typically not perceived as education, but rather as care services. Besides mentality on ECD, the poor infrastructure (limited capacities and availability) and costs are other challenges in the way of inclusion of Roma children in ECD and preschool system. Some of the progress was observed to be lost when it comes to preschool enrollment of Roma children. Enrollment in preschool education went down to 3 per cent in 2017 form 11 per cent in 2011[55].

Overall non-satisfactory performance is due to lack of and/or non-results-oriented budgeting in the area of education. Monitoring implementation of education measures it is reported that most budget funds in education are being spent on salaries while investments in quality improvements are low. On the other hand, although most budgets' funds are spent on wages, teachers' wages are still low and uneven across the country. The insufficient transparency and unclear budget allocations make it is hard to draw conclusions about overall spending on education. Moreover, budgetary items differ across administrative units which makes it impossible to determine the relationship between the funds spent on salaries and fees on one side and quality improvements on the other[56]. Funding for education is largely provided by the entity (in the case of RS), canton, and

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[53] Roma Regional Cooperation (2019) 2018 National Platform On Roma Integration Bosnia And Herzegovina 28 September 2018, Sarajevo
Https://Www.Rcc.Int/Romaintegration2020/Files/Admin/Docs/C6b644fd035a8fa2f2a90f4e34a3b3d3.Pdf

[54] Regional Cooperation Council (2021). Mainstream policies targeting Roma integration in the Western Balkans. https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/bc683d69caea951b0ba571874161cc27.pdf

[55] World Bank Group (2019) Bosnia and Herzegovina Review of Efficiency of Services in Pre-University Education, p. 19. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/719981571233699712/pdf/Bosnia-and-Herzegovina-Review-of-Efficiency-of-Services-in-Pre-University-Education-Phase-I-Stocktaking.pdf

[56] USAID (2018) Brief assessment of basic education in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Follow-on, USAID/Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 2018 p.42

municipality budgets, with funding from the central state-level government almost non-existent. Their distribution depends on the level of education and the entity or canton. Decision criteria are determined by the ministries of education for each entity/canton based on their financial capacities.[57]

In most of the cantons, preschool (from 5 and ½ years old to 6 and ½) is compulsory, but participation is low. Kindergarten fees are expensive. Although children from vulnerable families are excluded form fees, there are hidden costs such as those for clothes and slippers, didactic materials etc. Fee compensation procedures[58] vary from one canton to the other and often put extra burden/challenges on the parents, discouraging them to complete the process. With many Roma parents lacking primary education, not only enrollment but also advancement of Roma children from one grade to the other is difficult, without any additional support (such as tutoring, additional classes etc.). Covid-19 crisis, shifting to online education also made computer literacy a must for parents to be able to support their children, hence adding to the challenges.

Issues of *segregation* are peculiar in Bosnia and Herzegovina. While no cases of Roma segregated schools/classes were reported to be of a concern, issues of segregation are present at the level of segregation between Bosnians and Croats (having two schools under one roof but Bosnian and Croatians do not even meet during the breaks) and this does affect Roma children to one school or the other as well. Hidden segregation is of larger concern. Segregation happens in practice at the class level and also in teachers' approach to Roma children. It is reported that it is a common for most of the educators to give more attention to non-Roma children. Even when Roma children start on par or even more advanced as compared to their peers they are found to not keep the pace, and this is also due to this differentiation in teaching.

Region and gender base differences were reported too. Tuzla region was singled out as the area with most (sustainable) achievements in terms of Roma inclusion and Roma education. Main argument for this is the combination of a stronger Roma civil society and activism and (greater)

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[57] World Bank Group (2019) Bosnia and Herzegovina Review of Efficiency of Services in Pre-University Education, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/719981571233699712/pdf/Bosnia-and-Herzegovina-Review-of-Efficiency-of-Services-in-Pre-University-Education-Phase-I-Stocktaking.pdf

[58] Primary data collected through in-depth-interviews and FG discussions with various stakeholders point to the opportunity of full or partial compensation of kindergarten fees, however, levels of compensation and procedures to be followed by entitled beneficiaries vary from one canton to the other. This creates basis for lack of clarity and premises for discouraging Roma families to apply. This is particularly relevant for families on the move as well as those in which parents have difficulties in literacy and/or preparing documents/applications.

willingness and sustainable responsiveness of the local level authorities. Gender differences, on the other hand, were reported to have shrunk (sometimes with girls surpassing boys' enrolment and in academic achievements).

3.2.3. BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNT

Toy libraries emerge as a success story in Bosnia and Herzegovina too. The efficiency of this initiative has been documented and recognized and second by the local authorities providing an example of a best practice also in terms of ensuring sustainability and ownership and responsiveness for the public institutions. Two toy libraries within the mainstream kindergarten facilities are being supported by the respective municipalities which cover their costs, and one municipality also co – financed the adaptation of toy library. Considered a success story this best practice is intended to be replicated in other settings too.

REF integrated approach, (e.g. in combining mentoring and tutoring support for secondary education), is reported to have worked very well in Bosnia and Herzegovina where the main added value of this approach is seen not just in supporting and enabling more Roma children through education levels, but rather in its impact in shifting mentality in regard to education in Roma families and communities[59]. Various stakeholder reported to have noticed a shift in priorities which came with practicing these different forms of support. Initially scholarships where the main incentivizing form of support to Roma parents but benefiting and experiencing the impact of mentorship and particularly tutoring for their children has moved the latter up the priority scale as compared to scholarships. It is through this integrated approach that in few years the dropout rate was reduced to 5% and the average grade among the beneficiaries increased by 1 out of 5, and girls' enrolment increased significantly too.

The experience thus far has taught some lessons in terms of participation, activism, flexibility, and willingness. Roma activism and participation are stressed by most stakeholders as key to more (sustainable) results. Policymaking, decision-making, and planning done with the Roma for the Roma ensure a sense of ownership and higher levels of responsibility and responsiveness from all

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[59] REF educational model for primary education is presented as a model of good practice in in the Framework Action Plan on Educational Needs of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018-2022 (see http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/PDF/djeca/Okvirni%20Akcioni%20Plan%20fin%20verzija.pdf).

actors. The designing of the Framework Action Plan at the national level conducted in a setting of close collaboration between the different cantons and the Roma NGOs was singled out as a best practice in this respect.

A stronger civil society has translated in more results. Much of the achievements are attributed to the work of CSOs and even individual activists, showing that every single action and effort helps and might have an impact. However, higher records of quantity indicators (such as enrolment rates) do not lead by default to quality and sustainable results. Although more Roma children attend school and their passing rate during primary school is maximal, it is not a rare phenomenon that they do so with poor learning and academic performance (that later impacts all their following education and working chances).

Greater willingness and flexibility form relevant institutions, when present, has proved very helpful. The example of a school principal in Mostar who actively supported and facilitated Roma children on the move from middle Bosnia to the seaside area in immediately enrolling them in school regardless of the procedural/paper related challenges, giving parents more time and flexibility to complete and submit the required documents.

3.3. Kosovo

The Roma community in Kosovo consists of three different ethnic groups, namely Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians. The three communities differ from each other in terms of place of origin and language. Roma in Kosovo are mainly Muslim and speak the Roma language (Romani) and Albanian or Serbian as their second language. The Ashkali and Egyptian communities are mainly Muslim and speak Albanian. According to the 2011 census, 35,784 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (8,824 Roma, 15,436 Ashkali and 11,524 Egyptians) reside in Kosovo or 2 per cent of the total population[60]. Roma families are facing extreme poverty in much higher percentages than the non – Roma population, with a less than half per capita income[61]. Recently, migration to other countries

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[60] RCC (2021). Analysis of mainstream policies for Roma inclusion in Kosovo. Available at
https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/605ee6ad79e481a4d47e0eca6c0ae70d.pdf
[61] Ibid

and return is common among Roma communities, adding to the challenges faced by children that have to attend two or more different educational systems.

The national education system is structured as follows:

- Preschool education (children under 6 years of age)
- Primary Education, compulsory (grades 1-5, children aged 6-10 years)
- Lower Secondary Education, compulsory (Grades 6-9, Children Aged 11-14)
- Higher Secondary Education (grades 10-12, children aged 15-18)
- Higher Education[62]

Kosovo has two parallel educational systems running in its territory, one Kosovar and one Serbian. Members of communities in Kosovo enroll in schools under either education system depending on a number of factors such as their language, geographical location, religion and/or political pressure. Roma pupils can be found in both school systems, based on the previous factors[63]. This report refers mainly to issues of Roma children for inclusion in the Kosovo national education system.

3.3.1. POLICY & LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Kosovo has made significant efforts to improve its educational system during the last few years. The main strategy targeting Roma inclusion in Kosovo is the Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali 2017 – 2021, which puts education as a first strategic objective. The objective aims to increase inclusion in pre-primary, primary and secondary education and it suggests opening pre-primary classes in schools and building preschool facilities in Roma and Ashkali neighborhoods as measures for fulfilling this goal. Education Strategic Plan 2017–2021 is the main policy document for the development of the education system. The plan identifies seven strategic objectives relevant to the Kosovar education sector, most of which concern the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities either directly or indirectly. Strategic objective 1 aims to increase participation and ensure equal opportunities for the development, training, and education of every

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[62] Aliu, L. (2020). Analysis of Kosovo's education system. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Available at
http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kosovo/15185-20190220.pdf
[63] OSCE (2018). Communities access to pre – university education in Kosovo. Available at
https://www.osce.org/files/Community%20Education%20report_Eng_layout.pdf

individual in pre-university education. The KESP sets targets for inclusion and establishes regulations at the municipality level to facilitate preschool enrolment and raises awareness on school attendance and enrolment. Kosovo also has developed a national framework for the protection of minorities, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Relevant laws for Roma inclusion in education are the law on Pre – University Education, law on Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Communities and law on Protection from discrimination. These laws are not directly targeting Roma but they promote and guarantee access to quality education and the principles of equality, fair representation, and interethnic tolerance.

Notwithstanding the elaborated national strategic and legal framework, its implementation is still poor, as it will be discussed in the next section. Some of the main factors for problems with implementation include: lack of willingness and professionalism among the public structures responsible for the implementation, lack of coordination among public sector and civil society, lack of information among policy – makers about the importance of affirmative measures, and poor financial means. EU integration process seems to have a positive influence in monitoring the progress of implementation, yet many times the strategic/legal framework is being harmonized only to "tick the box" and not substantially.

3.3.2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Participation in preschool education (< 5 years old) is extremely low for Roma children, with only 20 children (out of 4,183) registered in 2020-21 school year. For the last year before primary education (5 – 6 years) the total number Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children was 358 out of 19,979 children, whereas for the first grade of primary education the number reaches 701 children out of 25,138[64]. Attendance rates for primary education is 60 percent, whereas for secondary education it drops to 30 percent[65].

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[64] Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2021). Education statistics, data processed by the authors. Available at https://askdata.rks-gov.net/PXWeb/pxweb/en/askdata/askdata__01%20Education/?rxid=00f4a040-93d0-46a7-aeb3-86bd85114998

[65] UNICEF Kosovo (2020). 2019 – 2020 MICS in Kosovo and 2019 – 2020 MICS with Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo. Available at https://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/media/1936/file/MICS%20Snapshots%20.pdf

Targeted policies and interventions for Roma inclusion in the education system at all levels are being implemented with bottlenecks and challenges remaining. As discussed earlier, participation in preschool education is low in general and increases in the last year prior to first grade (5 – 6 years), however compulsory education only begins at the age of 6 years old, in primary school. Yet, the attendance rates are much lower for children from Roma communities. The reasons for the low attendance in preschool education (PSE) include the limited number of public kindergartens and their understaffing (only 42, distributed unevenly across the country), the limited number of subsidized places for children from vulnerable groups (such as the Roma), and a dominant policy and public view that PSE is a care service for employed parents rather than something to which a child is entitled for his or her care and education (UNICEF, 2017)[66]. Therefore, exemption from the fee for Roma families doesn't seem to have an impact in their access and participation to ECE as there are other prevailing issues.

In relation to primary education, enrolment rates for children from non-Serb minority communities, including Roma, remain comparatively low with only 77 per cent of children between the ages of 6 and 14 enrolled in school, and 7.3 per cent of them not entering the education system. Gender disparities are even more alarming with only 69 per cent of girls from minority groups enrolled compared to 85 per cent of boys. The school dropout rate in compulsory education, particularly after the 4th grade is very concerning. These rates are attributed to poor economic conditions, repetition of the school year, low level of education of parents and lack of parental awareness on the importance of schooling, discrimination in schools, lack of transport, and the migration of families for economic reasons[67]. The ones remaining in school are among the underperformers of the system, a concern raised by NGOs working in the field. Segregation and discrimination at schools leave Roma children with less competences.

Two positive practices in support of Roma inclusion in the education system are the teacher training curriculum focused on diversity issues and inclusive classroom[68] and the local Learning

66 Haxhikadrija, A. (2019). ESPN Flash Report 2019/30 - Kosovo* plans expanded access to early childhood education and care – European Social Policy Network.
67 UNICEF Kosovo (2019). Analysis of the situation of women and children in Kosovo. Available at https://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/media/1141/file/SITAN.pdf
68 Kosovo Education and Employment Network (2018). Research report on the situation of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in the field of education and employment in the six (6) municipalities of Kosovo: Ferizaj, Fushe Kosova, Gracanica, Gjakova, Lipjan and Prizren

Centers that support Roma in their effort to catch – up with mainstream school requirements (supported primarily by donors) [69]. The latter will be discussed in the next section.

Segregation. Even though there is not a direct discrimination at schools against Roma children, usually this happens within the classroom: in their interaction with teachers and other pupils. Based on stakeholders' experiences, Roma children are usually put aside in the classroom, they are being asked just not to make a fuss and they pass all classes until the 5th grade. Teachers are not interested on school performance for Roma, leading to cases of children attending e.g. 8th grade, and still not knowing to read and write. Sometimes segregation comes for the parents of the mainstream community to sit somewhere specific, due to issues of hygiene, as they say.

Both education systems have taken steps over the past several years to introduce classes of the Romani language [70]. In 2014, the Ministry of Education published a first Romani language textbook. Classes in Romani, encompassing elements of Romani culture and history are provided in four schools in Prizren[71]. However, there are not any standardized textbooks for all classes nor sufficient qualified teachers to do so. There have been promises but much of the results are largely missing. [72].

3.3.3. BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNT

Community – based Learning Centers aim to improve school performance, preventing early school leaving, to provide education on sexual and reproductive health as well as other measures. These centers were initially supported by CSOs. They target children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, but they are open to any other children that fulfill the criteria. They have a great impact across the country, where more than 50 learning centers are functioning. Even though it started as a CSO project, the Ministry of Education has seen value in them, because of the impact they had in children's educational performance and inclusion in the education system. In the

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[69] Kosovo Integration Initiative (2020). Impact of Learning Centers on inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in education.
[70] OSCE (2018). Communities access to pre-university education in Kosovo. Available at https://www.osce.org/files/Community%20Education%20report_Eng_layout.pdf
[71] Child Rights Defender (2017). The wall of anti – gypsyism: Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo. Available at https://crd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/The-Wall-of-Anti-Gypsyism-Roma-in-Kosovo.pdf.
[72] OSCE (2019). Overview of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Kosovo.

academic year 2017/2018, according to education statistics in Kosovo, there were 6,662 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students in pre-university education, of which 4,992 attended the Learning Centers (75 per cent). According to an evaluation of the Learning Centers children are motivated to be there because they get help with their homework, they enjoy it, the staff or their tutor helps them, and they enjoy the activities and also create new friends[73].

In 2018, the MoE issued and Administrative Instruction that clarifies the definition of criteria and procedures for the establishment and operation of Learning Centers, through which additional education is provided for students of communities. They are to become part of the schools and continue with the same support they were giving while supported by the donors. Currently, they are being registered and integrated inside schools and will be supported with a scheme 50-50 by donors and municipality, aiming to be fully financed and managed from municipalities in five years.

3.4. Montenegro

According to the 2011 census, the total population of Montenegro of 620,029 included 306,236 men (49.4 per cent) and 313,793 women (50.6 per cent). Children under the age of 18 numbered 145,126, or 23.4 per cent of the total population: 75,367 boys (51.9 per cent), 69,759 girls (48.1 per cent). A total of 6,251 persons (1.01 per cent of the total population) declared Roma nationality. Montenegro also contains a small population of Egyptians (just over 2,000), many of whom face problems similar to those of the Roma.[74] However, other (non-official) estimates of the Roma population in Montenegro claim for a level of Roma population of at least two times the official data, amounting to up to 3.23 per cent of the total population.[75]

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[73] Open Society Foundations (2020). Impact of Learning Centres on inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in education. Published by the "Kosovo Integration Initiative 2020 – KOSINT" Project: Prishtina

[74] In Carraro A., Gavrilovic M., Novkovic M., Stanisic S., Smolovic D., (2020). Multidimensional Child Poverty in Montenegro – Understanding the complex realities of children in poverty using a mixed-methods approach, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti and UNICEF Montenegro
 https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/media/17696/file/UNICEF%20-%20MODA%20ENG%20-%20web.pdf.pdf

[75] See Roma Regional Cooperation site under "ROMA IN THE REGION The size of the Roma community in the region" Available at https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/pages/3/roma-in-the-region

In Montenegro, the education system consists of preschool education, primary education, general secondary education, upper secondary vocational education, upper secondary non-tertiary education, and higher education. Adult education is part of the overall system and is being implemented for all levels of education.

- **Preschool education** is implemented in nursery (children up to 3 years of age) and kindergarten (for children from 3 to 6 years of age). Preschool education is not a prerequisite to attend primary school.
- **Primary education** is compulsory and it's free for all children aged 6 to 15 years. It lasts for nine years divided into three cycles, which means that in Montenegro primary and lower secondary education are organized as a single structure system.
- **Secondary education** consists in general secondary education and secondary vocational education and it is not compulsory.
- **Higher education** is acquired at the university level and are organized in a 3+2+3 model.

MONSTAT and UNICEF assessment (2019) on Montenegro Roma Settlements Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey provides data that portray the situation of Roma children enrollment in Early Childhood Education and primary Education.[76] By 2018, it was found that only about 15.5 per cent of Roma children aged 36-59 months old were attending ECE as compared to 52.8 percent of the children in the total pollution. Similarly, out of the total number of children enrolled in 1st grade of primary school, only 45.2 percent of the Roma children as compared to 68.4 per cent of the overall number of children enrolled in this grade had attended preschool in the year prior to primary school. Overall, net attendance rates for Roma children in the compulsory primary education system stood at 77%. Some of the main barriers leaving Roma children out of compulsory education include financial burden (such as enrolment fees or the obligation to purchase textbooks or school uniforms); education supply and quality issues (such as a limited number of teachers or classrooms and low-quality teaching); as well as social and individual beliefs on education (such as low expectation in returns of advancing in education) (p.363).

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[76] Statistical Office of Montenegro (MONSTAT) and UNICEF (2019). *2018 Montenegro Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and 2018 Montenegro Roma Settlements Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, Survey Findings Report*. Podgorica, Montenegro: MONSTAT and UNICEF.

5.4.1. POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Two are the main pillars of the policy logic in Montenegro in terms of Roma education:

- Improvement of overall education and literacy of the population;
- Protection of minority language and culture in the education system.[77]

The Constitution of the Republic of Montenegro guarantees the right to education. Under Article 75, the right to education under same conditions is guaranteed and primary education is stated to be obligatory and free of charge[78]. The education system is defined through a set of laws, which range from early preschool education to adults' education, and a separate law regulates university education. All policy documents, strategic document, laws, and regulations in the area of education are in line with international conventions and European policies related to the Roma community.

The strategic framework shaping efforts on Roma inclusion in mainstream education in Montenegro includes a series of strategies, where the most relevant ones on ECD and primary education include:

- The Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro defines the measures for the education sector.
- The Inclusive Education Strategy (2019–2025) sets out directions for the development of education for children with special education needs.
- The Strategy for Early and Preschool Education 2016–2020 highlights the key areas, tasks and activities and suggests combining services and activities with a focus on making them realistic and measurable for short and long-term implementation.

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[77] Žerjav, B. and Nikolić, P. (2020) Mainstream Policies targeting Roma Integration in the Western Balkans https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/bc683d69caea951b0ba571874161cc27.pdf Page 18.
[78] Republic of Montenegro (2007) Constitution of Montenegro, https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/me/me004en.pdf

The policy logic and strategic approach is completed by a legal framework with a set of laws, in line with international standards regarding the inclusion of minorities. They include:

- General Law on Education;
- Law on Preschool Education;
- Law on Primary Education;
- Law on Education of Children with Special Educational Needs.

Other relevant provisions are also included in the Minority Rights and Freedoms[79].

In particular, Article 2 of the Law on General Education states that education is intended to provide the possibility for complete individual development regardless of sex, age, social and cultural background, national and religious affiliations and of physical and psychological structure[80]. It further states that it is intended to develop awareness on the need and the capabilities to maintain and improve human rights, the legal state of the natural and social environment and multi-ethnicity and diversity.

The implementation of the policy and legal framework is a responsibility of the key institutions of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and schools, and the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights (MHMR). In their efforts they are continuously supported by the relevant civil society organizations operating the area. Overall, at policy level continues willingness to address issues of Roma inclusion is translated into four consecutive strategic documents and a fifth one, 2021-2025 to follow soon. A commission is dedicated to monitor their implementation.

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[79] Elezovic, S. (2020) Analysis of Mainstream Policies Targeting Roma and Egyptians Integration in Montenegro, Roma Integration: Regional Cooperation Council
https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/8cd6f98954f4a53d9b5f25932adc2a8d.pdf
[80] Law on General Education, Official Gazette of Montenegro, No. 064/02, dated 28 November 2002, No. 031/05, dated 18 May 2005, No. 049/07, dated 10 August 2007, No. 004/08, dated 17 January 2008, No. 021/09, dated 20 March 2009, No. 045/10, dated 04 August 2010, No. 073/10, dated 10 December 2010, No. 040/11, dated 08 August 2011, No. 045/11, dated 09 September 2011, No. 036/13, dated 26 July 2013, No. 039/13, dated 07 August 2013, No. 044/13, dated 20 September 2013 and No. 047/17, dated 19 July 2017. Available from www.mps.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rid=200926&rType=2&file=Op%C5%A1ti%20zakon%20o%20vaspitanju%20i%20obrazovanju.docx.

3.4.2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Data form the last couple of years demonstrate a significant progress in terms of the overall Roma inclusion in education in Montenegro. However, this is more the case for the preschool and primary education level rather than the more advanced levels of education. Data referring to the last two years, 2019 and 2020, indicate for a significant increase in inclusion of Roma and Egyptian children in the education system. According to official data from the MEIS application, obtained from the Ministry of Education, Roma and Egyptian children enrollment improved significantly in 2019 and 2020.

The strategic period 2016-2020 helped in setting up a number of mechanisms to encourage and facilitate early enrolment and progress of Roma children. Nevertheless, implementation has lagged behind, particularly with reference to ECD. Overall, only 16% of the Roma children are attending preschool as compared to more than 50% of the non-Roma children. Although there has been a significant boost of awareness among Roma parents on the importance of ECD and early enrolment, there are still many challenges and barriers in the way. The main ones include: lack of/poor preschool infrastructure around the country with limited capacities, poor access to physical settings (lack of transportation) and to virtual ones (during the Covid-19 crisis), as well as persistent issues of segregation and discrimination.

The low levels of ECD and the language barriers make for the greatest challenges for the Roma children to progress well in the primary education. A general tendency of concentrating on enrollment rates and numbers, is being criticized as eclipsing issues of quality education for Roma children early on. Economic difficulties and discrimination are other major challenges. Although primary education is free of charge and books are free too, there are additional cost that many Roma families still struggle to cover for. Discrimination and segregation are present and they appear in blunt forms such as grouping Roma and non-Roma children separately in graduation ceremonies, or still having half of the Roma children (100 out of 200) in segregated kindergartens.

As a result of all these challenges and difficulties, only every second Roma child in finishing primary education (56%). Even among those that do, there are issues of quality education (unofficially, it is reported that Roma children are passing from one grade to the other without being able to learn to read and write). Additional support is needed for Roma children with learning

difficulties (due to language barriers, gaps from previous grades etc.). However, teachers are reported to be overloaded and not able/willing to provide such support. Moreover, dropout levels are expected to grow due the pandemic situation. Overall, the poor and (relatively) late enrolment and poor quality education Roma children are receiving in ECD and primary education lead latter to very low numbers of Roma children that make it through higher levels of education.

3.4.3. BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNT

Similar to other countries in the region, REF supported initiatives were put under the light of the best practices in terms of the integrated approach they employ. However, what is to be underlined in the case of Montenegro is the proactive approach of the state in taking over and supporting part of the successful interventions such as in the case of the mediators. Currently, some 22 mediators around the country, previously supported by REF are now being supported through state funds. It is also positive that textbooks from this year have started to be offered free of charge and certain measures are taken to ensure free of charge kindergarten for Roma children. However, the latter varies from municipality to municipality and needs to be better regulated among Ministry of Education and Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights to ensure equal access for all Roma children to this entitlement.

The new strategy to be adopted in the upcoming months and the measures and actions to follow are expected to address some of the problems and lessons learnt thus far. First and for most, a larger focus shall be put on early enrollment and access to quality education. Secondly, the issue of dropouts need to be tackled in a more structured and systemic manner. A protocol on dropouts needs to be developed to enable the identification of who those children are, along with a set of indicators to enable the assessment of who is at risk of dropout and help prevention. Thirdly, schools need to act to their obligation in developing individual plans for children who have special needs, including the ones with language barriers, which has so far been missing.

Another lesson learnt relates to the scope of interventions and its impact in (sustainable) achievements. Fragmentation of interventions, (large) variation at the municipal level, and intensive targeting of only certain areas (regardless if they have the higher numbers of Roma

population) have led to results that are also fragmentized and difficult to sustain. Achieving and promoting success in two or three municipalities is valuable, but not enough and not just to other Roma children in the other municipalities (almost nothing happening in the south, very few initiatives in the north and most efforts concentrated in the capital, Podgorica). An inclusive approach is needed not just in geographical sense but also thematically. A cross-sectorial and holistic approach and formalized cooperation between different actors are deemed necessary in addressing the complex issues of Roma education and inclusion.

3.5. North Macedonia

According to the 2002 Census of the Republic of North Macedonia, a population of 2,022,547 inhabitants is reported. The Roma account for around 2.66 per cent of the total population (or 53,879). However, informal sources estimate and claim a total number of Roma population which is almost 4 times that of the best official estimate. It is claimed that Roma make up to 9.74 per cent of the population (with a total of 197,000 Roma individuals).[81]

In the Republic of North Macedonia, education is compulsory between the ages of six to 19 for general secondary education, or from six to 17, 18 or 19 for vocational education and training depending on the selected VET track. The educational system consists of three sub-systems[82]:

- **Primary education** with a duration of nine years is free of charge and compulsory for all children aged 6 to 15, regardless of their gender, religion and nationality.
- **Secondary education** which includes general secondary education (Gymnasium) with a duration of four years and vocational education with a duration of two to four years is also compulsory and comprises all children in the age cohort 15 to 19 years for the general secondary education, and for the age cohort 15 to 17, 18 or 19 in the VET depending on the selected track.
- **Higher education** includes under-graduate, master and doctoral studies in the higher educational institutions and institutes which are autonomous and independent.

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[81] See Roma Regional Cooperation site under "ROMA IN THE REGION The size of the Roma community in the region" Available at https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/pages/3/roma-in-the-region
[82] For more information visit https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/former-yugoslav-republic-macedonia_en

Data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2018-2019[83] present an overall poor enrollment and attendance rate of Roma children in Early Childhood Education programs as well as in Primary Education. Percentage of children age 36-59 months who were attending early childhood education in North Macedonia Roma Settlements, 2018-2019 was reported of only 11.9 per cent, that of children attending first grade of primary school who attended preschool the previous year, stood at 24.7 per cent, whereas the percentage of children of primary school entry age entering grade 1 (net intake rate) for 2018-2019 was 75.9 per cent (p.195). Attendance diminishes as barriers to access (quality) education increase from one level of education to another, but also from one grade to the following one and the reasons are similar to those identified in other countries of the region such as financial challenges; education supply and quality issues such as a limited number of teachers or classrooms and low-quality teaching; as well as social and individual beliefs on education such as low expectation in returns of advancing in education.[84]

3.5.1. POLICY & LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The policy logic with regards to Roma and education in the Republic of North Macedonia is focused on the improvement of access to education and the improvement of the quality of education. Special attention is paid to the returnees, street children, and to the reduction of dropout levels for Roma children.

Two key documents frame the strategic approach in North Macedonia and they include the Education Strategy 2018–2025 and the Strategy for the Roma.
- The Macedonian Government adopted the new Education Strategy 2018–2025 in 2018 as the key document for improving the quality and conditions in education.
- The Strategy for the Roma (2014-2020), on the other hand, provided till recently the framework for the development of mainstream policies within the education sector.

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[83] State Statistical Office and UNICEF. 2020. 2018-2019 North Macedonia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and 2018-2019 North Macedonia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, Survey Findings Report. Skopje, North Macedonia: State Statistical Office and UNICEF.

[84] Ibid., p. 182

Primary education in the Republic of North Macedonia is a constitutionally guaranteed right under Article 44 of the Constitution, which stipulates that education is accessible to everyone under equal conditions, is compulsory and free.[85] Key relevant laws include:

- The Law on Education

- The new Law on Primary Education

- The Law on Prevention of and Protection from Discrimination classifies segregation as a form of discrimination

Several processes for increasing the quality of primary education in the Republic of North Macedonia have been initiated. Among others are the amendments to the Law on Secondary Education, introducing compulsory secondary education, which are claimed to have a positive effect on increasing the number of pupils in secondary education and with immediate impact on primary education too. Article 14 of the new Law on education stipulates that children that were not included in education and are over the age limit shall be included in primary school and be entitled to primary education under the same conditions as other children. The Bureau for Public Education is preparing an education program for these children that will enable their inclusion in an appropriate grade of primary education.

In the Republic of Macedonia, issues of *segregation* have been explicitly targeted in the new legislative developments. The new legal changes to the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination classify segregation as a form of discrimination. With these changes, civil society organizations and individuals have the bases on which to submit lawsuits against schools for segregation, which was not possible before this new legal provisions.

For the implantation and monitoring of the policy and legal framework, the Republic of Macedonia charges with responsibility the Ministry of Education and Science. However, the responsibilities are extended to the local level too[86].

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[85] Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No. 52/1991.
[86] For example, The Government Decision, on 28 December 2019, recommends municipalities to consider the possibility to exempt 450 Roma children, age three to six years, from financial participation in kindergarten for the period from 1 December 2018 to 31 December 2019.

3.5.2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES[87]

Aiming for quality education and not only quantity, Ministry of Education and Science is supporting tutoring classes, offered as a direct measure to support Roma children throughout all education levels. The additional classes are provided to the pupils on subjects that are part of the curriculum in the school year in which a pupil is enrolled when he/she scored less than excellent (5) in the previous year for such subjects. This measure is referred as an achievement which is expected to have a direct impact in increasing access to quality education and ensure more sustainable results from year to year. However, more needs to be done to ensure proper implementation of this measure.

North Macedonia is reported to be the only country in the region that Romani language is available. Roma mediators are also one explicit measure targeting Roma education. Scholarships are applied only from secondary level and upwards, however, they are considered an incentive for performing well early on and continuing up the education ladder.

In comparative terms, stakeholders assess that North Macedonia is doing well as compared to the other countries in the region and Roma integration agenda is progressing best in the education area; however, inequalities between Roma and non-Roma children in the country persist. Roma pupils still face social stigma, discrimination, and segregation. The segregation, at school or class level, is based on language, culture, and birthplace in certain localities. In some cases, segregation is fueled by the non-Roma parents' pressure of not wanting their children in same settings as the Roma children. Overall, the quality of education in these schools is reported to be poorer, with limited resources and less qualified teaching staff. There is also a lack of qualified Roma teaching staff in primary and secondary schools, while qualified Roma teachers with university education cannot find employment in primary and secondary schools[88].

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[87] Summary of Institute for Research and Policy Analysis Romalitico (2020) Analysis of mainstream policies targeting Roma integration in the Republic of North Macedonia, Regional Cooperation Council Roma Integration Action team https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/1cec0646e274595200f5b2abefc5f0be.pdf

[88] Žerjav, B. and Nikolić, P. (2020) Mainstream Policies targeting Roma Integration in the Western Balkans https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/bc683d69caea951b0ba571874161cc27.pdf pages 22-23.

ECD remains the most challenging area. The level of coverage for Roma children on preschool level is reported to be at around 14 per cent[89]. This low level is a result of the combinations of several factors starting with the overall poor infrastructure and limited capacities of the ECD in the country. Also, interest of Roma parents in ECD remains low and coupled with issues of poverty lead to the low enrolment rates of Roma children in preschool services. Although by a decision of the government, Roma children with unemployed parents are excluded for kindergarten fees, the hidden cost stay as an issue.

Situation in primary education is much better, however, there are still issue of unregistered children and issues of language barrier. Schools in North Macedonia apply an entry test as early as primary education and language barriers and low enrolment in preschool penalized Roma children disproportionally. According to stakeholders being interviewed in the frame of this assessment, failing to perform in the entry test (due to language barriers) leads to the negatively portrayed practice of sending these children to special schools, on wrong basis of assessment and evaluation. A special order of the Ministry of Education to put an end on this practice is yielding result and the number has decreased significantly.

Dropout issue is complex. The lion part of the problem lies out of the education system, with the unregistered children and not in the education system. The exact number of Roma children not enrolled in schools is not known exactly. Once in the system, the first three years of primary education go smoothly as children just pass with no grades and they have just one teacher to relate to. From primary data collected in the frame of this assessment, it is after the 4th grade, when children switch from having only one teacher to having different teachers that dropout starts to become problematic. It becomes harder for Roma children to work with different teachers, keeping in mind the issues of language barriers that carry on, the accumulated disadvantages from the elementary level, and the fact that there is a lack of readiness/willingness form teachers to be supportive and lower chances to have many supportive teachers as compared to one (as it is the case in the previous grades). Statistics reported from stakeholders show for only 25-30% of the Roma children that enroll in 1st grade manage to complete grade 9, of the primary education level

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[89] Ibid., p.11.

(starting at the age of six) which along with secondary education are mandatory in the Republic of Macedonia.

Covid-19 crisis stopped all programs which promoted inclusion, undoing much of what was thus far considered as sustainable results in terms of enrolment in primary education level and especially for the preschool level. The limited places in kindergartens, were further reduced due to the pandemic and the smaller groups protocols. Priority is given to working parents and thus, with the low (formal) employment rates among Roma parents, Roma children chances of enrolling in a kindergarten are further reduced.

3.5.3. BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNT

Starting from no interventions at the ECD level, prior to 2006, effective interventions such as those of REF, covering kindergarten fee, enrolling Roma teacher assistants in kindergartens, are now being fostered by the government (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy - MLSP). In 2009, 16 Roma teacher assistants were enrolled, and MLSP provided 30% of the budget. In 2016, 17 Roma teacher assistants were employed with a permanent contract from the government, and the level of support from the government is at 90%. By 2020, it is reported for a total of 19 Roma preschool teaching assistants who have been employed on a permanent contract as part of the project activities and 15 to 20 local Roma preschool mediators have been involved on annual basis, serving to an average of 350-400 Roma children of preschool age (3-6 years old) each year[90]. However, these remain fully-funded by donors (REF project) and on project-basis.

Similar approach is being followed with respect to mediators, another best practice shared in North Macedonia (as in other countries where REF has implemented similar schemes). After 15 years of experience of donor supported initiative, there are now more than 30 Roma mediators in 20 localities, contacted and fully financed by MoEs, working on education issues, bridging school

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[90] In January 2019, the number of enrolled Roma children in pre-school care has increased in 13 municipal units through a governmental decision. The decision refers to Social Welfare beneficiary families whose children could be enrolled into kindergartens free of charge, as their daily attendance is to be paid by the local-self-governments. REF expects this to continue in school year 2020/2021 and will support the process as the organization did last year through provision of a solicited grant. Visit: https://www.romaeducationfund.org/ref-funded-pre-school-education-projects-are-recognized-as-of-great-importance-by-the-minister-of-labor-and-social-policy-in-north-macedonia/

and parents. These best practices now endorsed by the government, come as a result of the sustainable results but also due to the Roma activism and political power which stand out in the North Macedonia context.

Experience thus far has taught some lessons too. First, explicit policies and interventions are still necessary. Regardless of progress and achievement thus far, the challenges discussed above persist and they cannot be tackled under the umbrella policy approach of "society for all". Secondly, practices which go against integration, such as those of "special schools", must be addressed and avoided in the future. Last, effective planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, demand for (a more meaningful) participation of Roma.

3.6. Serbia

In the 2011 census, there were 147,604 ethnic Roma registered in Serbia, composing 2.1 per cent of the total population on the territory of Serbia. This is the reference number used in the planning of strategic measures. However, due to a legacy of poor birth registration and some other factors, this official number is likely underestimated[91]. Estimates that correct for undercounting suggest that Serbia is one of countries with the most significant populations of Roma people in Europe at 250,000-500,000. Anywhere between 46,000 to 97,000 Roma are internally displaced from Kosovo after 1999[92]. According to different reports and indicators, most Roma are faced with social exclusion and poverty and are exposed to some form of open, and, even more often, covert discrimination[93].

Educational system in Serbia includes preschool, primary, secondary, and higher education. The total duration of compulsory education in Serbia is 9 years. Children enter compulsory education at the age of 5½, when they start the compulsory preschool preparatory program, followed by 8

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[91] UNICEF Serbia - Real lives - Life in a day: connecting Roma communities to health services (and more). Available at https://www.unicef.org/serbia/en/stories/life-day-connecting-roma-communities-health-services-and-more
[92] Relief, UN (2014). Roma IDP profiling. Available at
 https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/romaidps_desk_review_final.pdf
[93] The Strategy of Social Inclusion of Roma for the Period from 2016 To 2025. Available at
 https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/docs/5/mainstream-policies-targeting-roma-integration-in-the-western-balkans

years of compulsory primary education. The leaving age in full-time compulsory education is 14½[94]. Preschool education and care is intended for children from 6 months until the primary school starting age. The national education system in Serbia is as follows:

- Preschool education and care: from 6 months to 5 ½ years;

- Preschool preparatory program, from 5 ½ to 6 ½ years

- Primary education

    o Cycle I: 1st to 4th grade (children from 6½ to 10½ years old);

    o Cycle II: 5th to 8th grade (children from 10½ to 14½ years old)

- Secondary education consists of the following:

    o four years of general education (from 14 ½ to 18 years);

    o two to four years of vocational education[95].

- Tertiary education

3.6.1. POLICY & LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Serbia has a much-elaborated policy and legal framework related to education in general and Roma children inclusion to education, in particular. The two most important strategies to this field are the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia 2016 – 2025 and the accompanying action plan for years 2017 – 2018 (this is the latest action plan) and the Strategy for Development of Education 2012 – 2020 and its accompanying action plan. Currently, a new draft of the Education Strategy is being developed. The special objective 1, detailed in 6 operational objectives, of the Strategy on Roma Inclusion aims to "*ensure full inclusion of children and youth from the Roma community in quality preschool, primary and secondary education, greater coverage of Roma men and women in the student population and provision of support to the education of youth and adults who have not attended school or have dropped out, along with the introduction of effective and efficient mechanisms to combat discrimination and creation of conditions in which Roma can exercise all minority rights in the education system*"[96]. On the other

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[94] Eurydice (2021). Serbia national education system. Available at
 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/serbia_en

[95] OECD (2020). Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment: Serbia. Available at https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/72483fab-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/72483fab-en

[96] The Strategy of Roma Inclusion for the Period 2016 to 2025. Available at https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/25271eee1fb46a73d48630d6d4d63bec.pdf

hand, lack of an updated Action Plan since 2018 makes monitoring the implementation of the strategy and its specific measures and outcomes very difficult. According to key stakeholders, some of the measures foreseen in the strategy are indeed being implemented, because they have been present for years[97]. The Strategy on Education has described a number of tasks for the development of education for minorities, like instruction in and learning about the minority language and a number of measures for all stages of the education process.

Other strategies not explicitly targeting Roma but recognizing them as a minority group subject of discrimination are Strategy on Prevention of and Protection from Discrimination and Strategy on Gender Equality 2016–2020.

In alignment with the policy framework, the legal framework in Serbia included satisfactory laws and measures that address access and attendance to quality education for Roma children, tackling segregation and discrimination in the education system and the provision of (affirmative) measures to reach these goals. Some of the most important laws targeting Roma inclusion in ECE and primary education are: Law on Foundations of Educational System, Law on Preschool Education, Law on Primary Education, Law on Textbooks. This legal framework provides the basic rules aiming to increase access of Roma children to education and increase completion rates. They regulate education on the minority language and culture and the role of pedagogical assistants, the conditions for certification of knowledge of the Roma language, minority education and participation of representatives in the National Minority Councils (NMCs), mandatory preschool and primary education for all and the publication of textbooks on minority languages[98].

In addition, there are specific laws on discrimination which include Roma minority (Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities and Law against Discrimination), on the regulation of the minority councils (Law on National Minority Councils) and for the support of vulnerable families with children (Law on Financial support to Families with Children). The National Roma Minority Council is one of the largest in Serbia and is fully operational. They have

[97] EU (2020). Commission Staff Working Document Serbia 2020 Report Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2020 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/default/files/serbia_report_2020.pdf

[98] Regional Cooperation Council (2021). Analysis of mainstream policies targeting Roma integration in Serbia Available at https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/48e20612f5e16bfbe37f0f61db300c0b.pdf

been involved in the process of Roma language and culture promotion through certification of Roma teachers among other issues.

Notwithstanding the centralized nature of policy and legal framework, it is worth mentioning that several measures foreseen in them are implemented by the local government. This makes their implementation and monitoring sometimes not systemic and reliant on local government human and financial capacities.

3.6.2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

In 2006, Serbia introduced the Preparatory Preschool Program, an obligatory year of pre-primary education for children between the ages of 5.5 and 6.5. Participation is free at public kindergartens and primary school facilities and attendance has been increasing, from 87.5 per cent in 2010 to 97.1 per cent in 2018. However, younger children are less likely to participate in non-compulsory pre-primary education.[99] According to MICS (2019) participation to ECD in Serbia as a whole, 61 per cent of children aged 3–4 years (71 per cent in urban areas and 46 per cent in other areas) compared to 7 per cent of children aged 3–4 years from Roma settlements (24 per cent from the richest households and only 3 per cent from the poorest). Also, the net attendance rate for organized learning among children who are one year younger than the age for enrolment at primary school is 97 per cent compared to only 76 per cent for children coming from Roma settlements. Overall, 99 per cent of children of primary school age (6–13 years) attend primary school, compared to 92 per cent of children from Roma settlements. 7 per cent of the latter are out of school children, as they are not attending any form of education[100].

There is evidence of positive development in participation to ECD in Serbia, particularly at the preschool preparatory level[101]. Yet, as mentioned above, a very low percentage that raises concerns about the equal distribution of ECD institutions and other barriers to access them[102]. Previously

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[99] Ibid
[100] Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF. 2020. Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and Serbia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2019, Survey Findings Report. Belgrade, Serbia: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF.
[101] Ibid
[102] EU (2020). Commission Staff Working Document Serbia 2020 Report Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2020 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/default/files/serbia_report_2020.pdf

identified issues in the provision of ECD persist. The lack of adequate staff (teachers) and a limited number of kindergartens that can provide preschool programs close to Roma settlements remains an obstacle[103]. Available public preschool capacities, that accommodate are not sufficient to cover the total number of children left out from the preschool education in Serbia. The network of preschool institutions is not evenly geographically distributed with frequently preschool institutions being absent where there is the highest need: in under-developed and rural areas, like the Roma settlements. Even though new buildings are built every year, the coverage of preschool network is not sufficient for Roma children, as indicated by their low participation in ECE[104].

In addition, another structural barrier that hampers access to preschool education is the criterion for access to ECD. The system is designed to support working parents. In fact, parental employment remains one of the main criteria for admission into preschool and in 2011, only 10 per cent of students with unemployed parents were enrolled in preschool institutions, compared to 61 per cent of children with parents who were employed[105]. Parents are also expected to contribute up to 20 per cent of preschool fees, although disadvantaged families are exempt, depending on the decisions of the local government. While charging fees is a common practice across OECD countries, the vast majority of Roma minority are living in poverty, making it difficult for them to pay[106].

The Preparatory Preschool Program has had a positive impact for the inclusion of Roma children at this level of education. Compared to the great disparities of inclusion in pre – primary education programs, the gap narrows between Roma and non – Roma children for this PPP year (93 percent of the total population vs 77 percent of children from Roma settlements). Interviewed stakeholders indicated that registration of children for PPP serves as a proxy on how the education system reach out to Roma children. Initial enrolment rates at the primary education are better, however these rates are not followed by the same completion rates.

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[103] Regional Cooperation Council (2021). Analysis of mainstream policies targeting Roma integration in Serbia Available at https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/48e20612f5e16bfbe37f0f61db300c0b.pdf
[104]UNICEF Serbia (2012). Investing in Early Childhood Education in Serbia. Available at https://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/7271/file/Investing%20in%20Early%20Childhood%20Education%20in%20Serbia.pdf
[105] OECD (2020). Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment: Serbia. Available at https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/72483fab-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/72483fab-en
[106] Ibid

Inevitably, challenges are present for this year and continue throughout primary education, like the poor living conditions of Roma families, lack of mastery of Serbian language, difficulties for transportation etc.

Segregation. Schools close to Roma settlements are scarce and segregated; and discrimination in mainstream schools is much present. These challenges are greater for Roma girls. Roma neighborhoods usually have schools populated by Roma children at 80-90 percent. Non – Roma parents are prejudiced and hesitate – to say the least – to enroll their children in these schools, adding to the experience of segregation and to a lower quality standards for the school and the academic performance of their pupils.

There are a series of affirmative measures undertaken in the field of primary education for children of Roma minority, including targeted interventions as well as others in mainstream policies, e.g. free textbooks, free transportation, pedagogical assistants, learning of Romani language upon demand, mentorship program etc. However, these policies are dependent on financial resources' allocation at central and local level, and reliant on donors' contribution. [107] For example, stakeholders mentioned that not all Roma children have access to free textbooks, because this depends on the local government decision. Other, are good practices opting to be sustainable (see below "Best practices").

COVID – 19 pandemic has amplified many of the previous problems in Serbia: difficulties to access IT equipment for remote learning and to respect the hygiene rules required by schools during this era adds to Roma children challenges for access and meaningful attendance of education[108].

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[107] Regional Cooperation Council (2021). Analysis of mainstream policies targeting Roma integration in Serbia Available at https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/48e20612f5e16bfbe37f0f61db300c0b.pdf

[108] European Commission (2020). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council; A Union of Equality: EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation and its accompanying proposal for a revised Council recommendation on national Roma strategic frameworks for equality, inclusion and participation. Retrieved from
https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/commission_staff_working_document_analytical_document_accompanying_the_eu_roma_strategic_framework_for_equality_inclusion_and_participation_en.pdf

3.6.3. BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNT

Two promising practices that remain to be regulated and fully operational in Serbia are the pedagogical assistants for Roma pupils and the teaching of Romani language.

Pedagogical assistants for primary education are usually teachers coming from Roma minority that are placed in a school to help children from Roma minority that have difficulties with school. They also act as mediators between school and parents, a much needed connecting bridge and support link, considering the low educational level of Roma parents[109]. In the 2018/2019 school year there were 261 pedagogical assistants engaged throughout Serbia. However, their job description is not regulated and caution should be made not to use this work position as a "justification" for employment of Roma qualified graduates. It is evidenced by key stakeholders that local government tends to offer this position for any unemployed Roma graduate, independently of their qualifications for this profession.

Institutionalization of teaching Romani language and culture in primary education has started recently in Serbia. Fifteen years ago Roma language was taught only in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, but now potentially it can be taught all over Serbia. There are two cathedra for Romani language, one in Belgrade and one in Vrsac. The National Roma Minority Council has standardized the processed for teaching Romani language, e.g. standard textbooks and certified teachers. Every year the school is obliged to ask students if they are interested to learn it, and if there is interest of more than 50 students the state has to hire a teacher and open the class. Yet, it seems that in practice primary schools don't inform Roma parents about this possibility, so sometimes the class might not open due to lack of requests.

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[109] ECRI (2020). ECRI Conclusions on the Implementation of the Recommendations in Respect of Serbia Subject to Interim Follow-Up. Available at https://rm.coe.int/ecri-conclusions-on-the-implementation-of-the-recommendations-in-respe/16809e8275

3.7. Turkey

Roma live all across Turkey and, in terms of absolute numbers, are not concentrated in any particular region. Various groups are included under the general heading of Roma/Gypsy. Studies indicate that the population of Roma and similar social groups in Turkey is between 2 million and 5 million, but their exact numbers remain unknown as most Roma live in overcrowded households, but also because Turkey doesn't collect data on ethnicity[110].

In March 2012 Turkey passed new legislation on primary and secondary education usually termed as "4+4+4" (4 years primary education, first level, 4 years primary education, second level and 4 years secondary education)[111]. Early childhood education (ECE) and primary education in Turkey is provided free of charge to all children of the age from 3 to 5 years old and 6 to 10/11 years old respectively (6 years old is the age to start primary school). Children from 3 to 5 year-olds attend integrated or education-only programs provided in ECE institutions, including preschools (Bağımsız Ana Okulu) and practice classrooms (Uygulama Sınıfları). Children aged 5 (and 4, if there is space available) can attend nursery classrooms (Ana Sınıfları). However, young children in Turkey are typically cared for by families.[112]

National education system in Turkey is composed of:

- Early childhood care and education (from 0 to 66 months)
- Primary education (grades I to IV, ages from 66 months/5 ½ years to 10 years)
- Secondary education (grades V to VIII, ages from 10 to 14 years old to)
- Upper secondary education (grades IX to XII, ages from 14 to 18 years old)
- Tertiary education[113]

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[110] World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples. Turkey profile. Available at https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-19/
[111] Education in Turkey, Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Turkey
[112] UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Education statistics: Turkey. Available at http://data.uis.unesco.org/#
[113] Eurydice, 2021. Turkey overview: national education system. Available at https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/turkey_en

3.7.1. POLICY & LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The policy framework for the inclusion of Roma children in education is in place, as in 2016 Turkey adopted a Strategy on Roma People 2016 – 2021, which was supported by two Action Plans for its implementation: one that covered the years 2016 – 2018 and the second for 2019 – 2021[114]. One strategic objective of the Strategy Paper for Roma Peoples is "*to ensure all Roma children to access to equal opportunities for education and qualified educational services and have them complete at least the compulsory education successfully*"[115].

Even though the approval of this strategy was an important step forward for inclusion of Roma in Turkey, its content and rationale were widely critiqued, confirmed as well by key stakeholders. While the Fundamental Implementation Principles of the strategy largely adhere to the EU's 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion[116], when it comes to education, there is a swift departure from Principle No.6, which relates to evidence – based policy making, the existence of in - depth research, data and evidence, rather than "hypotheses and prejudices". ERRC (2017) argues that the Strategy per se has included different not - supported statements, like for example "*Roma families do not believe in the future.*" The strategy seems content to blame inequalities and segregation on the children themselves, their parents and those who "complain" about segregation[117]. In the same line with the Strategy are both Action Plans for its implementation. Lacking specific budgets, earmarked funding, baseline data and targets, it looks like their implementation remains rather vague and difficult to monitor and understand the progress of the specific objectives[118]. The monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the second action plan needs to become effective and more NGO inclusive and the measures in it need to be gender mainstreamed. Local authorities need to be properly involved for effective implementation of the

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[114] Strategic Paper on Roma People 2016 – 2021 and accompanying action plans

[115] Ibid

[116] EU (2010). The ten common principles on Roma inclusion. Available at https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7573706d-e7c4-4ece-ae59-2b361246a7b0

[117] ERRC submission to the European Commission on the enlargement component of the EU Roma Framework (May 2017). Available at http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/submission-on-roma-inclusion-in-enlargement-countries-may-2017.pdf

[118] ERRC (2017). ERRC submission to the European Commission on the enlargement component of the EU Roma Framework (May 2017). Available at http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/submission-on-roma-inclusion-in-enlargement-countries-may-2017.pdf

strategy and should secure financial resources for its implementation[119]. The new education strategy "Education Vision 2023" if a very promising strategic document, which includes issues related to disadvantaged families and children not particularly Roma, yet it doesn't explain the roadmap to achieving the objectives[120].

In respect to the legal framework, there are several laws and regulations which, although they are not designated as positive action by the legislation, stipulate positive measures in the areas of education and employment and in a number of services (social insurance, transportation etc.)[121]. Turkey has a very centralized education system, with Ministry of National Education being the main responsible institution for the provision of education.

Some of the most relevant laws that influence Roma education are as follows:

- Law on National Education (latest amendments on 2016) (No. 1739): according to Article 7 'Primary education is the right of every Turkish citizen.' Article 4 of the same law forbids discrimination, stating, 'Institutes of education are open to everyone regardless of language, race, gender, disabilities and religious affiliation. In education, privileges shall not be accorded to an individual, family, party, or class.' In addition, Article 8 states, 'In order to ensure that successful students who lack financial means can obtain the highest level of education, assistance will be provided in the form of free dormitories, scholarships, loans and other means.' Therefore, even though the law obliges the state to take special measures targeting disadvantaged groups, what is notable is that 'disadvantaged' here is limited to the state of economic disadvantage. Unfortunately, the law remains silent on the issue of other forms of disadvantage, such as those faced by Roma and similar social groups[122].

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[119] EU (2020). Turkey 2020 Report Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/default/files/turkey_report_2020.pdf

[120] Ministry of National Education (2019). Turkey's education vision 2023. Available at https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/turkey_education_vision_2023.pdf

[121] EU (2020). Country report on non – discrimination. Available at https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5281-turkey-country-report-non-discrimination-2020-2-35-mb

[122] Minority Rights Group International (MRG) (2017). Ignored and Unequal: Roma Access to the Right to Housing and Education in Turkey. Available at https://socialprotection-humanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/MRG_Rep_ENG.pdf

- Law on the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Turkey (2016) (No. 6701), which prohibits direct and indirect discrimination; multiple discrimination; harassment; mobbing; segregation; discrimination by assumption; instruction to discriminate and compliance with such instruction; and failure to provide reasonable accommodation[123].

- Law on Renewal (2005), the amendments of the Law on Housing Development (2004) and Law of Local Authorities (2005) gave significant powers over the regeneration of urban settlements to municipalities. During the last years Roma communities have faced forced evictions, which brought many new challenges for children education: difficulties in accessing the schools because of being in new settings, difficulties in transportation, and the development of new Roma neighborhoods (ghettos) that brought segregated schools etc.[124].

3.7.2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

The Government of Turkey has made efforts in the last years to improve coverage and programs in the field of ECD and improve access and education performance in primary education, however significant gaps in coverage persist based on regional and socio-economic differences, which affect particularly the Roma population[125]. Participation to early childhood education is low in Turkey, but the situation is even worse for Roma children. In 2017, only 10 per cent of 3-year-olds participated in ECE, compared to 79 per cent of OECD average, but 73 per cent of 5-year-olds did, compared to a 95 per cent average[126]. Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in primary education for 2018 is 95.04 per cent with very small differences between boys and girls[127].

Children can attend public preschool institutions free of charge only for educational purposes. Fees for meals received in preschools – the "nutrition fees" – and additional costs for educational materials they might ask from parents, are very costly for Roma families living already in very

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[123] EU (2020). Country report on non – discrimination. Available at https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5281-turkey-country-report-non-discrimination-2020-2-35-mb
[124] Oprisan, A. (2018). The Roma in Turkey: from survival mechanisms to development strategies. PhD thesis. SOAS University of London. http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/30304
[125] OECD (2020). Education policy outlook: Turkey. Available at https://www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/country-profile-Turkey-2020.pdf
[126] Ibid
[127] Ibid

poor conditions. Therefore, even though access and provision to ECD has been improving in Turkey, issues of inequalities regarding Roma children still remain[128]. Gender differences are not present in this stage of education, however some regional differences have been observed for the general population, again raising concerns about the inequality of distribution of preschool institutions. In 2016, around 30% of children in Southeast Anatolia and Istanbul attended ECD compared to up to 45% in the Mediterranean West and South Aegean.[129]

A conditional cash transfer for education is in place for families of children between 48 and 66 months who attend preschool education and for primary school attendance (ranging from 3.6 to 6 euros monthly)[130]. Also, some financial support arrangements exist in Turkey for students enrolled in private schools. The government's Private School Subsidization Programme (2014) subsidizes the fees or parental contributions required by private schools to enable some students from disadvantaged backgrounds to access these institutions, which was extended to children of 48-66 months in 2015/2016. In general, the fixed amount of the subsidy, which is not means-tested, may inhibit the program from achieving its aims, as the most disadvantaged families cannot afford to sufficiently supplement the subsidy to cover the full cost of tuition[131]. In addition, the Syrian crisis and the large number of refugee children in Turkey have shifted state and donors' priorities to these very vulnerable groups of children and adults, shadowing Roma inclusion in education. On the other hand, lack of baseline evidence and progress monitoring don't allow a better insight on the effectiveness of the current interventions.

Segregation. Roma in Turkey live mainly in neighborhoods populated mainly by Roma. Taking into consideration that the registration system for schools in Turkey is based on residence, the nearby primary and secondary schools mostly have children from Roma community. Segregation of Roma in specific neighborhoods due to urban transformation processes contributes to segregation and low performance in schools. In June 2020, hundreds of Roma were forcibly evicted by the municipality of Izmir from the tents and barracks they had been living in for years.[132]

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[128] World Bank (2013). Expanding and improving early childhood education in Turkey. Available at https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/987251468110675594/pdf/777230ENGLISH0ECE0EN0july03.pdf

[129] OECD (2020). Education policy outlook: Turkey. Available at https://www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/country-profile-Turkey-2020.pdf

[130] Ibid

[131] Ibid

[132] EC (2021). Country progress report 2020. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/default/files/turkey_report_2020.pdf

These forced evictions add to the challenges that Roma children face to access education and have better attainment levels. Reportedly, public schools in Roma neighborhoods are understaffed and often poorly resourced, contributing to a high level of school dropout among Roma children. It is a usual practice for schools to ask for financial contributions from parents for school maintenance and other reasons. Also, teachers that are appointed in schools populated by Roma children consider it as a "punishment", and they tend to turnover very quickly. Considering schools in Turkey are selected based on the address of residence this has become a vicious cycle for Roma education and adds to their further segregation and isolation. Class segregation is also observed, often with the justification that classes are divided based on academic performance, classing Roma and other underachieving children in same classes, where Roma are usually seen sitting together, separated from the rest of the class.

The housing conditions of the majority of Roma families living in segregated communities is an obvious obstacle to successful studies. Since the rooms are shared by a number of family members and basic furniture is often missing, it is difficult to concentrate on studies and homework. These difficulties have become greater in the face of COVID – 19 pandemic, due to lack of access to PCs/tablets/mobiles and internet, having more than one child to attend online classes and the fact than many Roma parents became unemployed during this time. To compensate these handicaps, Roma children are in need of extra-curricular support to school attendance, for example with regard homework. However, in schools where Roma pupils make up a majority, the resources that are available for the organization of extra-curricular activities are usually small and the workload of the teaching staff allows only limited investment of time to any additional activities outside the basic curriculum[133]. In addition, often Roma parents are not aware of this information, so they don't know that they can demand for these classes to open.

Interventions to integrate Roma in the educational system are not systemic and are mainly supported by donors and project – based. Lack of willingness from central and local government and implicit discrimination of Roma among the government stakeholders were the main reasons mentioned for unsustainability of interventions and for unsatisfying outcomes in relation to

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[133] SIROMA (2016). Social situation of the Roma people in Turkey and public policies to support social integration

education and other areas. However, though sustainability of these projects is often not guaranteed, some of them have had a positive impact. For example, the REF scholarship and mentorship program was mentioned by the stakeholders as one of them. Also, a project that has now finished was the SIROMA project (Social Inclusion for Roma), which among other things established "Mobile teachers for Roma in villages" that have been supporting children in villages to catch – up with education requirements and engaged in teacher training on Antigypsyism[134]. Other similar initiatives in ECE and primary education are: the Remedial Education Program (İYEP, 2017)[135], ROMACTED programs for ECE and 1st and 2nd grade, Dreamhouse project in Ankara by Roma Rights Association etc. These projects have developed good models to support inclusion of Roma children in education, which need to be embraced and incorporated in the system for them to be sustainable. [136].

3.7.3. BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNT

One of the best practices which can be replicated in Turkey is the mentorship program implemented by Roma Education Fund. During this implementation phase the mentorship program was supported by scholarships. The latter are very important for children to have a possibility to continue education. But it is even more important to have role models for children, which are much needed, to guide them in the process of inclusion to education, to help them with homework, to facilitate different processes, to share their experiences and to be a support person/mentor for them.

One lesson learnt to be avoided from previous implemented projects, according to stakeholders, are activities that target Roma but exclude other children, which may be in the same school/neighborhood, as these may contribute to further segregation and discrimination of them.

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[134] Ibid
[135] OECD (2020). Education policy outlook: Turkey. Available at https://www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/country-profile-Turkey-2020.pdf
[136] Ibid

4. COMMON THEMES / DISCUSSIONS/CONCLUSIONS
4.1. Contextual Factors

In designing and implementing policies and interventions for advancing Roma education, a set of contextual factors need to be closely considered, and they concern all targeted countries.

- Poverty and poor parental education levels – policies and interventions that target children and/or school alone tend to fail if they are not coupled with measures that address issues of poverty and other vulnerabilities of the child's family as well as measures that support parents with no/poor education. The latter becomes of paramount importance in times of crisis (such as Covid-19 pandemic) and with the growing relevance of technology literacy for education.
- Mobility and migration – these core issues concern Roma populations but also non-Roma and most of the countries in the region. Mobility as part of life or even a lifestyle should be carefully addressed and mirrored in the measures and provisions in the area of education with enhanced levels of flexibility and simpler and easier procedures of enrollment from one education institution to another. Although a challenge for the WB countries at large to retain capacities in the country, it is even more crucial for capacities build among Roma population to be incentivized to not leave the country.
- CS, activism, and political engagement counts – a stronger CS and stronger Roma CSOs are found to be decisive in pushing forward the advancement of Roma inclusion agenda and crucial in providing direct support with measurable result for Roma education. Roma political engagement and factorization (such as in North Macedonia) enhances the chances of more (sustainable) achievements by giving a stronger voice and say to the community.

4.2. Policy & Legal Framework and Implementation

It is widely appreciated that in most of the countries under assessment there is a clear and steady trend in advancing the legal/policy framework, also in light of EU integration processes. These make for a solid foundation where to back continuous interventions and measure in the efforts of improving Roma education in the region. However, several challenges do persist at the policy/legal level.

Incomplete/fragmentized approach – it is not rare that policy/legal framework is not complete (e.g. no Roma responsive budgets in any of the targeted countries, missing/incomplete bylaws, like in the case of Turkey and Albania etc.,) which hinders the implementation process and monitoring of results/impact. Fragmentation is another barrier and it ranges from design to share of responsibilities and implementation. Dealing with education though sectorial approach makes it difficult to address issues and problems related to contextual factors and inhibitors. On the other hand, implementation of interventions at the local level creates room for a large variation of practice, outcomes, and impact. For example, implementation of exclusion from fees (and lack of clarity of procedures) for Roma children in preschool/kindergarten like in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Albania, or provision of free textbooks has varied widely within same country and under same political/legal provisions, thus creating uneven access to entitles also within the Roma children category of beneficiaries.

Ensuring implementation and access to provisions and entitlements – the enriching of policy/legal frameworks has enhanced provisions for Roma children; however, there are common issues and concerns regarding the level of access to such provisions and entitlements. Reasons for that include lack of access to information, technology, unclear/non-determined criteria for beneficiaries, but not only. Lack of willingness to implement, poor coordination among different actors and in particular among local and central governmental bodies, lack of/poor Roma dedicated budgets, lack of (qualified) human resources (institutions being understaffed, having high turnover of specialized staff in the area of Roma inclusion etc.) are all shared concerns when it comes to implementing the (relatively) well-designed on paper policies and intervention.

4.3. Towards more (Sustainable) Results: Priority Issues

Examining issues of ECD and primary education in all targeted countries, it still strikes that ECD and early exposure and enrollment of Roma children in education remains the Achilles heel. Regardless of differences in the contexts of all seven countries, it remains that participation of Roma children in ECD is yet very low. Issues of registration make it even harder to correctly report on the issue. Notwithstanding the continuous efforts of CS and donors' effort in this area, the overall low coverage with kindergartens, uneven distribution of this service across different regions and particularly between urban and rural areas, variation in fees and/or procedures of being excluded from them, hidden costs and segregation and discrimination all add up to the poor result in ECD.

Primary education participation is better than in other educational levels. But if issues of enrollment and quantity seem to be better addressed in primary education, issues of access to quality education still exist in all the region. Apart of the contextual factors addressed earlier, language barrier is the greatest inhibitor when it comes to primary education enrollment and progress and performance. A lack of mastery of mainstream language is often coupled with lack of experience in preschool adding to a large gap between Roma and non-Roma children at the entry point (in some cases, such as in North Macedonia leading also to discriminatory practices such as sending children to special schools on the wrong evaluation basis). Absence of supporting staff, Romani teachers and/or the overall poor motivation of teachers to engage and support Roma children via individualized plans and/or extra classes does not help. Discrimination and bullying within the school/classroom are additional factors leading to dropouts starting around grade 4, when in most countries the system changes from one teacher per class to multiple, making it harder for Roma children to cope with all the mentioned challenges and different teachers at the same time (i.e. it is more difficult to have many teachers harmonize efforts in supporting Roma children with language barriers as well as accumulated gaps due to poor access to quality education).

Issues of segregation persist but they are rarely explicitly addressed in the legal framework and/or they are not monitored, reported, and addressed within a structured and systemic approach. Considering the issues of segregation and discrimination, there is a clear need on prioritizing and

addressing Antigypsyism. Antigypsyism, although a root cause of many of the issues Roma face in integrating with mainstream society, including education, is little addressed, monitored, reported, be it in general or with reference to education in particular. Albania is integrating Antigypsyism in its new action plan as a standalone priority issue, most likely with other countries in the region to follow (sooner or later).

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This last part of the report proposes recommendation organized around policy and legal framework level and implementation level.

5.1. Recommendation Regarding Policy/Legal Frameworks

- There is common identified need and recommendation for policymaking aiming to tackle issued of ECD and primary education for Roma children to be designed and endorsed through a holistic and inter-sectoral approach.
- Persisting problems of discrimination and segregation (direct or indirect/hidden) call for an urgency of addressing issues of Antigypsyism at all levels, starting by targeting and prioritizing it at the policy level.
- Interventions need to be inclusive not only in terms of on intersectoral approach but also in their scope and coverage, be it geographically or thematically.
- A holistic approach, combining economic and education related incentives would benefit the advancement of early enrolment of Roma children. In particular, a combination of measures could improve preprimary school attendance among Roma children. This would include lowering the age of compulsory education (e.g. making preschool year compulsory such as in Serbia), increase number of supporting staff (such as teacher assistants in Serbia and support staff in North Macedonia); raising the number of preschools, especially in more disadvantaged areas; institute preschool fee waivers; establish conditional cash transfer (CCTs) for preschool[137]
- To ensure equal access to policy and legal provisions, central government bodies need to coordinate and ensure that local government bodies abide to the foreseen responsibilities and guarantee access to provisions entitlements designated for Roma children.
- Policy/legal frameworks need to be complete in terms of content (including bylaws that make them operational) as well as in including dedicated budget lines. Roma budgeting needs to advance at both central and local level agendas and action plans.
- Monitoring and evaluation component (which has been typically missing, fragmented or incomplete) much be strengthened and sustained.
- Improved data-collection processes are a must in identifying, assessing, and documenting the problem as well as in monitoring and evaluating success/failure. This is of paramount

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[137] See for example, Monica Robayo-Abril and Natalia Millán, World Banks Publication on Breaking the Cycle of Roma Exclusion in the Western Balkans, 2019 available at https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/642861552321695392/pdf/Breaking-the-Cycle-of-Roma-Exclusion-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf

importance to issues of access and quality service in ECD and primary education in all studied contexts. Improved evidence shall then help in better informing policymaking processes and SMART-er policies and interventions.

- Policymaking in the area of Roma education must foster a participatory and inclusive approach. Participation needs to become more meaningful and not just a "tick the box" procedural practice.

5.2. Recommendations on Policy and Intervention Implementation

- Policy implementation is hindered by a number of factors, among which a lack of clarity in divisions of roles and responsibilities as well as lack of transparency in how task and responsibilities are carried out by all relevant actors. Better and more transparent responsibility taking by involved actors is what is expected and needed in many settings where implementation is not optimal.
- In line with the first recommendation regarding implementation, there is a need also for better coordination among relevant actors. Improved coordination between different actors to avoid overlaps and improve synergy is also required.
- Implementation and achievements that result from implementation processes are often threatened by lack of continuation and sustainability. This could improve significantly with a higher involvement and ownership developed by the governmental institutions (central and local) that will help to guarantee continuation of good practices developed by other actors as well as help reduce the donor dependency/ donor driven attitude in the area of Roma inclusion and Roma education.
- It is highly recommended that partnerships between state structures and CSOs are further strengthened throughout the region. CSOs contribution and input in implementation of policies and interventions has proven essential in enhancing coverage and access to services and provisions targeting Roma and ECD and primary education.
- Relevant actors, in particular responsible state institutions and structures are required to further build/strengthen their capacities of those working with and for Roma education

issues. (Some initial steps include minimizing turnovers, including Roma employees/experts etc.).

- Last but not least, best practices and lessons learned through nation wise and regional wise is strongly encouraged to be documented, shared, and replicated. In the context of this assessment, some of the best practices in the area of ECD and primary education, which are strongly recommended to keep and scale up are those on mentoring and tutoring practices which have proven to be every effective in all different setting s applied across the region. Expanding measures and support in overcoming language barriers and endorsing Romani language is another recommendation which if taken into consideration and endorsed would significantly impact enrollment and quality education for Roma children.

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7. ANNEXES

7.1. Data Collections Tools

Here we include: 1. Letter of informed consent; 2. Template for individual interviews; 3. Template for focus group discussions.

I.   Informed Consent

Introduction and Study/Data Collection Purpose

My name is [name]. Together with my colleague [name], we're working on behalf Roma Education Fund, Hungary. In the frame of the REF's regional project "EU Regional Action: Increased Education Opportunities for Roma Students in Western Balkans and Turkey", funded by European Union, we are contracted by REF to conduct the task of studying, analyzing and reporting on the state of secondary and tertiary educational policy level and achievements in terms of enhancing education and employability of Roma youth in the Western Balkans and Turkey.

In this frame, we are conducting individual in-depth interviews and FG discussions with stakeholders and key informants form seven targeted countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey. You are identified and invited to this interview as a stakeholder/key informant for your country.

Material Benefits

The study findings will directly inform the REF on the advancement of policy framework and implementation of educational policies in the region. There are no direct material benefits to individuals participating in the research.

Types of Questions

I will ask you questions about the state of art of the policy and institutional framework targeting issues of Roma education and employability of Roma youth in [country], specifically addressing the progress achieved the bottlenecks faced/addressed in the processes, the best practices and lessons learnt.

Skipping Questions or Ending Participation

You can decide not to participate in the interview, or you can tell me that you prefer not to answer a specific question, and I will skip the question. There is no need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. If you like, you can end the interview at any time and this will not affect your relationship with REF or the project funders.

Confidentiality

All of your answers will be kept private and confidential, and the only people who will have access to this information are the researchers for the study. When we write up the results of the study, we will not connect your name to anything that you said.

Contact

If you have any questions about the research, or if problems arise, you may contact: *[contact name and details (email) of experts]*

Are you willing to participate in this study?	**Yes / No**

II. In-depth individual interview

Demographic Questions

Question	Answer
What is your gender?	
What is your age?	

Please describe your educational background.	
Please describe your working experience with Roma education and/or employment.	

Semi-Structured Individual Interview Guide

General

- How would you describe the situation of Roma education in your country? Why? Is there any difference in terms of gender / region / etc.?
- What is specific on the secondary and tertiary education levels of Roma youth? Is there any difference in terms of gender / region / etc.?
- What about their employability upon graduation? What are the main opportunities and challenges Roma youth face in entering the labour market? Is there any difference in terms of gender / region / etc.?

The legal and policy framework

- To your knowledge and expertise, what is the national state of the legal and policy framework addressing issue of Roma secondary and tertiary education and their employability?
- What is the nature of the existing policies? Are there explicit policies/laws and mechanisms addressing Roma youth education and employability? What is their main target? Are there any other sensibilities such as gender sensitive approach or other?
- To what extend would you say that they are approximated / designed with reference to the EU aquis of the same area?

On interventions and processes

- With reference on what we discussed regarding the legal and policy framework, what would you say is the scale of the interventions implemented under this framework? (Policies/ projects / actions / individual activity etc.)

- What is the scope of such interventions? Geographically, thematically, target-group wise (e.g. girls, rural areas, disability etc.?

- What is the approach employed in designing and implementing such interventions? Are they targeted intervention? Are they mainstreamed interventions? What shapes these approaches?

- Is there a gap between what is planned and what gets implemented? Why? What is influencing that? What are the bottlenecks in the process of implementing the aimed interventions?

Achievements, enablers and inhibitors, best practices and lessons learnt

- In line with what you've described so far, to what extend would you say the implementation of relevant laws and policies has been effective? To what extend have they managed to meet the set targets/objectives? Is there a variation in the range of achievements by gender or other relevant variables in your country context?

- How would you describe the level of success/achievements in this respect? To what degree is it satisfactory? Why?

- What have been the opportunities and enabling factors that have facilitated the achievement made thus far?

- What have been the main bottlenecks and barriers to success? Why?

- Are Roma girls and boys affected differently by these opportunities and barriers? How? Why?

- Could you share with us one or more cases of best practices in this respect? What do you think made them succeed?

- What are some other lessons learned (be it from best practices or failures) that you could share with us?

- What can be done differently in the near future? What about in long-term? By whom? How?

Conclusion

- Is there anything to would like to add that we haven't already spoken about today?
- Do you have any questions for me?

III. Focus Group Discussions

(following informed consent and collection of demographic questions)

General

- How would you describe the situation of Roma education in your country? Why? Is there any difference in terms of gender / region / etc.?
- What is specific about the secondary and tertiary education levels of Roma youth? Is there any difference in terms of gender / region / etc.?
- What about their employability upon graduation? What are the main opportunities and challenges Roma youth face in entering the labour market? Is there any difference in terms of gender / region / etc.?

The legal and policy framework

- To your knowledge and expertise, what is the national state of the legal and policy framework addressing issue of Roma secondary and tertiary education and their employability?
- What is the nature of the existing policies? Are there explicit policies/laws and mechanisms addressing Roma youth education and employability? What is their main target? Are there any other sensibilities such as gender sensitive approach or other?
- To what extend are education and Roma integration policies shaped by / approximated / designed with reference to the EU aquis of the same area?

On interventions and processes

- With reference on what we discussed regarding the legal and policy framework, what would you say is the scale of the interventions implemented under this framework? (Policies/ projects / actions / individual activity etc.)
- What is the scope of such interventions? Geographically, thematically, target-group wise (e.g. girls, rural areas, disability etc.?
- What is the approach employed in designing and implementing such interventions? Are they targeted intervention? Are they mainstreamed interventions? What shapes these approaches?

- Is there a gap between what is planned and what gets implemented? Why? What is influencing that? What are the bottlenecks in the process of implementing the aimed interventions?
- Which are the main actors? How would you describe/rate their role and contribution until know? What about in the future?

Achievements, enablers and inhibitors, best practices and lessons learnt

- In line with what you've described so far, to what extend would you say the implementation of relevant laws and policies has been effective? To what extend have they managed to meet the set targets/objectives? Is there a variation in the range of achievements by gender or other relevant variables in your country context?
- How would you describe the level of success/achievements in this respect? To what degree is it satisfactory? Why?
- What have been the opportunities and enabling factors that have facilitated the achievement made thus far?
- What have been the main bottlenecks and barriers to success? Why?
- Are Roma girls and boys affected differently by these opportunities and barriers? How? Why?

- Could you share with us one or more cases of best practices in this respect? What do you think made them succeed?
- What are some other lessons learned (be it from best practices or failures) that you could share with us?
- What can be done differently in the near future? What about in long-term? By whom? How?

Conclusion

- Is there anything to would like to add that we haven't already spoken about today?
- Do you have any questions for us?

Matrix of policy indicators and questions		
Major indicators	Specific indicators	Questions
1. The legal and policy framework in place (structural indicators);	1.1. Specific laws for anti – discrimination and/or inclusion 1.2. Explicit policies for Roma Education 1.3. Level of approximation with EU legislation/Charter of Fundamental Rights	• What is the national state of legal and institutional framework for the integration of Roma? • What is nature of existing policies (implicit or explicit)? • To what extent they are approximated with EU acquis?
2. The concrete interventions to implement it (process indicators);	2.1. The scale of interventions states undertake to address Roma education issues (policy, project, individual activity), their scope (nation-wide, regional, local), and continuity (regularly implemented or one - off intervention);	• What is the scale, scope and sustainability of the interventions in the area (i.e. Roma education)? • What type of approaches do they employ and what is their target? • What is actually being implemented?

	2.2. The type of approaches states use to address Roma education (targeted interventions or mainstream interventions); 2.3. Specific details of the targeted interventions for which the Roma beneficiaries could be identified; 2.4. Substantive content of interventions (what was actually done)	
3. The achievements, as experienced by the rights holders (outcome indicators).	3.1. Education - Indicators of discrimination/segregation/exclusion of Roma children in education - Percentage of Roma children, 6-11/12 years old, attending schools where all or most of schoolmates are Roma - Prevalence of hate-motivated bullying/harassment of Roma children while in school - Indicators of presence/level of support for fostering Romani language and culture in the general education system	- To what extent have the targets/objectives of these policies been met with a focus on education? - What has enabled or inhibited the road to success? - What are the lessons learnt from the implementation of these processes?

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