

4 Bulgaria

Many Roma children continue to attend overcrowded “Gypsy Schools” first established in the 1940s and 1950s, and cannot enrol in many half-empty Bulgarian schools which have higher standards.

“The buses come here every week, collect the Gypsy children and take them all the way to Rozovets, where there is a school for them. The teachers here don’t want any Gypsy children”
Roma child, 13 years old

Summary

Context

Bulgaria has been hit particularly hard by transition to a market economy, suffering severe economic recession both when communism collapsed and again in 1995. Government expenditure on education has declined and Roma/Gypsies have been disproportionately affected by the increased costs of schooling due to widespread unemployment and impoverishment. Post-communist governments were slow to develop a comprehensive strategy towards the Roma/Gypsy minority. This is reflected in the insensitivity of many aspects of the mainstream education system, including outdated teaching methods based on a mono-ethnic conception of Bulgaria, a lack of materials and teacher training in Roma/Gypsy issues and Romanes, and a failure to tackle the low social status of Roma/Gypsies and discrimination.

Roma/Gypsy population

The last official household census (1992) found over 300,000 Roma/Gypsies, but other estimates put the size of the Roma/Gypsy minority at up to 800,000, nearly ten per cent of the country’s population. The youthful profile of the Roma/Gypsy minority means its absolute and relative size is certain to increase in coming years. The Roma/Gypsy population is distributed throughout the country, in both urban and rural areas, and is also differentiated by language (Bulgarian,

different dialects of Romanes and Romanian are all spoken as mother tongues) and religion (Orthodox/Muslim).

Roma/Gypsies and education

Figures on educational attainment are broken down by ethnicity and show very few Roma/Gypsies with tertiary qualifications, small numbers graduating from vocational secondary schools and a far higher proportion than the national average who are illiterate. The insensitivity of the school system is shown by high drop-out rates amongst Roma/Gypsies, though cultural and economic factors also contribute.

Segregated provision

Segregation is a major factor in low educational attainment. Almost 20,000 Roma/Gypsy children attend separate “Gypsy schools” where the quality of education is low. There is often strong local resistance to plans to integrate Roma/Gypsies into mainstream schools. Roma/Gypsies are also grossly over-represented amongst pupils in special schools for the mentally handicapped. Many of Bulgaria’s thousands of street children are Roma/Gypsies. The Constitution does not recognise any collective minority identities and it was not until 1997 that the government made its first attempt to develop a Roma policy. These proposals were rejected by Romani NGOs who lobbied for a programme which was finally approved in 1999. Since then, some steps have been taken to end

educational segregation, though without government funding. A programme to train Roma/Gypsy teaching assistants appears to reinforce lower standards for Roma/Gypsy pupils.

Language provision

Governments have been unwilling to develop teaching in Romanes, citing the multitude of dialects and absence of skills and materials on the subject.

Balance of NGO and government activity

NGOs have become a dominant force on Roma/Gypsy issues, particularly at the level of developing ideas such as on multicultural education, curriculum development and teacher training, as well as helping with the development of educational infrastructure. NGOs have become a focus for the activity of the growing number of Roma/Gypsy organisations. Together with international institutions, they have sought to influence government policies. However, problems have emerged such as the inconsistency and short-termism of projects and with the perception that some NGO activities effectively absolve the state from its responsibilities and are not accountable to their Roma/Gypsy users. NGOs have largely occupied a space vacated by the state and it is still too early to evaluate their actual contribution to improving the education of Roma/Gypsy people.

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Introduction – Roma/Gypsies in Bulgaria

Demography

There are no precise and comprehensive official statistical data on ethnic minorities in Bulgaria, such as indicators on demography and education. At the time of writing, the only official source of demographic data with an ethnic breakdown is the most recent *Population and Housing Census*, conducted on 4 December 1992. This states that, the total population of Bulgaria was 8,487,317. Of these, 7,271,185 were Bulgarian, 800,052 were Turkish and 313,396 were Roma/Gypsy.¹

However, this information should not be taken to be precise and comprehensive. Due to the imperfection of the census methods used, and a number of other factors, the figures do not reflect accurately the actual situation. Inaccuracies are especially striking for Roma/Gypsies. The discrepancy between the number of people who declare themselves as Roma/Gypsies and the actual number of Roma/Gypsies is a well-known phenomenon, which exists in many countries. In the 1976 population census, conducted during the Socialist era (the information has not been officially published), 373,200 people were registered as Roma/Gypsies. However, in 1980 the Ministry of Internal Affairs conducted a second census with the assistance of the Fatherland Front for the needs of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. This was a special census of the Roma/Gypsy population based on a different principle – it registered not only the people who had declared themselves as Roma/Gypsies, but also all people

perceived as Roma/Gypsies by the surrounding population. This perception was based on anthropological type, lifestyle, cultural and other characteristics. The 1980 census listed 523,519 Roma/Gypsies – nearly one-third more than in the previous census.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs continued for some time to conduct undeclared secret population censuses (of Roma/Gypsy population in particular). A similar one was conducted in January 1989, for the needs of the so-called *Process of Revival*. This registered 576,927 Roma/Gypsies (6.45 per cent of the then population of Bulgaria). The latest census conducted by the regional offices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was in May 1992 (during the government of the Union of Democratic Forces). It was incomplete (not all regional offices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs submitted the required information), but registered 533,466 Roma/Gypsies (see Table 3.1).

The information provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs censuses should not be perceived as comprehensive, since these censuses were often a mere formality and the information given was incomplete and imprecise. Were we to compare this information with that gained from other sources and from observation, we could say tentatively that the overall number of people of Roma/Gypsy origin in Bulgaria is between 700,000 and 800,000. For various reasons (mostly because of the predominant negative social attitudes and prejudices), many people do not wish to declare themselves as Roma/Gypsies.

When calculating the number of people in the minority communities of Bulgaria, and more specifically the number of Roma/Gypsies, we have to consider a number of factors, including the phenomenon of “preferred ethnic identity” – a public declaration of a different identity that a person prefers. Such instances are common among many of the Turkish-speaking Roma/Gypsies, who prefer to present themselves as “Turks”. Other Roma/Gypsy Muslims prefer the neutral (and ethnically unclear) category of *millet* (‘nation’ or ‘people’). The Romanian-speaking Roma/Gypsies prefer to declare themselves as Wallachians, Romanians or ethnically neutral “Rudara” and others. Clearly, official data from the census (and from Bulgarian statistics in general) on the number of Roma/Gypsies in Bulgaria, and their demographic characteristics must be treated with reservation.

The age pyramid of the major minorities in Bulgaria (Turks and Roma/Gypsies) reveals a very significant characteristic feature – the relatively higher number of children and young people compared to those among ethnic Bulgarians (see Table 3.2).

However incomplete the census may be, these figures reveal an indisputable trend – the share of Roma/Gypsy children of school age will grow because of the higher percentage of Turks and Roma/Gypsies of child-bearing age (especially since some of those registered as Turks in the census are actually Roma/Gypsies with a preferred Turkish identity). This adds force to the fact that the Roma/Gypsy minority must be considered in the preparation of new educational strategies.

Table 4.1 Bulgaria's Roma/Gypsy population, 1992²

Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MI) (formerly District)	Jan 1989 (MI)	May 1992 (MI)	Dec 1992 (Census¹)	Dec 1992 (Census²)
Sofia (city)	38,000	n/a	10,797	13,902
Sofia (district)	14,136	17,077	10,812	11,684
Blagoevgrad	16,100	18,000	7,652	8,216
Burgas	37,894	38,453	16,365	16,120
Varna	20,682	35,000	14,313	17,077
Veliko Târnovo	20,880	n/a	2,750	7,236
Vidin	15,115	12,000	6,142	7,965
Vratsa	22,160	23,715	9,924	11,927
Gabrovo	5,920	114	2,314	1,585
Dobrich (Tolbuhin)	23,665	18,000	17,210	18,449
Kârdzhali	9,024	9,843	1,562	1,899
Kyustendil	8,463	12,762	6,248	6,057
Lovech	17,746	12,490	5,581	6,384
Montana (Mihailovgrad)	28,813	29,480	8,867	19,079
Pazardzhik	45,705	50,000	22,124	21,810
Pernik	38	6,600	1,604	2,142
Pleven	24,870	27,747	6,559	7,111
Plovdiv	45,333	61,585	24,403	21,139
Razgrad	5,213	16,468	7,639	7,464
Russe	16,306	16,306	8,917	11,934
Silistra	12,826	12,826	4,570	6,519
Sliven	46,491	40,590	17,170	18,183
Smolyan	548	1,225	n/a	514
Stara Zagora	28,289	38,000	22,309	24,143
Târgovishte	17,035	n/a	6,487	9,474
Haskovo	13,488	26,100	12,135	14,014
Shumen	20,128	15,823	15,760	14,727
Yambol	11,240	12,762	8,515	6,669
Total	576,927	553,466	287,732	313,396

Note: (1) 2% representative sample. (2) Final census data.

Table 4.2 Structure of Bulgaria's population by age and ethnic group, 1992³

Age	All ethnic groups	Ethnic Bulgarians	Turks	Roma/Gypsies
0-9	12.0%	10.9%	16.8%	25.4%
10-19	14.5%	13.7%	18.1%	23.2%
20-29	13.3%	12.7%	16.5%	17.4%
30-39	13.7%	13.4%	14.9%	13.9%
40-49	14.0%	14.4%	12.2%	9.2%
50-59	12.1%	12.7%	9.9%	5.8%
60 and over	20.4%	22.2%	11.6%	5.1%

A brief historical overview

Roma/Gypsies have lived in Bulgarian lands for centuries. Most historians think that the first big settlements of Roma/Gypsies in the Balkans, and more specifically in Thrace, can be dated back to the beginning of the ninth century AD. Abundant historical evidence points to the presence of Roma/Gypsies in the Byzantine Empire and their entry into Serbia, Wallachia and Moldova from the eleventh to the fourteenth century. This wide timeframe (from the ninth to the fourteenth century) also includes the lasting settlement of Roma/Gypsies in Bulgarian lands (the first Gypsy wave of migration).

There is a wealth of information about Roma/Gypsy presence in Bulgaria at the time of the Ottoman Empire. They were mentioned in many laws and other official documents, mostly tax registers, under the names *cengene* or *kepts* (ie, Copts). Roma/Gypsies in the Ottoman Empire were actively settling in towns and villages. A new type of semi-nomadic way of life was established too – the Roma/Gypsies had a

permanent winter residence and an active nomadic season. Often some Roma/Gypsies would break away from the traditional Roma/Gypsy occupations and take up farming or menial labour in the towns.

Roma/Gypsies had a special place in the overall social and administrative organisation of the Ottoman Empire. They were differentiated on the grounds of ethnicity (something rather unusual for the Ottoman Empire), with no sharp differentiation between Muslims and Christians in social status and the payment of taxes. Roma/Gypsies were similar in status to the local subject population, with some small privileges for the Muslim Roma/Gypsies and bigger privileges for those who served in the army. In this environment the Roma/Gypsies were able to preserve a number of their specific ethnic and cultural features, such as the nomadic lifestyle and traditional occupations. From a comparative point of view their civil status in the Ottoman Empire was more favourable than the status of Roma/Gypsies in Western Europe at that time.



In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries many Roma/Gypsies left the Danubian principalities (Wallachia and Moldova) and entered the Ottoman Empire (the second wave of Roma/Gypsy migration in Bulgarian lands). Other Roma/Gypsy groups (the third wave of Roma/Gypsy migration) came to Bulgaria in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, leaving Romania after the end of Roma/Gypsy slavery. Roma/Gypsy migrations from the neighbouring countries (Romania, Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey) continued in the twentieth century as well, and were usually related to the change of state borders after the wars and subsequent population migrations (the two Balkan wars, WWI and WWII).

More than two-thirds of Roma/Gypsies in the newly independent Bulgarian state (1878) were

living in villages. This number also included a lot of nomads (most of whom had permanent winter residences). In the 1920s and 1930s some nomadic Roma/Gypsy groups began to settle down and go to the big city neighbourhoods (*mahalas*). These processes continued after WWII as well, when the Roma/Gypsies were the target of the purposeful, though rather inconsistent and superficial, state policy of the new government. In the middle of the 1950s the Council of Ministers issued several decrees for sedentarisation (Decree 1216, 8/10/1957, “On solving the problem of the Roma/Gypsy minority in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria” and Decree 258, 17/10/1958, “On settling the problems of the Roma/Gypsy population in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria”). All nomadic Roma/Gypsies had to adopt a sedentary lifestyle and obtain permanent residence. The overall

change in the economic environment during socialism forced many Roma/Gypsy groups to abandon their traditional occupations and way of life. Many Roma/Gypsies moved from small villages to big cities as part of the general processes of migration in the country.

The collapse of the Eastern European socialist system in 1989 was followed by a long and still uncompleted period of transition in Bulgaria. This has had a powerful influence on the situation of Roma/Gypsies in Bulgaria. Economic hardship has very often resulted in a return to traditional Roma/Gypsy occupations and a semi-nomadic lifestyle, a transformation or modification of the traditional professional specialisation or migration abroad. At present, Roma/Gypsies are living in a wide range of economic circumstances due to a number of factors, including the internal subdivisions in the Roma/Gypsy community itself.

Different Roma/Gypsy groups in Bulgaria

Roma/Gypsies in Bulgaria, like Roma/Gypsies all over the world, are not a homogeneous community. They have many internal divisions – groups, meta-group units and subgroup divisions. The most numerous and varied Roma/Gypsy community is the meta-group community of the so-called *Yerlia* (ie, local). They are the descendants of the first Roma/Gypsy wave of migration and speak different dialects of the Balkan group of Romanes (the Roma/Gypsy language). The Balkan group of Romanes is divided into two main groups – *Erlides* and *Drandari* dialects. Some Roma/Gypsies from this meta-group community speak Turkish or use both languages – Turkish and Romanes.

As well as having these dialect/language groups, the *Yerlia* community is also divided on religious grounds into two main subdivisions: *Dasikane Roma* (Bulgarian Roma/Gypsies, ie, Christians) and *Xoraxane/Xoroxane Roma* (Turkish Roma/Gypsies, ie, Muslims). Within the framework of these main subdivisions there are more or less preserved endogamous groups, whose members are aware of their group identity and some of whom still practise traditional occupations. There are also large Roma/Gypsy communities whose members remember the old-time occupations and the group divisions which are no longer relevant. The group divisions have been mostly obliterated, and there is a shift within the borders of the larger communities (*Dasikane Roma* or *Xoraxane Roma*). In general, *Dasikane Roma* live mostly in western Bulgaria, while *Xoraxane Roma* live mostly in eastern Bulgaria, but sometimes parts of these communities may merge into one another. These processes are typical of the big city *mabalas*, where the memories of old groups have faded.

Roma/Gypsies in Bulgaria have another large subdivision, which is now a part of the big *Yerlia* community. It includes the communities of the so-called *Vlaxichkei* (versions *Vlaxoria*, *Laxo*, etc). These communities speak the so-called Old Vlax dialects of Romanes. They settled in Bulgaria during the second wave of Roma/Gypsy migration (17th-18th century). In the 1920s, 1930s and later some of them gradually adopted a settled lifestyle (mainly in the urban *mabalas*) and some changed their religion (for example, they are Muslims in eastern Bulgaria now), gradually merging with the major group communities (*Dasikane Roma* and *Xoraxane Roma*). Today, living with other Roma/Gypsy groups from these

subdivisions and intermarrying with them is considered normal, but their different group origin is still remembered.

Some members of the two main communities (Bulgarian and Turkish Roma/Gypsies) gradually separated themselves from the others on the basis of their preferred ethnic identities. This is the case with many Turkish Roma/Gypsies, who lost most of their group characteristics, are mostly bilingual (speaking both Turkish and Romanes), or only Turkish-speaking, and prefer to declare themselves as Turks or only as *millet* (ie, people).

The second main meta-group of the Roma/Gypsy community in Bulgaria is very clearly distinct from the rest. This is the group of the so-called *Kardarasha* (self-appellation *Rom Ciganjaka*, in sense “true Gypsies”), descendants of the third wave of Roma/Gypsy migration (19th-20th century). They were nomads until 1958 and now are living mostly in villages and smaller towns and less often in the big cities. They speak the so-called New Vlax dialect of Romanes. *Kardarasha* are strictly endogamous within their meta-group community and differentiate themselves from the other Roma/Gypsies.

The “Thracian” *Kalajdzhia* [ie, tinsmiths] (self-appellation *Vlaxos*) are semi-nomads, permanently settled in small villages on the Thracian Plain. They are endogamous and rigorously distinguish themselves from other Roma/Gypsy communities. They speak an Old Vlax dialect of Romanes.

The third main meta-group is the one of *Rudara*, often called *Vlasi* (ie, Wallachians) or Wallachian Gypsies by the surrounding population.⁴ They speak a Romanian dialect and they vehemently distinguish themselves from the Roma. In the past they were mostly nomads, settling in Bulgaria mainly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The *Rudara* community has two main subdivisions: *Lingurara* (ie, spoon-makers, also called *Kopanari* – ie, trough-makers), who are wood carvers, and *Ursara* (bear-trainers, monkey-trainers). The *Rudara* are endogamous within their large community and scattered all over the country. They live mostly in villages and small towns.

Minority rights

After the transition from communism in 1989, the situation of Bulgaria’s minorities changed. In August 1991 a new Constitution was adopted, which was based on the presumption of individual civil rights and the denial of some collective minority rights. The most frequently cited article from this Constitution is Article 6, paragraph 2, which does not allow for “any limitations of the rights or privileges based on race, nationality, ethnic belonging”. This text has some harmful implications for minorities – whenever their problems have to be solved, the typical reply is that, according to the Constitution, all Bulgarian citizens are equal and there can be no privileges. In November 1992 the Constitutional Court elaborated on this text, allowing for “certain socially justified privileges” for “groups of citizens” who are in

“an unfavourable social situation”, thus opening the way for the state to adopt a policy in regard to minorities.

However, the situation in the system of executive government remained almost unchanged, despite changes of cabinets and political leadership. For several years, there were discussions about instituting a special body of the Council of Ministers, with representatives of various ministries who would implement a co-ordinated state policy in respect of minorities. Finally, an Inter-departmental Council on Ethnic Problems was organised in 1994. The following year the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) came to power, and the council was transformed into an Inter-administrative Council on Social and Demographic Issues. However, it was inactive. In early 1997 the new government of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) declared a new approach to the minorities, and established a new government body – the National Council on the Ethnic and Demographic Issues at the Council of Ministers. In the same year President Stoyanov signed the Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities. This was ratified in parliament on 18 February 1999, with a special declaration according to which Bulgaria is obliged to maintain a policy of human-rights protection and tolerance of minorities and to ensure their complete integration into Bulgarian society.

Yet despite the changes brought about in 1989, and the political ideologies of the various governments since then, there has been no real policy implementation concerning the education of minorities in Bulgaria. The past decade has

seen governments of all the major political groupings, including the government formed with the mandate of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (uniting Bulgarian Turks and Muslims). However, nothing tangible has been done about the education of minorities (except for the study of mother-tongue languages as discussed below).

There are some essential differences in the views of the major political groupings regarding the education of minorities, not at the level of general strategy, but in relation to specific measures concerning individual aspects of education. These differences are especially clear in the comparison of two governmental programmes aimed at Roma/Gypsies and the subsequent chapters on education adopted by the UDF and the BSP.

The right to education in Bulgaria

Primary, secondary and further education

The 1991 Constitution was promulgated in the Official Gazette No. 56 of 13 July 1991. Article 53 guarantees the right to education of every citizen. It states that education is compulsory for all children under the age of sixteen, and there is a right to free primary and secondary education. The Bulgarian language is compulsory in schools because Article 3 of the Constitution proclaims that it is the Republic’s official language. Article 36/1 stipulates that:

“The study and use of the Bulgarian language shall be the right and obligation of every Bulgarian citizen.”

Article 36/2 proclaims that:

“Citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian shall have the right to study and use their own mother tongue together with the mandatory study of the Bulgarian language.”

Education is free and compulsory for all those aged between 7/8 years and 15/16 years. Compulsory education is broken down into primary education (grades one to four) and secondary education (grades five to eight). Primary and secondary education is predominantly government-funded through local authorities, with a small percentage of schools being privately run, more so at primary than at secondary level (less than five per cent).⁵

In addition, there are a number of optional stages in the schooling career. These include, preschool care and education, and kindergartens catering for young children aged from nine/ten months. Kindergartens are partially subsidised by local authorities, and lower-income families pay lower fees. Although this is optional, many children do attend. However, exact figures do not exist on how many attend and to what extent minority groups are represented.

Further education is also provided for those aged between 16 and 18 years. This is delivered through three types of institutions: profile-oriented colleges, gymnasiums and vocational/technical colleges. Profile-oriented colleges cover topics such as the natural sciences, mathematics, and the humanities, which are studied over a four-year period. This type of college can be attended on

completion of grade eight. Gymnasiums focus on modern languages and can be attended on completion of grade seven, for a total of five years. Finally, vocational/technical colleges are available for those who have completed grade eight, the course taking three years to complete. On completing further education, those aged 18 and over are entitled to go on to higher education in universities and equivalent institutions.

According to Article 5 of the Public Education Act, adopted in 1991, education in Bulgaria is secular. Article 4 guarantees the right to education and the ongoing development of education and attainment of qualifications. No restrictions or privileges based on race, nationality, gender, ethnic or social origin, faith or social status are admissible. In the past, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) supplied all students from grades one to eight with textbooks and obligatory manuals free of charge. This provision has been amended, and now textbooks are free only for those children who are identified as poor. Parents have to request free textbooks from the school authorities and submit evidence of their income. Preparatory classes are compulsory for children aged six years or over who have a poor command of the Bulgarian language and who have not previously attended a kindergarten. However, as will be shown later, this provision is seldom implemented. Likewise, Article 8/2 of the National Education Law, and the 1992 Council of Ministers Decree No. 223 provides practical arrangements for the study of minority languages in municipal schools. However, the teaching of such languages has not been made compulsory, but instead remains optional. Consequently, such

languages are only studied if the option has been made available in individual state and municipal schools or through private schooling.

In recent years, several legislative instruments have been adopted for the development of the private school sector. For example, the Ordinance on Private Schools of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technologies (now the Ministry of Education and Science – MES) states that the government, and in particular the MES, must create the necessary conditions and preconditions for the development of private school systems. The Ministry's position is that, in a context of economic, political, social and cultural change, private schools have a specific role to play in the system of formal education. They present an extra opportunity for ensuring the constitutional right of all citizens to choose freely the kind of school and education they wish.

Higher education

A new structure of higher education was introduced at the end of 1995, enacted by the Higher Education Act and adopted by the National Assembly. In line with Chapter ten of this Act, the setting up of a National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education Establishments is intended to contribute to the development and application of criteria for the evaluation of profitability in different education establishments. The Law on Academic Autonomy states that all universities and higher education institutions must determine independently all matters relating to their curricula, structure, teaching, research, qualifications and certification.

Laws established for the higher-education sector remain largely distinct from those that underpin compulsory education in so far as the Law on Academic Autonomy relates only to universities and the prime focus of the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation is that of issuing academic titles.

At the beginning of 1995, an Ordinance on Unified Government Norms for Higher Education of Teachers was adopted by Decree No. 12 of the Council of Ministers. The Ordinance establishes obligatory forms for the practical training of future teachers, guaranteeing the minimum level of their teaching competence, and regulates the pedagogical and methodological elements in the study plans for teacher training. However, the Ordinance does not inform the entire content of teacher training, thus giving scope for variation between colleges on what aspects are covered. Teaching of equal opportunities or multicultural education, for example, is not compulsory, and therefore it is possible to find only a few examples of these topics being included in teacher-training courses. Shumen University has courses on bilingual education and Sofia University on multicultural education. With such limited examples, however, the impact on the segregated school system is minimal.

In practice

The right to education of Roma/Gypsy children

According to official census data, the levels of education of the main minority groups are shown in Tables 3.3 and 3.4:

Table 4.3 Population aged seven and above, according to ethnic group and primary education

	Total	Primary	Elementary	Incomplete elementary	Illiterate	Not indicated
Bulgarian	6,735,540	1,978,680	969,696	395,113	69,479	
Turks	708,107	287,891	171,741	75,612	52,599	
Roma/Gypsies	257,840	83,410	80,179	51,892	28,897	
Total	7,797,602	2,370,214	1,231,727	527,392	152,955	7,876

Table 4.4 Population aged seven and above, according to ethnic group and post-primary education⁶

	Total	University	College	Specialised College	Gymnasium
Bulgarian	6,735,540	602,204	258,077	1,253,549	1,208,742
Turks	708,107	2,798	5,523	38,416	73,527
Roma/Gypsies	257,840	464	274	4,210	8,514
Total	7,797,602	619,294	266,907	1,311,652	1,309,585

According to the Bulgarian report for the Education for All 2000 Assessment, the relative share of education expenditure within overall GDP declined in the period between 1992 and 1994.⁷ However, the Education for All country report makes no reference to education arrangements and legislation for children belonging to minority ethnic communities, including Roma/Gypsy children. This is despite the fact that, in its 1997 concluding observations on Bulgaria, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination notes as a matter of serious concern the persistent marginalisation of the large Roma/Gypsy population, in spite of continuing efforts by the government. The observations make reference to inadequate training and education for the Roma/Gypsy minority.⁸

The 1999 Enlargement Commission Report for Bulgaria on progress towards accession to the EU similarly deplores the fact that a disproportionate number of Roma/Gypsy children are sent to special schools for the so-called mentally handicapped.⁹ Furthermore, it notes that the health and housing conditions of Roma/Gypsies remain considerably lower than for the rest of the population. The 1999 concluding observations on the Bulgarian report by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also expresses concern over the issue of multiple discrimination against the Roma/Gypsy minority, including in the field of education.¹⁰

The most persistent problem concerning the education of minority ethnic communities in

Bulgaria is the low level of education among the largest minority communities (ie, Turks, Roma/Gypsies, and Bulgarian Muslims, otherwise referred to as *Pomaks*) leading to basic inequalities. Smaller minority groups are affected to a lesser degree, due to their size and the fact that their level of education does not differ as much from that of the majority. In some instances, the educational level of smaller minorities, for example, the Jewish minority, in fact exceeds the national average. In contrast, the level of education among Roma/Gypsies is the most far removed from the national average, causing additional problems of poor professional qualifications, unemployment and poor living standards.

The reasons for the lower level of education among the Roma/Gypsy minority are complicated. To a certain extent they are related to the unequal status of this minority in Bulgarian society, but there are other important factors at play, which vary in influence. These include (not in order of importance):

- ineffective and outdated teaching methods of minority children in an educational system which so far has been a mono-ethnic (Bulgarian) system and is intended for the needs of an ethno-national (one-nation) state
- lack of consideration for minorities in the principles and teaching methods of the current educational system



- lack of consideration of their ethnic and cultural characteristics, and for varying levels of bilingualism
- widespread and persistent negative attitudes towards certain minorities (especially Roma/Gypsies) in Bulgarian society, which are often reflected in the attitude towards Roma/Gypsy children in Bulgarian schools
- specific peculiarities in the ethnic, cultural and religious characteristics of the Roma/Gypsy minority, which determine their different values, and especially their attitude towards education
- the hardship during the period of transition from communism and the economic crisis, which has had an impact on the social and economic situation of the Roma/Gypsy minority and in turn hindered the access of their children to school.

These, as well as a number of other, factors are obstacles to equal education for the Roma/Gypsy minority, and must always be considered against the backdrop of their specific environment – the region, town or village, type of school, etc – along with the specific internal community subdivision of this minority.

In recent years, there has been a misuse and even open abuse (at the state level as well as in the NGO sector) of the economic hardship of Roma/Gypsies, which has often been aimed at shifting the emphasis away from this problem and postponing attempts at its solution. The standard explanation that “children have no shoes and that is why they do not go to school” is universally applied to Eastern European Roma/Gypsies and has existed for some time.¹¹ Ultimately,

government programmes and NGO projects that focus on the distribution of free breakfasts or shoes for Roma/Gypsy children, do not automatically result in a higher quality of education, even if they yield a higher percentage of school attendance.

School abandonment

Directly related to the low level of minority education (especially among the Roma/Gypsy minority) is the problem of high drop-out rates. Unfortunately, there is no precise information about this phenomenon, but the MES, based on figures drawn up by Regional Inspectorates, registers some 30,000-40,000 drop-outs each year, most of whom are Roma/Gypsy children. NGOs usually give different numbers, ranging from 45,000 to 120,000 children, but such figures are unsubstantiated and generalised. As well as disparities between official and non-official estimates, there are significant gaps in knowledge in terms of how these drop-out rates link with age, ethnicity and religion. Furthermore, there is the need to establish to what extent “dropping out” among Roma/Gypsy pupils is due to family migration (labour, seasonal or abroad) and whether the children ever go back to school. Connected to this is also the question of whether children continue their education in another form after a temporary break, such as in another school, a specialised school, private tuition or even abroad.

The 1999 UNICEF Report *Out-of-School Youth in Bulgaria* indicates that widespread poverty and the return of minorities to their cultural traditions do not in themselves explain the school drop-out rates.¹² Even if the family situation places

demands upon young people, such as pressure to contribute to household income and/or to marry young, these circumstances should not automatically disqualify young people from enjoying their right to education. Ultimately, a failure on the part of both policy-makers and practitioners to respond to the reality of children's circumstances contributes to high drop-out rates. In the new market economy, schools in Bulgaria are struggling to survive financially and are competing with each other to maintain overall student numbers as well as to attract "good students". (In 1998, more than 300 schools were closed because of reduced numbers.) Social prestige is important for schools, as parents endeavour to enrol their children in schools offering a 'modern' curriculum (particularly featuring language instruction and IT skills). While this situation could result in an increase in drop-out rates as neighbourhood schools are closed, it also provides an incentive for schools to try to attract pupils by offering innovative and relevant curricula.

Bulgarian schools are often perceived as being detached from the social, economic and cultural needs of today's youth, lacking in activities that appeal to children, and failing to provide opportunities for students to acquire vocational, social and basic professional skills. It is felt that the schools are losing their multidimensional vocational education role, and are modifying the learning process to a simple transfer of a huge amount of academic information. The UNICEF report draws attention to the fact that MES does not systematically collect data of its own, but makes use of data transmitted by the National Institute of Statistics to the Department of

Finance. Such data is not intended for educational and pedagogical purposes, but mainly for the management of schools and staff. Furthermore, neither the National Institute of Education nor the 28 MES Regional Inspectorates collect data about school attendance on a regular basis. They may collect specific data at the request of MES for some special purpose, or for certain surveys. Finally, the report highlights the lack of communication and co-operation among the diverse institutions and partners dealing with education at all levels, which does not serve the interests of students.

Roma/Gypsies and segregated schooling

Another very important issue specifically related to the quality of education of Roma/Gypsy children, is that of the so-called "Gypsy schools". These schools have predominantly or only Roma/Gypsy children, and their learning conditions and quality of education are considerably poorer than mainstream schools in Bulgaria. Gypsy schools were built in the 1940s and 1950s in separated Roma/Gypsy neighbourhoods. At the time they had a positive influence on the education of Roma/Gypsy children in that it was the first time that Roma/Gypsies had received any formal schooling. However, over the years, the quality of education in these schools suffered a drastic decline. In particular, during the 1970s and 1980s, with the breaking up of the school system into differentiated parts, these schools began to deteriorate. Official policy was to gather all Roma/Gypsy children into the Gypsy schools. Some of the schools were given the special status of primary schools with 'specialised labour' education at the expense of general education. According to MES, in 1991 there were 31 such

schools with 17,800 children and another 77 schools which were euphemistically defined, in the terminology of the past Socialist era, as schools for children with a “lower level of lifestyle and culture”. In 1992, MES cancelled the special status of labour schools, and introduced the national curriculum. However, due to the lack of any ministerial backing, the absence of new teachers, the reluctance to invest resources and a general lack of interest on the part of the population, the educational environment has remained unchanged.

In the first few years after the changes, the state institutions avoided taking a stand on the problems in Gypsy schools. Their excuse was the existing territorial principle of the distribution of students. This principle is no longer mandatory, but its abolition in the early 1990s did not change the *status quo*, and Roma/Gypsy children are still not allowed (for different “reasons”) to enrol in many of the half-empty Bulgarian schools. Instead they are sent to the overcrowded Gypsy schools (even where a Bulgarian and a Gypsy school are next to each other). When the decreased number of ethnic Bulgarian children and increased number of Roma/Gypsy children requires the transfer of students from a Gypsy school to a Bulgarian school, the process is often accompanied by widespread protests from Bulgarian parents or the segregation of Roma/Gypsy children into different classes. For example, in Yambol in autumn 1999, due to insufficient places, Roma/Gypsy children were transferred without prior notice and little preparation to a neighbouring school. This led to problems of non-compliance on the part of the receiving school and to protests from the

non-Roma/Gypsy parents. More recently, in September 2000, in the Nov Pat Romani neighbourhood in Vidin, a more organised and well-prepared process of desegregation was initiated, which is discussed in more detail in the following section.

Roma/Gypsy children and special schools

The problems of the so-called “special schools” are related to the educational problems of the minorities in Bulgaria. According to MES, on 31 December 1997, there were 299 special schools in Bulgaria. These were of 12 kinds, including educational boarding schools; social-pedagogical boarding schools; homes for children and youth (orphans or children who were temporarily abandoned by their parents); schools for children with learning disabilities; schools for the speech-impaired, and schools for children with health problems (see Table 3.6). In 1997, a total of 27,148 children attended these special schools, with the highest numbers being in schools for children with learning disabilities (34 per cent in 85 schools) and homes for children and youth (25.5 per cent in 87 homes), which together accommodated more than half of these children. At the end of 1999, there were a total of 34,122 children, or 1.8 per cent of Bulgaria’s child population, in specialised institutions under the Ministries of Health, Education and Science, Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Justice.

The majority of children in special schools are of minority origin. Many are children from Roma/Gypsy communities who have expressed this as a preferred ethnic identity. The problems of these schools are often seen in terms of the problems

Table 4.5 Social institutions in Bulgaria, 1997

Type of institution	Number of institutions	Number of children	As percentage of all children in special schools
Reform boarding schools	11	782	2.9%
Social-pedagogical boarding schools	25	2,428	8.9%
Schools for children with learning disabilities	85	9,228	34.0%
Schools for children with impaired hearing	4	767	2.8%
Schools for children with impaired vision	2	303	1.1%
Schools for children with speech problems	5	262	1.0%
Schools for children with health problems	35	3,909	14.4%
Sanatoria-type schools	6	477	1.8%
Hospital schools	3	508	1.9%
Homes for children and young people	87	6,933	25.5%
Family homes	2	7	0.0%
Homes for children of pre-school age	34	1,544	5.7%
Total	299	27,148	100.0

Source: Ministry of Education, 31 December 1997.

of minority education, which is by no means justified. There are no precise data about the number of minority children in special schools. Moreover, most of the children with minority origins in these schools belong to communities with no preserved ethnic and cultural traditions and no clear identity.

The problems of special schools are many and diverse, and to a great extent they are related to the economic situation in Bulgaria. The unclear legal status of these schools and the complicated mechanisms for their financial support brought about by the transition to a market economy

result in extremely hard living conditions for the students. For example, laws and regulations issued before and after 1989 often overlap, making it difficult to determine where responsibility lies for issues such as payments for school maintenance. As a result, both municipal and state authorities have evaded payments for basic resources for individual schools.

The economic crisis has presented some elements of Roma/Gypsy society with difficult decisions about their children's welfare. For example, it has led to a growing number of parents temporarily leaving their children in homes for children and

youth, whilst maintaining parental rights. Others have sent normal and healthy children to schools for children with learning disabilities where they are at least provided with meals. Teachers who actively seek out pupils in Roma/Gypsy districts further encourage this. This is the case in other countries too, including the Czech Republic, for example. (See the chapter on the Czech Republic in Volume Two of this report.)

Officially, there are certain procedures for deciding which children should attend schools for those with learning disabilities. According to existing legislation, the decision must be taken by a special committee – consisting of a psychologist, an educator and the child’s teacher – elected by the regional educational office, or by the issuing of a medical certificate showing the child’s psychological status. In reality, however, the majority of Roma/Gypsy children are sent to such schools upon parental request only, thus demonstrating that the decision is not based on the existence of mental disability or learning difficulties, but that it is a “social” one.

Educational provision for street children

Somewhat similar is the problem of the so-called “street children”. This euphemism describes children who have left their homes for long or short periods of time, or have been abandoned by their parents, and have neither homes nor parental supervision. The category of “street children” is ill-defined, and the number of children it encompasses is subject to discussion. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which discloses information about street children on a regular basis, their number across Bulgaria fluctuates between 2,000 and 3,000.

NGOs working in this area, however, provide much higher estimates, ranging between 20,000 and 30,000 children. It is certain that most street children are of Roma/Gypsy origin. However, as with the special-school situation, this does not justify treating street children as an ethnic problem. To focus on street children ultimately distracts from the bigger underlying issue that the educational system is failing Roma/Gypsy children.

The state continues to justify its lack of concern with the problems of “street children” by transferring their care to the NGO sector. In many respects, the NGO sector has certain advantages over the state in terms of its potential for greater flexibility and innovation. However, for the NGO sector to be effective, the government must provide financial support and a means for monitoring NGO work to ensure child-protection and other standards. At present, the Bulgarian government, and in particular the MES, must be informed of any project activity in the area of education and in turn offer expertise in the implementation of projects such as those aimed at Roma/Gypsy education. However, this “in-kind” contribution does not make up for the lack of direct financial support. For example, it has been NGOs, not the government, that have established temporary accommodation for street children, such as *Nadezhda* in Sofia and *Gavrauche* in Varna. Ultimately, the establishment of temporary homes by NGOs alone is not a solution.

The lack of adequate legislation is the routine and often reiterated excuse offered by the Bulgarian government for its failure to act on a number

of social issues. However, in June 2000, at its 38th National Assembly, the Bulgarian government ratified the Child Protection Act. This piece of legislation, together with the possible introduction of foster families and a series of proposed amendments to the Family Code, potentially has huge implications for the rights of Roma/Gypsy children.

The study of Romanes by Roma/Gypsy children

A constant issue concerning the education of minorities is the study of their mother tongue. This has often been the subject of heated political and public debate, and has acquired symbolic significance for many minorities in Bulgaria. The 1991 Bulgarian Constitution declared “the right of citizens, whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian... to study and use their mother tongue, together with the mandatory study of Bulgarian” (Article 35, paragraph 2). Decree No. 232 of the Council of Ministers of 10 December 1991 specified how this constitutional right should be implemented within the educational system. Turks, Roma/Gypsies, Armenians and Jews were allowed to study their mother tongue as an “elective” subject (ie, outside the regular curriculum) for two hours a week. Decree No. 183 of 5 September 1994 expanded the time to four hours a week. After lengthy public debate, and with pressure from the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, as well as other minority parties and NGOs, there was a major breakthrough in the law that established a minimum standard in primary and secondary education. The study of one’s mother-tongue language became a “mandatory elective”, with a view to including all stages of education after the respective laws and curricula had been approved.

At present, the study of a mother-tongue language in Bulgarian schools varies substantially between different minority groups. There are a number of factors behind this, such as the demographic characteristics of a minority or the manner of their settlement, whether it is according to regions or the type of towns or villages that they live in.

The study of Romanes (the Romani/Gypsy language) is extremely complicated. After the 1991 decree, the study of Romanes was rejected by the Bulgarian institutions on the grounds that there was no standardised written form of Romanes – only a multitude of dialects. Furthermore, there were no teachers in this subject. Hristo Kyuchukov, who at the time was appointed as a Romanes expert in the Ministry of Education, did manage to develop and publish a series of teaching materials and to train part-time Romanes teachers. As a result, many schools across Bulgaria started teaching Romanes in the following school year. However, since his departure, the government has refused to appoint a new Romanes expert. The unresolved status of part-time teachers, the fact that universities do not cover Romanes as part of their teacher training and the resistance (or lack of co-operation) on the part of school boards, regional educational inspectors and MES have combined to mean that Romanes is currently not studied in Bulgaria. Under pressure from Roma/Gypsy-led NGOs, the present government has promised to engage with this issue within the Framework Programme. As yet, however, no tangible activity has been observed.



Government initiatives

In its last days in power, in January 1997, the government of Zhan Videnov (BSP) approved a “Programme for solving the problems of Roma in the Republic of Bulgaria”, which failed to recognise the existing segregation of the vast majority of Roma/Gypsy children in special Gypsy schools. Indeed, the programme emphasised the preservation of these schools and the need to ensure regular attendance of all Roma/Gypsy children. It was believed that this would fulfil the proposed objective that all pupils should receive a vocational qualification by the age of sixteen. The BSP programme largely reproduced the underlying educational philosophy of socialist primary schools, ie, labour training. It also combined a number of methods used in the “Let’s bring the children back to school” project run by the International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (described below). Other educational problems of Roma/Gypsy children, such as the need for bilingual education and preparatory Bulgarian-language classes, were merely noted, with no specific ideas for their implementation.

Similar in philosophy and trends was the Draft Programme (the so-called “Spanish Programme”), prepared in 1999 by the new UDF government with the assistance of experts from the Council of Europe. The programme was not accepted, due to pressure from Roma/Gypsy-led NGOs. Their main objections were that, firstly, Roma/Gypsies were not consulted or allowed to participate during the preparation of the programme and, secondly, the proposed strategy was not applicable to the Bulgarian context. These factors resulted in the programme failing to reflect issues already

identified by Roma/Gypsy organisations, such as the desegregation of schools. Instead the programme spoke of the “double discrimination” of Roma/Gypsy women and the need to create schools that catered for nomadic populations.

In April 1999, with the support of a number of international institutions, and after a long series of negotiations, a number of Roma/Gypsy-led NGOs obliged the government to accept their own “Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma/Gypsies in Bulgarian Social Life”. This programme’s philosophy for the solution of the educational problems of Roma/Gypsy children was radically different. Its goal is to guarantee the right to (and opportunities for) equal education of Roma/Gypsy children. The most important elements of the Framework Programme are:

- the need for desegregated education
- the gradual abolition of the so-called Roma/Gypsy schools
- the gradual abolition of all forms of specialised education on an ethnic basis (including the special schools).

The Framework Programme includes the introduction of preparatory classes for children who do not speak Bulgarian, and additional teacher training for teachers of Roma/Gypsy children.

Although the Framework Programme was accepted by the Bulgarian government, there has been no indication of any financial support, or indeed any indication of how the MES has been working on it, if at all. For example, an important first step towards desegregation began in

September 2000, in the Nov Pat Romani quarter in Vidin. This was a process initiated by Rumyan Russinov, chair of the Roma Participation Programme of the Open Society Institute, and a Vidin-based Romani NGO, DROM, as part of the framework programme. Unlike previous attempts, such as those in Yambol (previously discussed), there were many months of preparation; parents and teachers were consulted, and an agreement was reached with the school inspectorate. The process was also closely monitored and proper support given to the Roma families and children during the transfer process. Around 300 children were transported to a number of mixed schools in Vidin, and it is now estimated that three-quarters of the school population in this area are participating in the initiative.¹³ Although this initiative is part of the Framework Programme, there has been neither government funding nor indeed any support offered of any kind. Instead, external funding and support has come through the Roma Participation Programme of the Open Society Institute. The institute will also fund processes of desegregation in the towns of Montana, Pleven, Stara Zagora, Haskovo and Sliven in the school year 2001-02.¹⁴

Once again this raises the issue of the unwillingness (or lack of ability) on the part of all Bulgarian governments since 1989 to tackle the problems of Roma/Gypsy children and education. It seems possible, with the approval of a primary-school curriculum that seeks to establish a minimum standard of attainment (and primarily aimed at securing students' early vocational training), that the segregated

Roma/Gypsy schools will remain in existence *de facto*, even if they no longer exist *de jure*.

A current violation of the principles of the Framework Programme is the recent announcement made by the National Council of Ethnic and Demographic Issues to finance selected NGOs with an EU (PHARE) grant to train teaching assistants of Roma/Gypsy origin. In many respects this serves to consolidate rather than challenge the principle of specialised education for Roma/Gypsy children, especially in light of the fact that the position of teaching assistant does not currently exist in the Bulgarian educational system. It also encourages increased segregation, in that the training required is considerably less than is required for full members of staff and in turn would restrict the professional potential for such assistants. The introduction of Roma/Gypsy teaching assistants via the NGO sector, without any state back-up, is another example of the way in which the state attempts to transfer its obligations to the NGO sector, through half measures and temporary solutions.

NGO practice in the area

It must be emphasised that Roma/Gypsy-led NGOs have a specific role to play in the development of state policy on the education of Roma/Gypsy children. With the help of international institutions and other NGOs they are able to exert pressure on the government, and to have a number of their concepts and specific ideas accepted. The Framework Programme,

which prioritises education, is the best example of this. It was developed under the initiative of the Human Rights Project prior to negotiations with the government. Central to its development was extensive discussion with Roma/Gypsy-led NGOs throughout the country and their support during the difficult negotiations with the government.

Since the “transition” from communism in 1989, the NGO sector has grown rapidly and emerged as an important factor for the development of society. Over a short period of time, it has found a stable place in various aspects of Bulgarian public life, where it now occupies key positions. In times of state crises, the NGO sector has often taken upon itself the duties of the state. The NGO sector is dynamic and has become a generator of new ideas in many aspects of Bulgarian society. In the context of the Bulgarian economy, where the average monthly salary is 224 Bulgarian Leva (€72), the NGO sector is also relatively well funded.¹⁵ It is estimated that salaries in the NGO sector far exceed those in other more traditional spheres such as the university sector and the law.

The NGO sector has been instrumental in the development of debates around the education of minorities. NGO actors have been able to fill the gaps that have eluded the attention (and abilities) of the state. The support of foreign donors and, in particular, their prioritising of Roma/Gypsy issues has been a major contributing factor.

In reviewing the NGO sector’s major education projects targeting Roma/Gypsy children, we are concerned not with problems of implementation

(or the lack of it), but rather with overall concepts and possibilities for their adaptation into the state education system (or at least co-operation between these two sectors). Some NGO projects are not specifically targeted towards Roma/Gypsies, but towards minorities in general. However, the situation in Bulgaria is such that their emphasis tends to fall on the “Roma/Gypsy issue”.

One of the first projects on minority education came from the Bulgarian National Committee of UNICEF, and was implemented in 1991-93 in a number of schools and kindergartens around the country in which Roma/Gypsy children were a majority. This project included the preparation of special teaching materials introducing bilingual teaching methods and an introduction to Roma/Gypsy language, history and cultural traditions. The PHARE Programme Project for Intercultural Education, implemented in 1995-98 by the Minority Rights Group (London) and the Interethnic Initiative for Human Rights Foundation was to a great extent a repetition of the UNICEF project, with the following differences:

- a wider range of schools were included in the project (35 schools)
- a more extended programme was implemented for the different levels of education (primary and secondary)
- kindergartens were not included
- the study of Romanes was not included
- there was more extensive and expensive printing of teaching materials, which included samples of Roma/Gypsy folklore and Roma/Gypsy music.

A series of projects under the Step-By-Step Programme of the Open Society Fund has been implemented in rapid succession since the early 1990s. These projects are dedicated to different forms of minority integration through special (intercultural and multicultural) education in kindergartens. Another series of projects based on the principle of intercultural and multicultural education is currently being implemented by the Open Education Centre (initially a part of the Open Society Fund). It includes various training courses and teacher-training seminars.

The project “Let’s Bring the Children Back to School” has become very popular. It was implemented by the International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations in a selection of schools in Bulgaria (14 schools at the last stage of the project) and initially funded by UNESCO (other sponsors contributed later). This project started in 1993 and has been modified many times in the course of its development. It is dedicated to the inclusion in the school system (initially within the regular curriculum and later as extracurricular activities) of a number of elements (music, fine arts, choreography, sports) designed to attract Roma/Gypsy children to the school and, importantly, to keep them there.

NGO-sector projects are very often oriented towards the solution of specific problems, such as building additional wings of schools in Roma/Gypsy neighbourhoods. An example is the project to extend the school building in Fakulteta, Sofia (the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee).

The Balkan Foundation for Cross-Cultural Education and Understanding “Diversity” has been very active in the last few years. It has implemented a series of projects related to the publication and dissemination of academic literature, methodological writings and teaching materials for the bilingual education of minority children (especially Roma/Gypsy children), and teaching materials for the study of Romanes. The Foundation’s other projects are dedicated to the study of the conditions and forms of education for Roma/Gypsy children in the various types of special schools as discussed above.

A new element was introduced into the Bulgarian education system as part of a project run by the Interethnic Initiative for Human Rights Foundation funded by the Council of Europe. The project consisted of a short training course organised by the Nova Skola Foundation in the Czech Republic in 1998. Although based in the Czech Republic, this course trained young Roma/Gypsies as teaching assistants for Roma/Gypsy children in Bulgaria. The methods used and outcomes achieved are unclear, in so far as many of those who underwent the training could not speak Czech, English or Romanes. The MES promised to employ these teaching assistants in the Bulgarian education system even though, as mentioned above, no such position exists in Bulgaria. Further still, the teaching-assistant salaries come exclusively from Council of Europe funds, rather than from the MES budget. The project has since come to an end, and consequently no funding is now available for the payment of salaries. As a result, none of the participants who were trained for these positions is currently employed in schools.

Roma/Gypsy teaching assistants are also important in the ongoing projects of the Creating Effective Grassroots Alternatives Foundation in many towns and villages. The difference is that the teaching assistants are trained in Bulgaria and they take part in the education process in special preparatory classes (a year before 1st grade of school) where Roma/Gypsy children study Bulgarian. The projects include the active participation of Roma/Gypsy communities in these activities and events. As a result, new forms of project implementation are being developed, including the participation of local Roma/Gypsy organisations. The Catholic Remedial Services project is also directed at encouraging community (Roma/Gypsy and Turkish) participation in the education of their children. It includes the participation of community members on the school boards of trustees, which will be registered as juridical bodies according to new legislation.

In 1998/99 the Open Society Fund's Programme for Reform of Education's mega-project "Education" entered its pilot stage. Its purpose was to make recommendations to the MES by summarising the results of the various minority education projects of the NGO sector and outlining the achievements and faults of their implementation. The overall aim was to enhance co-operation between the state and the NGO sector with a view to achieving the best possible results.

On the whole, it is not possible to conclude either way whether NGO projects dealing with education and Roma/Gypsy children have been successful or, indeed, detrimental. While evaluation reports produced for the donors by

the NGO very rarely highlight negative aspects of a given project for fear of losing vital funding, we cannot ignore their low efficiency relative to the funds invested in them. In measuring the effectiveness of such projects, a number of indicators need to be established. For example, one very important indicator is to look at what a given NGO is actually advocating. A worrying trend is that many projects emphasise the special education of Roma/Gypsy children, rather than their general education, thus helping to increase rather than challenge the existing segregation of Roma/Gypsy children in the Bulgarian education system. Another important indicator is how well NGO materials are used and distributed. The bibliography at the end of this volume lists some examples of publications that have been produced by NGOs in Bulgaria, none of which are currently used in mainstream schools. This is particularly significant given the high costs of such publications, which may include costs of surveys, writing, printing, salaries, office maintenance, seminars and workshops. More specific data on the effectiveness of NGOs is dealt with in annual reports. However, in order to prevent the fuelling of negative attitudes towards NGOs and Roma/Gypsies in particular, these reports tend to remain confidential.

The attitudes of state institutions towards NGO minority-education projects have varied a great deal in the years since 1989. In general, the MES has tended to accept education projects as proposed by the NGO sector and has not created any major obstacles to their implementation (even during the BSP government). However, when it comes to the expansion or continuation of a project, the MES and its regional inspectorates fail

to deliver. For example, as discussed above, the MES has not helped in the dissemination of NGO-produced materials, such as Roma teaching materials. Most NGO projects therefore lack the potential for genuine development and the means for directly influencing the education system.

It has become standard practice for the MES (in all governments to date) to offer mainly “in-kind” support (whatever form this may take) rather than any substantial financial backing. In 1992-93, the MES did fund the development and publication of textbooks for the learning of Roma. The Bulgarian state, however, has tended to embark on more general programmes aimed at improving the lot of Roma/Gypsies. These programmes are often ill-informed, poorly prepared and sporadic, demonstrating little evidence of thorough preparation or follow-up. As a result, they often fail to be implemented in the first place, or if they do get implemented, fail to fulfil original objectives, thus remaining just “one-off” projects. For example, in 1993-94 the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs embarked on a pilot programme in Stolipinovo, a Roma/Gypsy neighbourhood in Plovdiv, for the development of literacy, professional qualifications and employment among the Roma/Gypsy population. Unofficially, it was admitted that it had failed to reach most of its targets. Only a few dozen people gained employment (and that was not even permanent), and participation in training courses had deprived Roma/Gypsies of unemployment benefits, leaving many participants in fact worse off. Because of its “in-kind” contribution, the MES is able to take credit for gains made by the NGO sector, even when there has been little or

no financial input. Conversely, if the MES is subject to criticism for any such activities, it is quick to place the responsibility back with the NGO sector.

In some cases, NGO projects are approved without criticism and presented as the basis for an entire programme, such as the project “Let’s Bring the Children Back to School.” For example, the “Programme for Solving the Problems of Roma/Gypsies in the Republic of Bulgaria” was approved by the BSP government, and an ongoing programme, “School for Everyone”, has been implemented by MES in 13 regions. The approval of such projects, however, represents more a gesture than funding *per se*. The “School for Everyone” programme, for example, distributes free breakfasts and lunches to schools, as well as offering various courses, such as in music. Although the MES has approved this programme, various foreign donors actually provide the funding.

NGO activities in the field of minority education are perceived differently by the political parties and organisations of the minorities themselves. The initial euphoria of Roma/Gypsy-led NGOs caused by the growth of interest in them has given way to disappointment, and even to confrontation with NGOs run by non-Roma/Gypsies. The latter type of NGO is increasingly perceived as a parasite feeding on Roma/Gypsy problems without displaying any real attempt at trying to solve them. Such confrontations influenced the discussion and approval of the “Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma/Gypsies in Bulgarian Public Life”. Through their organisations,



Roma/Gypsies were able to express their desire to cease being the passive object of state and NGO interventions, and instead to become active agents of change. This desire has received almost no support from the wider NGO sector. The confrontation is most explicit when you compare the approach of Roma/Gypsy-led NGOs with that of the various Roma/Gypsy-oriented educational projects of the wider NGO sector. Whereas for Roma/Gypsy-led organisations, the most important element of the Framework Programme is the right to equal education for Roma/Gypsy children through desegregation, the

vast majority of NGO projects emphasise the differentiation of Roma/Gypsy children, the end result of which is segregation. This fundamental contradiction, which is reflected in each individual project evaluation, has led to a negative attitude among Roma/Gypsy-led organisations towards such projects.

On the other hand, there are some non-Roma/Gypsy NGOs that, in co-operation with partner Roma/Gypsy NGOs and with the involvement of Roma/Gypsy participants, do carry out important work that represents the interests of

this minority. The sheer volume of projects dedicated to issues connected with Roma/Gypsies, together with their high turnover, however, makes it difficult to monitor them all. While some Roma/Gypsy NGOs may approve of certain projects, others may not. The emphasis, therefore, in selecting examples of good practice, should be more on measuring the extent to which there is, or is not, a clear contradiction between the objectives of a given project and the needs of the community as represented (where possible) by Roma/Gypsy organisations.

Finally, a very important aspect of the education process, which must not be overlooked, is the role of teachers, and especially their professional organisations (including the most popular one, the Union of Bulgarian Teachers). So far they have not developed a clear-cut approach to the education of minorities. Individual speeches by members of the teachers' unions have been limited to generalisations and politically correct phrases, or to expressing the desire for additional payment for work with minority children (ie, the restoration of some socialist practices).

Voices of Roma/Gypsy children

TNV, 15 years old, from kv. Fakulteta, Sofia

“You can't learn anything in this school. There aren't enough rooms, we study in three shifts, the rooms are overcrowded – 30-40 people. Some feel like studying, others don't. The teachers don't care. Whoever managed to go to a Bulgarian school almost always finished it,

while here only a few students finish the eighth grade every year... They may ask you for money to send your child to a Bulgarian school... They choose their students there and when they don't like someone they don't tell you that they don't want the child because you are a Gypsy, but they tell you that there are no vacancies, the classes are full and there is nothing you can tell them. How can you check if this is true or not, who can you complain to?”

AVH, 14 years old, from kv. Istok, Pazardjik

“I was lucky that years ago I was accepted in a Bulgarian school. They accept about 10-15 of our children every year. They want to have only three or four Roma/Gypsy children in a classroom in order to fulfil the requirement, and they tell the rest that we have a Roma/Gypsy school... The two schools are about 100 metres away one from the other, but the classes in the Gypsy school are two times bigger, and you can see that the students there have not learned anything. You can immediately tell who goes to which school.”

KTG, 13 years old, from kv. Nikola Kotchev, Sliven

“It is not hard to study in our school at all. They give you a C whether you know something or you don't in order to get rid of you. There are some students who cannot read until the fifth grade... Otherwise they are not strict, the teacher sends you to do her shopping for her or to do something else for her, and you don't have to come back before the end of the lessons.”

APY, 15 years old, from kv. Nov Pat, Vidin

“When I was in the fourth grade we studied the ‘mother tongue’. It was very nice. The teacher was talking to us in Romanes, she told us stories and she told us about our history. We were studying our letters... But we don’t have this any more. We haven’t had it for four years, I don’t know why.”

HSR, 14 years old, from kv. Trite Kuli, Russe

“Some people came here from a foundation and made us study Gypsy language. What do you mean, Gypsy language? We are Turks¹⁶ and we want to study Turkish, maybe also English, and let the Gypsies study Gypsy language. Our parents went to the school to argue about it.”

ONV, 14 years old, from kv. Istok, Kustendil

“We have a school here in the neighbourhood, so why would we go to the town to look for another school... We all study here. There is also a school for the mentally handicapped – it is elsewhere. Their teachers come here every fall before the beginning of the school year to make their classes full – they go around the neighbourhood, telling the people to send their children there because it is like a boarding school and they don’t have to think how to feed and clothe them. And the poorer people agree, they can’t help it, and thus the mental school gets enough students. It is not difficult to send your child to a mental school, you need a note from the local clinic, from a psychiatrist, but even if you only sign a request they will accept them.”

TNF, 13 years old, from Rakovski, Plovdiv region

“The buses come here every week, collect the Gypsy children and take them all the way to Rozovets, where there is a school for them. The teachers here don’t want any Gypsy children... The parents agree because they cannot help it – they cannot feed them here. Others send their children to orphanages to be raised there, not that they give them up, but they want the state to raise them and they will have them back when they grow up. They can’t afford to do it now.”

GBJ, 11 years old, Orphanage, Plovdiv region

“We are mostly Gypsies here, and when people come to adopt children no one wants us... The foreigners take Gypsy children but only few foreigners come. They take two to three children every year, younger children, the lucky ones.”

ANM, 12 years old, Temporary Accommodation Home, Sofia

“It’s good that we have this place, at least we don’t have to sleep in the train station... What can we do here all day? We wander around... They give us new clothes when foreigners come.”

These interviews were conducted for the purpose of this study. Their text in full is in the archive of the Minority Studies Society, *Studii Romani*. Interviewees’ initials are used instead of their names, in order to preserve their privacy.

Recommendations

Given that Bulgaria has ratified:

- the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ratified 21 September 1970, entered into force 23 March 1976)
- the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ratified 21 September 1970, entered into force 3 January 1976)
- the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ratified 8 August 1966, entered into force 4 January 1969)
- the Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified 3 June 1991, entered into force 3 July 1991)
- the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education. (The UNESCO Protocol instituting a Conciliation and Good Offices Commission to be responsible for seeking the settlement of any disputes which may arise between States Parties to the Convention against Discrimination in Education has not yet been ratified.)
- the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ratified 7 September 1992, entered into force 7 September 1992)
- the First Protocol to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ratified 7 September 1992, entered into force 7 September 1992)
- the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ratified 7 May 1999, entered into force 1 September 1999)

and has signed but not ratified:

- the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

Save the Children recommends that:

The Government of Bulgaria

- Ratifies the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages
- Initiates a policy of equal education of Roma/Gypsy children as its basic philosophy and primary goal – this should constitute the basis for MES to develop its “General Strategy for the Education of Roma/Gypsy Children” and implement it through specific programmes.
- Adapts existing laws and regulations in the field of education to this General Strategy.
- Adopts a flexible approach to the implementation of the new General Strategy, which should always take into consideration the characteristics of each internal group and subgroup of Roma/Gypsy community, region, town or village and school. At the same time this approach should remain within the framework of the main principles of the General Strategy.
- Accords priority to the principle of integrated, equal and generally accessible education for everyone – the different forms of special education should be used only in the context of this principle as a means of achieving the common goal and not to segregate minority groups.
- Establishes an extensive system of preparatory classes for Roma/Gypsy children before first grade for the study of Bulgarian and, where necessary, provides for the application

of the methods of bilingual education in the primary education system.

- Bases education on the principles of intercultural and multicultural education, through a modification of the curricula, which should be enriched with lessons on the history and culture of Roma/Gypsies as an integral part of Bulgarian history and culture.
- Improves the training system for teachers and other educational staff, with the aim of teaching the teachers about the major ethnic and cultural characteristics (including language, at least at a basic level) of the Roma/Gypsy community. The presence of highly qualified teachers will render redundant the teaching assistants (whose status, qualification and obligations are unclear).
- Instructs the MES and the regional inspectorates to help actively in the implementation of the constitutional right of Roma/Gypsy children to study their mother tongue. The study of the mother tongue should be made more extensive in terms of content, and should include the study of minority history and culture. The MES should, in addition, develop the necessary teaching materials and build a comprehensive university-based system for the preparation and professional qualification of teachers in Romanes.

- Establishes an efficient system for interaction in the field of minority education between governmental institutions, the different NGO types within the sector (ie, the Roma/Gypsy-led organisations and those run by non-Roma/Gypsies). This system should work on different levels – national, regional and local – and should also make active use of the potential of school boards of trustees.

The international organisations, including the UN Commission on Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education and the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, and the European Union:

- Closely monitor the international obligations undertaken by the Bulgarian government in respect of the right to education, paying particular attention to the right to education of Roma/Gypsy children.

Bulgaria: Notes on the text

1 In the census, citizens gave answers to specially trained census takers, who wrote the information in categories prepared in advance; these were according to ethnic group, religion and mother tongue. Data from the 2001 census were beginning to be made available at the time of writing, but with no ethnic breakdown. According to this census (01/03/2001), the overall population in Bulgaria was 7,973,671.

2 E Marushiakova and V Popov, *Gypsies (Roma) in Bulgaria*, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, New York, Paris, Wien, Peter Lang Verlag, 1997, pp. 41-2; *Rezultati ot prebrojavaneto na naselenieto, Tom I – Demografski karakteristiki* (The results of the population census, Vol. 1 – Demographic characteristics), Sofia, Natsionalen statisticheski institut, 1994, p. 194; *Demografska karakteristika na Bulgaria (rezultati ot 2% izvodka)* (Demographic characteristics of Bulgaria (results from a 2 per cent sample)), Sofia, Natsionalen statisticheski institut, 1993; D Dimitrov, B Chakalov, K Dechev, Iv Georgieva and P Georgiev, *Utvár-zhdavane na socialisticheska nachin na zivot sred bulgarskite grazhdani ot tsiganski proizvod* (The affirmation of socialist lifestyle among Bulgarian citizens of Roma/Gypsy origin), Sofia, CK na BKP, 1980.

3 *Rezultati ot prebrojavaneto na naselenieto, Tom I – Demografski karakteristiki* (The results of the population census, Vol. 1 – Demographic characteristics), Sofia, Natsionalen statisticheski institut, 1994.

4 Rudara/Rudari are one of the groups of Romanian-speaking Gypsies (often with a non-Romani consciousness) that are found throughout Europe. They are also referred to in other contexts as *Karavlabs* (in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example) and *Beasha* (variant *Boyasha/Boyashi*) (in Croatia, for example).

5 Ministry of Education, Science and Technologies, Institute for Education and Science, *Development of Education 1994-1996*, (National report presented to the 45th session of the International Conference on Education in Geneva, 30 September – 5 October 1996), Sofia, 1996.

6 *Rezultati ot prebrojavaneto na naselenieto, Tom I – Demografski karakteristiki* (The results of the population census, Vol. 1 – Demographic characteristics), Sofia: Natsionalen statisticheski institut, 1994, p. 303.

7 National Institute for Education, Republic of Bulgaria, *Education For All, The Year 2000 Assessment National Report*, Sofia, 1999.

8 In the context of Bulgaria, we recognise that Roma/Gypsy, as a term, may not always be appropriate. For example, Turkish- and Romanian-speaking Gypsies and/or Gypsies with a preferred Turkish or Romanian identity refer to themselves and are referred to by others specifically as Gypsies, *not* Roma.

9 Commission on Bulgaria's Progress Towards Accession, *Second Regular Report*, Enlargement Commission Report, October 1999.

10 Concluding Observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Bulgaria. 08/12/99 E/C.12/1/ADD.37.

11 The same explanation could be heard during the years of communism. For example, I Kemeny *Beszamoló a magyarországi cigányok helyzetére foglalkozó; 1971 ben végzett kutatásról* (Information from the 1971 survey on the situation of Gypsies in Hungary), Budapest, 1976.

12 UNICEF, Regional Office for CEE, CIS and the Baltics, *Out-of-School Youth in Bulgaria: Mission Report*, Sofia, February 1999.

13 ERRC, “Desegregation effort begins in Bulgaria”, *Snapshots from around Europe*, *Roma Rights*, 4/2001.

14 The successful implementation of the Vidin programme, which today includes some 460 Romani children, has prompted a debate about using it throughout Bulgaria. It was the focus of a conference held in Sofia on 27 April 2001, entitled “The Desegregation of the ‘Romani Schools’ A Condition for an Equal Start for Roma”. The conference was co-organised by the Open Society Institute’s Roma Participation Programme, the European Roma Rights Centre, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and the Human Rights Project. The conference was the first major forum

focusing on Roma and school integration in Bulgaria, and it allowed Romani education experts and activists, government officials, diplomats and representatives of the World Bank and human rights organisations to discuss the implications of desegregation in Vidin.

15 National Statistical Institute, April 2000. Exchange rate 3.10BLeva/£GB1.

16 As discussed at the beginning of this report, many “Turkish” Roma/Gypsies, are Turkish-speaking and prefer to declare themselves only as Turks or *millet* (ie, “people”).

5 Republic of Croatia

Primary school education is compulsory between the ages of 7 and 14. It is estimated that 50 per cent of all Roma/Gypsy children enrol in primary school and that 25 per cent of all Roma/Gypsy children complete primary school education.

“My other brothers and sisters are not enrolled in school. School is useful because it develops our brain, we do not fight, we learn to calculate and not to use drugs. I think there should be some Roma language in the school. The teacher treats me differently from other children and this is why I have to learn more. I am not good in maths and do not want to continue schooling.”

Romani boy, ten years old

“The problems are large. The enrolled children range from 7 to 11 years of age and none of them have a good-enough command of the Croatian language to follow the classes normally.”

School pedagogue

Summary

Context

Croatia was declared an independent state in 1990, but it was not until the end of the war with the Yugoslav Federation, in 1995, that the government obtained full control over the country's territory. Until 1999, Croatian politics was dominated by Franjo Tuđman and, despite the development of a sophisticated structure of minority-related institutions, the Roma/Gypsy population (officially considered an “ethnic community”) received little government attention and is “represented” in parliament by the MP for the Italian minority. There are few official data on the Roma/Gypsy population, though steps have been taken recently to include Roma/Gypsies in official minority-representative institutions and, in 1998, a government committee was formed to improve Roma/Gypsy educational opportunities and to develop a broader Roma/Gypsy policy.

Roma/Gypsy population

Historically, the Croatian lands have had a relatively small Roma/Gypsy population. The 1991 census recorded fewer than 7,000 Roma/Gypsies, though other estimates put the population at around 40,000. The current picture is even more uncertain, due to large

movements both in and out of Croatia during the war years and afterwards, including Roma/Gypsy refugees from other conflicts. In 1991, over two-thirds of Roma/Gypsies were permanently settled. At least two dialects of Romani are spoken, and Roma/Gypsies are differentiated by religion (Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim). Many Roma/Gypsies have failed to obtain Croatian citizenship. They suffer high rates of unemployment, welfare dependency and job insecurity. Most Roma/Gypsies live in marginal settlements in poor-quality accommodation often lacking basic infrastructure. This has led to conflicts with local authorities and social tensions.

Roma/Gypsies and education

Small-scale surveys indicate around half of Roma/Gypsies of school age don't enrol in (compulsory) primary school. In part this is due to their not possessing the necessary documents, but also lack of fluency in the language of instruction, Croatian, is a factor. Fewer than five per cent attend a secondary school, demonstrating a high dropout rate between the two stages. Schools are often far from Roma/Gypsy settlements, and high Roma/Gypsy absenteeism can be due to illness or family obligations. Antipathy towards the presence of Roma/Gypsy children in

mainstream classes remains a problem. Some authorities have sought to address Roma/Gypsy disadvantage through separate classes, but this has been criticised by the Ombudsman.

Balance of NGO and government activity

Government activity is still at the stage of information gathering and a pilot project involving a small number of Roma/Gypsy classroom assistants. Broader government proposals are yet to be implemented, and it is unclear to what extent Roma/Gypsies will be able to use new opportunities for minority education and language teaching. Given the slow pace of state activities, NGOs have taken a leading role in developing educational initiatives for Roma/Gypsies, including summer schools, course development and training Roma/Gypsy educators. Projects have also been developed to help prepare Roma/Gypsy children for school and to raise awareness amongst Roma/Gypsy parents about the school system. However, Roma/Gypsy NGOs have proved less successful in constructing an effective political lobby and in exerting pressure on the state to allocate sufficient resources to address Roma/Gypsy educational disadvantage.

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Introduction

With a population of some 4.5 million, Croatia was formerly one of the more developed republics in the Yugoslav Federation. Before the onset of war, its *per capita* GDP was approximately \$US5000.¹ Following Croatia's declaration of independence in 1990 and in the wake of democratic elections, full-scale war broke out in 1991. Between 1991 and 1995, about a quarter of the country was not under government control, and the GDP halved. Military actions in 1995 restored three of the four United Nations Protected Areas to Croatian control, leading to the exodus of over 250,000 ethnic Serbs. The Eastern Slavonia region was peacefully reintegrated into Croatia later, after being administered by a UN transitional authority. From 1990 to 1999, Croatia's government was led by the Croatian Democratic Union, with its leader Dr Franjo Tuđman as President. The government's record on minority rights, refugee return and on wider human rights was problematic, and internationally, the country was relatively isolated.

Following Dr Tuđman's death in December 1999, the general election held on 3 January 2000 produced a decisive victory for two opposition groupings: one bloc formed by the Croatian Social Democratic Party and the Croatian Social-Liberal Party (which secured some 40 per cent of the popular vote) and another formed by the Croatian Peasants' Party, the Croatian Liberal Party, the Istrian Democratic Party and the Croatian People's Party (which secured 16 per cent). The result led to the formation of a

coalition government of six parties (the *šestorka*) headed by Social Democratic Party leader Ivica Račan as Prime Minister. The new government has embarked on an ambitious programme of returning Croatia to the mainstream of the international community, and offers the opportunity for a renewed dialogue and commitment to minority rights. However, the sheer scale of the task facing it has led to the postponement of many key initiatives. In addition, until local elections scheduled for May 2001, the Croatian Democratic Union retained control of many municipalities.

Roma/Gypsies in Croatia

Demography

The last census in Croatia was in 1991, when the republic was still part of the Yugoslav Federation. Whilst republic-specific data were recorded, there are real problems with the census in giving an accurate picture of the total number of Roma/Gypsies in Croatia. A new census is due to be undertaken in 2001. Given the complexities of “ethnic” identification in Croatia, and the stigma attached to self-identification as Roma/Gypsy, it is likely that the 1991 census considerably underestimates the magnitude of the Roma/Gypsy population. In any case, the impact of the war between 1991 and 1995, with large-scale migration into and out of Croatia, further undermines the reliability of the census figures from 1991.

According to the 1991 census, Croatia had a total population of 4,784,265, of whom only 6,695 (or 0.14 per cent) of the population identified

themselves as Roma/Gypsies.² Excluding those who identified themselves as Yugoslav, this made Roma/Gypsies the tenth-largest nationality in Croatia. The underestimation that this number represents is illustrated by another census statistic: namely that some 7,657 people (or 0.16 per cent) stated that their mother tongue was Roma, an increase of almost a thousand on the Roma/Gypsy nationality figure. In any case, the figure represents a significant increase from those who identified themselves as Roma/Gypsies in previous censuses (only 405 in the 1948 census; 1,263 in 1953; 313 in 1961; 1,257 in 1971; and 3,858 in 1981).³

The census also indicates clearly that Roma/Gypsies are concentrated in certain parts of Croatia, with over 70 per cent of the recorded Roma/Gypsy population in seven municipalities, towns and cities, namely: Čakovec (1,930), Zagreb (1,105), Pula (575), Rijeka (445), Varaždin (245), Osijek (221) and Slavonski Brod (208).⁴ The scale of underestimation is illustrated by the fact that the Municipal Centre for Social Work in Čakovec, in 1996, had 2,957 Roma/Gypsies registered as users of their services, 1,000 more than the census suggested as living there.⁵ Indeed, within many of these municipalities, there are individual Roma/Gypsy settlements which themselves have a population in excess of the 1991 census figure for the municipality as a whole. For example, in the municipality of Pitomaca in Podravina county, only 28 people declared themselves as Roma/Gypsies in the 1991 census, whereas the Ivo Pilar research study estimated, on the basis of birth records, that there were up to 200 Roma/Gypsies in just one settlement in 1998.⁶

It is generally accepted that the 1991 census seriously underestimates the number of Roma/Gypsies living in the Republic of Croatia at that time. In any case, the number of Roma/Gypsies has since increased dramatically because of immigrants from other post-Yugoslav Republics or territories, notably from Bosnia and Herzegovina and from Kosovo, some of whom have joined family members who had arrived in Croatia before the wars. As most Roma/Gypsies were not concentrated in the war-affected parts of Croatia, with the exception of those in Eastern Slavonia/Baranja, there was no corresponding outward migration in the same period.

In the absence of accurate statistics, there are a number of more or less informed estimates on the present size of the Roma/Gypsy population. Whilst some Roma/Gypsy leaders have suggested figures as high as 150,000, the most common and respected estimate, given by both the Council of Europe and the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), is between 30,000 and 40,000 – over six times the 1991 census figure and representing close to 1 per cent of the Croatian population.⁷ This would make them, alongside Muslims, the second or third largest minority in Croatia. Whilst it is extremely likely that the 2001 census will continue to understate the figures, there is some evidence of a recognition of this higher number by some key policy-makers. However, there have as yet been no systematic attempts to obtain reliable figures upon which to base policies.

Different Roma/Gypsy groups in Croatia

In 1998, the Ivo Pilar research institute carried out a small-scale survey of 126 Roma/Gypsy heads of households in five different Roma/

Gypsy settlements on the outskirts of large towns throughout Croatia. The survey found that Roma/Gypsies spoke two major dialects: *Romani Chib* and a dialect of the Romanian language (*Ljimba d'bjas'*).⁸ Speakers of *Ljimba d'bjas'*, quite a significant group in Croatia, are also known as Boyashi (*Bajasi'*), and are thought to have travelled from Romania hundreds of years ago.⁹ Roma/Gypsies can also be differentiated in terms of religious affiliation with three distinct groupings: Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christian and Muslim. The survey also looked at family size and concluded that there is an above average number of children in Roma/Gypsy households in Croatia (see Table 5.1).

As previously stated, there was large-scale migration within the republics of former Yugoslavia before its break-up in 1991. According to the 1991 census, before internal barriers to movement had been set up, about 68 per cent of Roma/Gypsies in Croatia were long-term sedentary inhabitants. Some 27 per cent had come to Croatia from other parts of Yugoslavia.

Table 5.1 Sample survey of Roma/Gypsies in Croatia: family size

Families with:	% of families
No children	9%
One child	22%
Two children	18%
Three children	22%
Four children	15%
Five children	14%

Source: Štambuk, "Roma in Croatia in the Nineties", *Journal for General Social Issues (Društvena istraživanja)*, 2000, 9: 2-3; Table 9.

The socio-economic status of Roma/Gypsies

Survey evidence suggests that Roma/Gypsies are in a disadvantaged socio-economic position in Croatia, with high levels of unemployment. The Ivo Pilar survey notes unemployment at 73 per cent, with 21 per cent of households having one member employed, only 6 per cent with two members employed and just under 1 per cent with three or more employed members.¹⁰ Of those employed and pensioners,

the majority are “unqualified workers” (37 per cent) or “collectors of scrap iron and other materials” (21 per cent).¹¹ A similar majority were in temporary or seasonal, rather than permanent employment, with most engaged in trade, in the construction industry or in agriculture. Given that Roma/Gypsies often lack the papers required for legal employment, much of this participation is in the grey economy, thus compounding their marginalisation.



There has been no systematic study of poverty amongst the Roma/Gypsy community in Croatia, although the cumulative disadvantage noted above is highly likely to have created large numbers of families living in poverty. It has been noted that Roma/Gypsies in Croatia are no different from their Central and Eastern European counterparts: “Roma are both poorer than other population groups and more likely to fall into poverty”.¹² This thesis is borne out by the Ivo Pilar survey, which found that the most often-mentioned problem was the “weak material situation of the family” affecting between 67 per cent and 91 per cent of households.¹³ The survey also showed that 47 per cent of households relied on social support from the state as a major source of income.¹⁴

There are many issues concerning the relationship between Roma/Gypsies and Centres for Social Work in Croatia that are beyond the scope of this report.¹⁵ However, evidence shows that Roma/Gypsies are over-represented as users of social services but underrepresented as recipients of cash support. For example, in Čakovec, around which there is the largest concentration of Roma/Gypsies, the Centre for Social Work has established a special office for Roma/Gypsy issues. A social worker from this office stated, in a conference held in 1997:¹⁶

“We do not give them all financial assistance in cash, 70 per cent of it goes directly to the shops where they can get food and 30 per cent we give them in cash. Of course, Roma are not satisfied with this form of support. However, the regulations allow us to deliver assistance in the way we consider to be most useful for Roma.”

One of the most serious problems that Roma/Gypsies face in Croatia, and the one which has attracted the most media attention in recent years, is that of housing and property rights. Most Roma/Gypsy settlements are on the edges of large towns and, whilst some of these indicate a clear intention to settle in one place, many houses were constructed without building permission. In recent years, both past and present governments have sought to clamp down on such illegal building, and the threat of demolition hangs over many Roma/Gypsy settlements – some houses have already been demolished. Many settlements lack essential infrastructure. According to the Ivo Pilar survey, while over 70 per cent of Roma/Gypsies lived in houses and 11.9 per cent in flats, most of these were extremely small, lacked water and electricity and had no functioning sewerage system.

Such settlements are often the targets of resentment from other communities and from sections of the local authorities. In some cases, government attempts to build sewerage and water connections have been opposed locally. There is now a system by which the government can make available matching funds to local authorities, which will fund infrastructure programmes. This has had positive results in some parts of the country, for example, the establishment of a drinking fountain in Drnje, near Koprivnica, and electrification of two villages in Sisak Municipality. However, in other cases, for example, in Čakovec, the local authority has blocked essential infrastructure programmes, which would raise the standards of Roma/Gypsy settlements, presumably for fear of a backlash from the majority community. Where such

programmes are in place, they represent an important step forward, not least since Roma/Gypsy communities are involved in consultations about priorities.

The 1998 ERRC field report also focuses on police mistreatment of Roma/Gypsies in Croatia, as well as the growing problem of civilian violence against Roma. The latter appears particularly pronounced in eastern Slavonia, where many Roma/Gypsies sought to return after the war, but who were sometimes attacked as “Serbs” by local Croats. In Našice, the ERRC also report that the chair of the municipal council had made racist comments about Roma/Gypsies and sought to restrict their movement.

The legal status of Roma/Gypsies

As a result of the war, the issue of Roma/Gypsies in Croatia has rarely been discussed or systematically addressed, outside specialist arenas or policy forums. In addition, the complexities of minority policies are such that Roma/Gypsies are not treated as a fully constitutive “national minority”, but rather as an “ethnic community” in Croatia. This is partly demonstrated by the fact that Roma/Gypsies have been left out of the preamble to the Constitution. Although this does not mean an abrogation of rights, it does mean that the identification of Roma/Gypsies remains merely symbolic.

With the break-up, and the independence of Croatia in 1991, it became important for Roma/Gypsies in Croatia to obtain Croatian citizenship (*domovnica*). However, the legal, administrative and practical regulation of citizenship was extremely complex and, in effect,

discriminatory against Roma/Gypsies. The June 1991 Law on Citizenship of the Republic of Croatia granted citizenship automatically to those former Yugoslav citizens who also held citizenship of the Republic of Croatia. In fact, this Republic-based citizenship had not previously been widely regarded as important. Without this, citizenship could only be obtained by those who had been registered residents of Croatia for at least ten years. In addition, a statement of “belonging to Croatia” had to be submitted within six months of the enacting of the law, at a local police station. This tended to restrict citizenship to “ethnic Croats”. In May 1992, the law was amended: the ten-year rule was removed but no new regulations more favourable to wider citizenship rights were added. As a result, few Roma/Gypsies obtained citizenship through this route and had to seek it, effectively, as foreigners. Articles 8 and 9 of the law set criteria for this, including proficiency in the Croatian language and Latin script, and “attachment to the laws and customs of Croatia”, further compounding discrimination against Roma/Gypsies.

Although there are no accurate statistics available, after its field visit to Croatia in 1998, the ERRC concluded that probably most Roma/Gypsies in Croatia do not have Croatian citizenship, and that the vast majority of them are stateless.¹⁷ If we accept the estimates above of the numbers of Roma/Gypsies in Croatia, this could amount to as many as 30,000 people. Roma/Gypsies who do have documents are, effectively, foreigners with limited rights to stay in Croatia. This, of course, seriously jeopardises the right of access of Roma/Gypsy children to education since these same documents are required for enrolment.

Minority rights

The Croatian Constitution inherited a model of minorities from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in which there were constitutive peoples (*narodi*) in the Federal Republic as a whole, who might be numerical minorities in specific republics. These had more rights than “other” groups, constitutionally minorities, including Italians and Czechs, whose “nation” was considered to be outside the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Groups such as Roma/Gypsies fall outside both of these categories. With the break-up of Yugoslavia, grave problems emerged as some of the nations previously recognised as a majority became a minority (eg, Serbs in Croatia). Given the huge tensions caused by these changes, the problems faced by smaller minority and ethnic communities were not included as priorities in debate. Indeed, the Croatian Constitution introduced after independence reflected some of the political preferences and shifts of the time. For example, the preamble of the Constitution not only omits Roma/Gypsies as a national minority, but also omits Slovenes and Bosniaks (Muslims). This has led to the formation of an alliance of Bosniaks and Roma/Gypsies to lobby to be included in the preamble.

The status of minorities has been mainly regulated through the following national legal documents:

- the Constitution
- the Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Freedoms and on the Rights of Ethnic and National Communities or Minorities in the Republic of Croatia

- the Law on the Use of Language and Script of National Minorities in the Republic of Croatia
- the Law on Upbringing and Education in the Languages of National Minorities.

There are numerous other laws and legal acts that also have provisions regarding minority and human rights.

Under Articles 14 to 20, the Constitution establishes basic rights and freedoms: the equality of all people and citizens before the law; and equal rights and freedoms regardless of race, skin colour, gender, language, religion, political or other beliefs, national or social background, property, birth, education, social position or other characteristics. As well as equality before the law, the Constitution guarantees the equality of members of all national minorities, with full freedom to express their national belonging, freedom to use their language and script, and cultural autonomy.

In order to promote and protect human rights, the following governmental bodies have been formed at national level:

- Co-ordination for Social Affairs and Human Rights. This discusses cultural, scientific and social issues, health and pension rights, protection and promotion of human rights, and the rights of ethnic and national communities. It resolves complaints and encourages the state administration in solving certain problems. The president is selected from one of the vice-presidents of the government. The members consist of Ministers of Culture; Education and Sport;

Labour and Social Care; Health; Science and Technology; War Veterans; Justice and Local Government; and Finance.

- The National Committee on Human Rights. Its goal is to educate citizens and raise awareness on the principles of equality and freedom of all.
- The Committee on Issues of Equality. The goal of this committee is to co-ordinate and act as an umbrella for all activities connected with the implementation of the documents of the Fourth World Conference on the Rights of Women, held in 1995.
- The National Committee for the Development of a National Plan of Action for Children in the Republic of Croatia. The goal of this committee is to develop a National Plan compatible with the action plan of the World Summit for Children, which took place in 1990.
- The Committee for Children. This is a co-ordinating body consisting of representatives of state authorities, MPs, NGOs, experts and media representatives. Its main goal is to monitor the implementation of the National Programme.
- The Office for National Minorities. The goal of this office is to monitor and protect human rights in Croatia, to formulate policies in relation to minorities and to distribute funds from the state budget to associations of national minorities. It was established in 1991 as The Office for Ethnic and National Communities or Minorities.

There are also specific bodies within the parliamentary structure, which seek to ensure representation of minority interests in policy-making. Within the parliament there is a Committee for Human Rights, and within that committee there is a Subcommittee for National Minorities, which monitors policy implementation and participates in the process of passing laws. It has all the rights and obligations of the working body. Another important parliamentary body is the Council for Minorities, formed in 1997, as required by the Council of Europe, on which each of the 16 minorities has its own representative. The council co-operates with minority MPs and exists as an institution complementary to the MPs. It supervises the policies on the preservation and promotion of minority rights, comments on laws and other acts with provisions for minorities, makes proposals and forms requests to parliament, government and other bodies, and co-operates with governmental bodies and the international community. Perhaps one of the most important of the council's achievements was the recent recommendation that a Roma/Gypsy representative, for the first time, be included in the Parliamentary Subcommittee for National Minorities.

At a general election, members of national minorities have a choice as to whether to vote with the majority of the population for a majority list, or to cast their vote within a section of the parliament reserved for minorities. However, there is no obstacle to mainstream parties including minority candidates within the majority list. The system of representation is complex, and has also



been changed to reduce the number of MPs for minorities to eight. This was designed to reflect the decline in the Serbian population, the result of the exodus during the war. National minorities are grouped according to their proportion in the population, and can vote and be candidates on that particular list. In practice, those elected are likely to be from the larger minorities, but are still meant to represent the interests of smaller minorities and ethnic communities from the same list. Currently, of the eight minority seats, three are held by candidates from the Serb minority, one by Hungarians, one by an Italian, one by Czechs and Slovaks, one by Ruthenians and Ukrainians, and one by Germans and Austrians. At the moment, the Italian minority MP, as the President of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, is also meant to represent the Roma/Gypsy community.

In practice

The right to education of Roma/Gypsy children

There are no accurate figures on current rates of enrolment and achievement of Roma/Gypsies in the school system in Croatia. From our discussions, observations and experiences, we would suggest the following as very approximate figures:

- 50 per cent of Roma/Gypsy children enrol in primary education
- 50 per cent of these pupils finish primary education (25 per cent of all Roma/Gypsy children)
- No more than 10 per cent of these pupils enrol in secondary education (2.5 per cent of the total)
- 50 per cent of these finish secondary education (1.25 per cent of the total)
- 1 per cent or fewer go on to higher education (0.01 per cent of the total).

An illustration of the long-standing nature of the issue can be gleaned from the experience in Međimurje County. The Municipality of Čakovec, with the largest concentration of Roma/Gypsies in Croatia, developed a plan as early as 1972 to co-ordinate activities in favour of improved social and educational support for the Roma/Gypsy population. There are reports that, by 1978, up to three-quarters of Roma/Gypsy children were enrolled in the primary schools. Subsequently, there was a relative neglect of the issue, and there are now figures which suggest that far fewer (around 45 per cent) now register and only 7 per cent actually complete primary education. Different schools now implement their own approaches, and any idea of a co-ordinated plan, based on consultations with the Roma/Gypsy community, has been lost. In addition, there have never been additional resources provided to promote the integration of Roma/Gypsy children into the educational system, for instance, through additional staff. Indeed, the fact that, in recent years, only seven Roma/Gypsies finished secondary school in the entire county, gives further cause for concern.¹⁸

There is little evidence available on the quality of education experienced by Roma/Gypsy children. From our interviews and discussions, there appear to be many causes for concern, perhaps best expressed by the following quote from an interview with a representative of the Association of Roma in the County of Međimurje:

“Children here are discriminated against in school. Parents of non-Roma children are against their children sharing the class with Roma children – they say that they would

rather kill their children than let them sit together with Roma children. They all complain that our children are dirty. They are not dirty because they want to be, but because of the poverty they live in. They have nowhere to wash themselves. Children themselves are not aware that they are being discriminated against. Also, they are being educated according to the shortened programme, similar to the programme for those with learning difficulties, and then, later on, they have problems if they want to enrol in the secondary school. Children are told that this is best for them... We feel powerless.”

Roma/Gypsies and primary school

Primary school education is compulsory between the ages of 7 and 14. Secondary education for ages 14 to 18 is not compulsory. According to UNICEF's TransMONEE Index, Croatia has a gross enrolment rate in secondary education of 19.0 per cent. Access of Roma/Gypsy children to the educational system of Croatia in practice remains quite limited, mainly because most do not have the documents needed for enrolment. Currently, school authorities require a birth certificate, a police residence permit and proof of citizenship (*domovnica*). There are numerous examples of Roma/Gypsy children and their parents finding it very difficult to register and being deterred by what can be quite complex bureaucratic procedures. This may change, since there appears to be a strand in the government, particularly in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Sport, supporting a more permissive and relaxed approach towards Roma/Gypsies in terms of citizenship and personal documentation.¹⁹

Table 5.2 Educational levels of households

Family members with...	Kozari Bok	Capraške Poljane	Kotoriba	Bjelovar	Vodnjan	Total
No schooling	45.8%	83.9%	61.5%	61.9%	56.5%	62.7%
Primary incomplete	62.5%	38.7%	84.6%	52.4%	78.3%	61.9%
Completed primary	20.8%	32.3%	30.8%	52.4%	78.3%	42.1%
Secondary education	20.8%	3.2%	7.7%	19.0%	17.4%	13.5%
Higher education	8.3%	0	0	4.8%	0	2.4%

Source: Štambuk, "Roma in Croatia in the Nineties", *Journal for General Social Issues (Društvena istraživanja)*, 2000, 9: 2-3; Table 11.

However, given that much is left to local discretion, practice will continue to be problematic even if there is a new emphasis on inclusion at the centre of power.

As with many other issues noted in this report, there have been no systematic studies of school enrolment of Roma/Gypsies throughout Croatia. It is possible to refer to only small-scale local studies. In the Ivo Pilar survey, 47 per cent of families had no member enrolled in primary education (ranging from 27 per cent in Kotoriba to 71 per cent in Capraške Poljane) and 95 per cent had no one in secondary education.²⁰ These rates are particularly worrying given that most families surveyed had school-age children. It suggests a national picture of a massive drop-out among Roma/Gypsy children before the stage of secondary education and of limited, although very geographically varied, enrolment in primary education.

A more nuanced picture of the situation can be gleaned from interviews carried out by a group of students at the School of Social Work in Zagreb

with 40 Roma/Gypsy children: 30 boys and 10 girls, all enrolled in primary education in one school in Kutina.²¹ The study included a control group of non-Roma. In the study, 43 per cent of Roma/Gypsy pupils stated that they are absent from school several times a month but, unlike the control group, none skip classes. This was confirmed by the school pedagogue who "expressly stated that the Romani children do not 'skip' classes; they either come and stay the whole day, or simply do not show up at all".²² Most Roma/Gypsy children were absent from school as a result of illness, although a significant minority (40 per cent) stated that their absence was a result of other obligations, such as helping at home or working at the market.

In addition, none of the girls and only a quarter of the boys had brothers or sisters enrolled in school, indicating that school enrolment varied within the same family. Also, far fewer of the girls (20 per cent as opposed to 57 per cent of the boys) could speak Croatian well before going to school. The vast majority of the Roma/Gypsy children have to walk a long way to school (taking

about an hour), and most do not intend to continue beyond primary education (63 per cent of Roma/Gypsy children compared to none of the non-Roma/Gypsy children). The students conclude that Roma/Gypsy children's relative failure in education is a product of poor socio-economic conditions, distance from school and inappropriate curriculum in schools.

The Ivo Pilar survey provides a snapshot of the educational levels of Roma/Gypsy families in five settlements, concluding that a majority of Roma/Gypsy children remain outside the primary education system. The figures are complex to interpret, however, given their reliance on heads of households as respondents.

Roma/Gypsies and segregated education

The problems which schools face in adjusting to the presence of Roma/Gypsy children are illustrated by the comments of a school pedagogue from Drnje in Koprivnica-Križevci County, where a quarter of the pupils in two annexes of the school are Roma/Gypsies:²³

“This year, 14 Romani and 11 other children were enrolled in the 1st grade (two of them are repeating the grade and one of them is following the adjusted programme). There are no parallel classes and there are no legal possibilities of opening any (an insufficient number of children). The problems are large. The enrolled children range from 7 to 11 years of age and none of them have a good enough command of the Croatian language to follow the classes normally. The conditions at home are not conducive to learning – the majority of

their parents are illiterate. The adjustment to the school and the process of socialisation are very slow. They received textbooks free of charge because many of them possess social-welfare cards, but they do not have any other material needed. The textbooks and notebooks remain at school because if they take them home, they get ruined in a short period of time. We cannot assist the teacher legally or financially... Children are, at the moment, regularly attending school and their biggest motivation is a free hot meal. Another problem is tardiness – they have no clocks at home, so they come whenever they like... The best solution would be to separate the first grade into two classes, although this is legally impossible. The hygienic and work habits, as well as the knowledge level of these two groups cannot be compared and it is impossible to work with one group at the expense of the other. The new law on primary education should introduce the provision that would make this possible even in the cases when the number of pupils is insufficient for two classes.”

Whilst clearly seeking to address the wider context, the solution proposed of separate classes for Roma/Gypsy children is controversial and open to many objections, as it would compound rather than solve the problems. Recently, there have been 13 cases from Medimurje and Varaždin counties in which separate classes have been formed exclusively for Roma/Gypsy children. The issue has come to public attention because of the interest of the Office of the Ombudsperson of Croatia in the case.²⁴ The violation of the

human rights of Roma/Gypsy children is highlighted by some cases. In one school in Međimurje County, there are separate entrances for Roma/Gypsy children and, in another, Roma/Gypsy children who could not afford school meals were allowed into the dining room afterwards to eat the leftovers of other children. Following an investigation, the Ombudsperson's office asked for a report from the Ministry of Education and Sport. However, the office considered the report to be insufficient, whereupon it made the cases public. Beyond a brief public debate, however, nothing changed as a result of this and, to our knowledge, both situations remain.

As early as 1994, Neven Hrvatić, of the Department of Pedagogy of the University of Zagreb, summarised the problems for Roma/Gypsies "lost within the educational system", and sought a holistic approach based on both integrative and specific measures.²⁵ He outlined the need for:

- greater inclusion of Roma/Gypsy children in kindergartens, both inside and outside Roma/Gypsy settlements, preparing Roma/Gypsy children for enrolment in primary education
- complete inclusion of Roma/Gypsy children in primary schools as the key area for Roma/Gypsy education, to be accompanied by social measures encouraging parents to have closer links with schools – where Roma/Gypsy children comprise 50 per cent or more of the school population, there should be teaching in Croatian and in Romani languages, with the possibility of specific teaching on Romani language and culture

- a commitment to increased Roma/Gypsy participation at the secondary-school level, through granting of scholarships to Roma/Gypsy children – this would then allow for the possibility of introducing specialist topics into the curricula
- at university level, introduction of Romani language into teacher training, and the establishment of an Institute for Romology.
- appointment of an adviser for Romani education in the Ministry of Education
- specific extra-scholastic institutional provision, such as a summer school for Roma/Gypsies.

Looked at in the light of Hrvatić's framework, it is much easier to concur with the ERRC's conclusion that "the education of Romani children is a grave problem", with little or no progress made in terms of the first five of his objectives.²⁶ In a sense, there has been little reform of mainstream educational provision, other than a reinforcement of separate provision based on the notion that Romani pupils are the problem. An emphasis has instead been placed on supporting initiatives from NGOs. Whether this has, itself, further marginalised and discriminated against Roma/Gypsy children, is an open question, discussed below when we look at the work of NGOs.

Language provision

The issue of language as a barrier to education is referred to in Croatia's 1994 report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child:²⁷

“The schooling of the Romani children poses a number of specific problems, ranging from the lack of Romani teachers to the fact that the Romani children have extreme difficulties in following the school courses in the Croatian language.”

However, since this report, little has been done to tackle this issue. The new government, however, did bring in a series of laws on minority rights in May 2000, which appear to offer a more permissive framework for a progressive approach. According to the new Law on Education in the Languages and Script of National Minorities, national minorities have the right to receive education in their first language in pre-school institutions, primary and secondary schools.²⁸ This right can be implemented through special language schools or separate classes for national-minority pupils. The curriculum in minority languages and script can cover both the general curriculum for all pupils, and specific, relevant teaching in the mother tongue itself, literature, history, geography and cultural heritage of the national minority. Curricula should be developed by the Ministry of Education and Sport on the basis of consultations with associations representing minority communities.

The law goes on to state that any such educational programme should be taught by teachers who have perfect command of the minority language,

whether or not drawn from the minority community itself. As a framework for reform, the law is excellent. However, real problems remain in translating this law into practice for Roma/Gypsy children, not least in terms of ongoing debates about the nature and status of Romani languages, and the need for systematic institutional reform and recruitment of teachers and counsellors fluent in these languages.

Government initiatives

Until relatively recently, there has been little government and state concern about the plight of Roma/Gypsies in Croatia, beyond a stereotypical perception of Roma/Gypsies as an intractable social problem. The many factors behind this neglect include more pressing problems as a result of war and a refugee crisis, an unwillingness to address minority rights issues, and the lack of Roma/Gypsy political strength. Since 1997, as war problems have eased somewhat and, perhaps more importantly, as Croatia signs up to membership of a number of international bodies, including the Council of Europe, there has been more evidence of strategic thinking and planning. In 1997, members of national minorities elected representatives into the Council of National Minorities, which established a permanent dialogue between national minorities and government on subjects including its administration.

In 1998, as part of this thinking, the government financed a programme “...[aimed] at supporting the Roma/Gypsy population which, because of its long-term marginalisation, remains in a neglected position”.²⁹ Funds were provided for two seminars, one implemented by the Ministry of

Education and Sport for Roma/Gypsy assistants in schools; and the other by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for Roma/Gypsy mediators in social work and social care.

Subsequently, in 1998, a Committee for the Inclusion of the Roma Population in the Educational System of the Republic of Croatia was established, with representatives from the Ministries of Education and Sport; Labour and Social Affairs; Reconstruction and Public Works and Internal Affairs; as well as the Office for National Minorities, and Roma/Gypsy associations. According to a key driving force behind this initiative, a representative from the Ministry for Public Works, this committee was a deliberate attempt to shift the focus away from only supporting Roma/Gypsy cultural initiatives and, also, to address access to education in a wider context. Hence, whilst one of the three main aspects of the Committee's work is to support Roma/Gypsy children to enter and continue in mainstream education, this is linked to an attempt to improve standards of living in Roma/Gypsy communities and to improve relationships between Roma/Gypsy communities and social support services.³⁰

An attempt is also being made to create a National Developmental Programme for Roma/Gypsies in Croatia (*Nacionalni razvojni program za rome u RH*), involving the same groups. Whilst only at the conceptual stage so far, the approach adopted appears to be one which seeks to look at the situation of Roma/Gypsies in a holistic manner. It recognises that one problem cannot be solved in isolation from other issues, and that

there is a need for simultaneous and co-ordinated action from all relevant agents in society. The programme outline shows that there will first be a consideration of the historical aspects, the general position of Roma/Gypsies in Croatia, their heritage. Then, based on an assessment of the existing infrastructure of the major Roma/Gypsy settlements, as well as the status of Roma/Gypsies in regard to health, social care and education, there will be a clear attempt to prescribe concerted action. The aim is to discuss the role of all levels of government, state, local authority and local communities. Whilst not itself a financing mechanism, the programme seeks to steer existing sources of finance, as well as to attract international donors to fund publications (newsletters, bulletins and a first textbook for Roma/Gypsies), projects of Roma/Gypsy associations and Roma/Gypsy cultural centres. Whilst this is clearly a step forward, there is a noticeable lack of detail in terms of how much finance it plans to generate, sources of finance, what exactly it plans to spend money on and over what period.

The concept represents a clear statement both of the developmental potential of Roma/Gypsies and a clear signal of the willingness on the part of the new government to work with Roma/Gypsies and improve their situation. The authors of the concept document are aware of the limiting factors that exist in terms of basic misunderstandings between the majority population and the Roma/Gypsy population. The first misunderstanding is general, and follows from the perception of the majority population that Roma/Gypsies are deeply attached to

their way of life, and changes that bring their lifestyles closer to those of the majority society can never happen successfully. For their part, Roma/Gypsies are anxious about what ‘integration’ entails, because of the extent of misunderstanding and lack of awareness. The second misunderstanding arises from the perception that Roma/Gypsies until now have had a “separate destiny”, based on their oral tradition and their fear of an imposed majority culture.³¹ The authors of the concept document hope to present it to the government and have it approved as a national strategy. However, given that its completion has, already, been delayed by some six months, the extent to which the government sees this as a high priority is open to question.

The majority of Roma/Gypsy associations offered support for the document, welcoming its holistic approach and seeing it as an opportunity to contribute to development through their own projects. It is also hoped that the government will, through the programme, be able to finance projects that already exist, especially those in the area of culture and education.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) of the Council of Europe, in its report on Croatia in November 1999 based on field visits in 1998, stated with regard to the “Roma/Gypsy community” that:³²

“Progress has been made in the field of education... through the publication of studies on the subject of Romani education, initiatives related to the organisation and

financing of Roma children, (and) training of Roma teachers...”

The judgement appears overly optimistic and, perhaps, was influenced by a pilot programme, in 1998, by the Ministry of Education and Sport, funded by the Office for National Minorities. The programme consisted of a series of seminars for Roma/Gypsies wishing to become classroom assistants. The basic idea was to train some of the more highly educated and motivated Roma/Gypsies, mainly those who had begun, and preferably completed, secondary education, to act as aids to non-Roma/Gypsy teachers in classrooms where Roma/Gypsy children were present. These aids would provide additional help to children with homework, Croatian and Romani languages and culture. It was planned that their role would also be to raise awareness in the Roma/Gypsy community about the need for education.

The seminar was organised two years ago for 12 Roma/Gypsy participants from different parts of Croatia, including one of the authors of this report. However, given that the law on education does not support such provisions, there are no legal grounds for the introduction of assistants in the classrooms, so those who attended could not do what they were trained for in any of the state institutions. As a result, only two of four planned seminars were actually held. Even so, the programme can be considered to be partially successful because it had an unintended outcome: a number of the participants went on to form NGOs, some of which have initiated programmes on education.

The optimism in the ECRI report might also have derived from a document entitled *A Programme of Integration of Romani Children in the Educational and School System of the Republic of Croatia*, also written in 1998. The programme outline promises:

- to elaborate and devise experimental programmes for kindergartens for Romani children within state-run kindergartens, or through the formation of special groups if necessary
- experimental supplementary programmes for the education of Romani children in primary schools
- a supplementary programme for training of teachers
- tolerance education of other school children
- a mentorship programme, through which school personnel would be more engaged in monitoring and supporting Roma/Gypsy children to attend school and would liaise with centres for social work and NGOs.

More than two years on, there has been no systematic implementation of this programme, and only a piecemeal approach has been adopted. Indeed, the provisions for education have been less developed than those on infrastructure, for example. With the change of government, a new approach is being developed.

NGO practice in the area

In recent years, the most innovative approaches to the education of Roma/Gypsies in Croatia have come from local NGOs, most of which have been established since 1991. All of the initiatives noted below have sought to promote new forms

of educational provision for Roma/Gypsy children as a supplement and corrective to the mainstream educational system. There have been many other initiatives which we do not have space to mention. Notwithstanding the energy and creativity of the NGOs, these initiatives have sometimes been beset by various kinds of politics, both internally and in relation to governmental institutions, and few have been able to consolidate their work in terms of influence over mainstream provision.

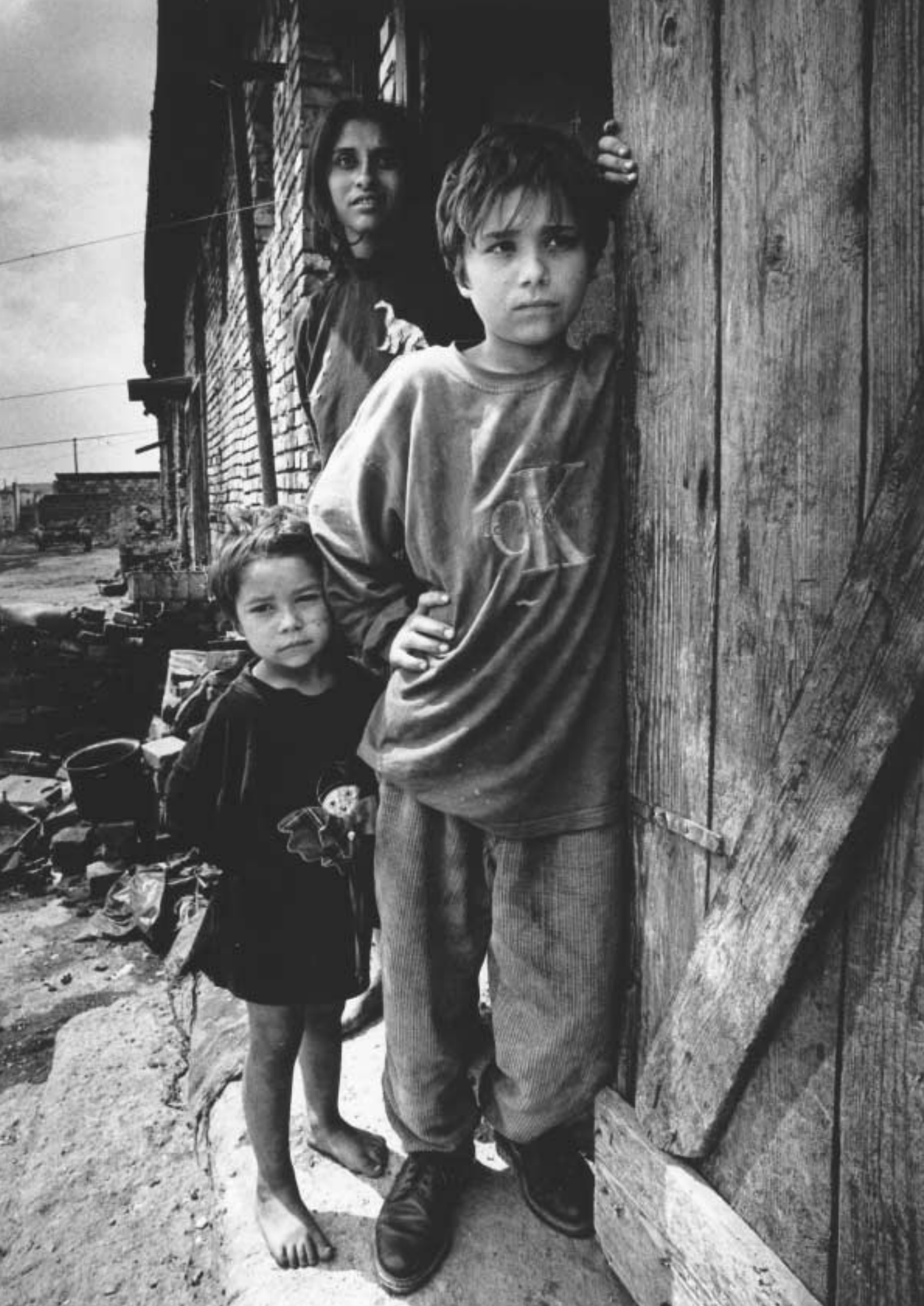
One of the earliest and most important initiatives was the summer school for Roma/Gypsy Children in Croatia, which was first organised in 1994 by the Union of the Associations of Roma in Croatia (*Savez Udruženja Roma Hrvatske*, SURH). The school was supported by the Committee for Pastoral Care of Roma of the Croatian Archbishops' Conference and financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The idea of the programme was to act as a supplementary curriculum for Roma/Gypsy children from all over Croatia who are enrolled in schools. The programme addressed two extremely important issues simultaneously: the provision of a relatively intensive programme on the Romani language, culture, history and art; and the introduction of Roma/Gypsies as teachers. The core objectives of the summer school were: to raise awareness about Roma/Gypsy national identity; to promote use of *Romani Chib* and other Romani dialects spoken in Croatia; and to explore Roma/Gypsy history and tradition.³³ The initiative gained the support of some within the formal educational system and gathered a group of experts from the Department of Pedagogy in the University of Zagreb, who supported the concept and developed the content.

It also used the event as an opportunity to develop a systematic approach to the education of Roma/Gypsy children in the mainstream educational system, as well as additional programmes aimed at specific education on Roma/Gypsy national identity and culture.

A similar initiative, also called the Roma Summer School, was started in 1996 and was held in 1997 and 1998, organised by the Union of Roma of Croatia (*Zajednica Roma Hrvatske*). In its first year, the school attracted some 35 attendees aged 7-15 years old. The programme introduced Roma/Gypsy history, literature, the basics of *Romani Chib*, music, art and health education. Between 1995 and 1997, summer programmes were also organised by the Croatian Archbishops' Conference for Roma/Gypsy and non-Roma/Gypsy children to meet together and learn about Roma/Gypsy culture. Roma/Gypsy children from Međimurje County, as well as from the towns of Nova Gradiška, Bjelovar, Karlovac and Zagreb attended.

In 1996, SURH also developed a mentorship programme which, through seminars, aimed to mobilise and educate community members to work with parents and children to raise awareness on the importance of schooling. Within this programme, the "A Hundred for A Hundred" initiative was planned. The idea was that for each of the one hundred mentors, there would be at least one hundred children who would be encouraged to go to school. To our knowledge, the programme was never implemented, for various reasons, including financial ones.

The first preschool initiative for Roma/Gypsies was organised in the Kozari Put settlement on the edge of Zagreb in 1996, by the Association of Roma of Zagreb and Zagreb County. Entirely conceptualised and implemented by Roma/Gypsies, the programme sought to prepare Roma/Gypsy children to enter the mainstream educational system. In the house of a leading community member and his family, which functioned as a kind of community centre, the programme also introduced literacy classes for those children who had not attended school and, for whatever reason, were unlikely to be enrolled. The initiative also expanded to include art and cultural programmes, courses for parents, and literacy and computing classes for adults. Some of those programmes were carried out in co-operation with other NGOs, mostly non-Roma/Gypsy, although this co-operation tended to be temporary rather than permanent. The preschool centre and related activities have attracted considerable media and public attention, and are currently funded by Zagreb Municipality. Some 40-50 children attend classes led by Roma/Gypsy educators, some of whom had training in pedagogy. However, staffing of the centre seems to be a permanent problem, given the shortage of Roma/Gypsy educators with appropriate training/education. There have been attempts to compensate for that shortage through co-operation with non-Roma/Gypsy teachers. The programme itself raised quite significant debates within the Roma/Gypsy community, whilst it was widely accepted and praised by the non-Roma/Gypsy community. Critics of the initiative contend that it contributes to the further ghettoisation of Roma/Gypsies since they are not being included in the educational opportunities



offered to the wider community. They say that there has been little attention paid to the integration of the pupils into the mainstream system, an original goal of the project.

One example of a non-Roma/Gypsy NGO working on preschool education is Children First (*Djeca prva*) which, in 1997, implemented the programme “Psycho-Social Support with Educational Elements for Preschool Children and their Mothers”, also in the Kozari Bok/Kozari Put communities. The programme sought to address issues of socialisation of children, non-violent communication and co-operation, as well as tolerance towards differences amongst people. Some 120 children, of whom 80 were Roma/Gypsies, were included in the programme.

According to the Office for National Minorities, there are some 17 Roma/Gypsy associations in Croatia. To our knowledge, many of them place the education of Roma/Gypsy children as one of their priorities and most have developed, at least in part, activities which seek to contribute to a resolution of education-related problems. The Roma Women’s organisation Better Future (*Bolja budućnost*) has a programme of awareness-raising about the need for children to attend school, and its activists sometimes play the role of mediators between the Roma/Gypsy community and school authorities.

There has been little evidence of more co-ordinated efforts or attempts to lobby jointly the relevant ministries and government authorities. This disunity, or lack of co-ordinated action, might be one of the reasons that pressure has recently been put on Roma/Gypsy NGOs

to work more closely together. Some of the funding currently earmarked for Roma/Gypsy associations has been made conditional on Roma/Gypsy associations forming an umbrella organisation; a similar condition does not exist for human rights, women’s rights, and child rights organisations.

Funding for minority associations comes mainly from the Office for National Minorities rather than through the annual governmental competition organised by the Office for Co-operation with NGOs (*Ured za udruge*), which has a much larger funding pool. In 2000, the Office for Co-operation with NGOs gave grants totalling some HRK20.5m (about £GB1.7 m).

The approach of the Office for National Minorities is not without its critics. In its report, it states: “The schooling of the children of the Roma/Gypsy minority is specific and encounters problems uncharacteristic of other national minorities. For the majority of Roma/Gypsy children the basic problem is not an inability to learn about their language and culture, it is rather not attending mandatory education. This part of the Roma/Gypsy population is illiterate, which means that their chances for inclusion into civilised life are smaller.” In 1998, the government earmarked HRK556,728 (about £GB46,000), routed through the Office for the programme of inclusion of Roma/Gypsy children into the educational and school system. The money was spent on the seminars already mentioned, two organised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and two by the Ministry of Education and Sport. A drinking-water system has also been financed in one of the Roma/Gypsy settlements

near Čakovec. A much smaller amount was given for the funding of Roma/Gypsy magazines, although, as the ERRC report notes, this was given on the condition that the Office appointed the editors of the magazines.³⁴

As mentioned above, currently the Office appears to want to link financial support to the setting up of an umbrella organisation of Roma/Gypsy NGOs and associations, through which all the funding can be channelled. The debate about the formation of an umbrella organisation is not new and in recent years has raised a lot of debate amongst Roma/Gypsy associations and between them and governmental authorities. Although some associations support the proposal (including the strongest, albeit only on paper) most Roma/Gypsy associations consider that forming such an organisation would be very difficult, taking into account all the differences that exist. This impasse is currently preventing any systematic state funding being administered to Roma/Gypsy NGOs.

Voices of Roma/Gypsy children

Children from two counties, Istria in the north-west, and from a settlement in the County of Zagreb, participated in group discussions, giving their own input for the report. In total, some 40 children and young people provided their views on many aspects of the report. In addition, a number of adults were also consulted, including leaders of the associations of Roma/Gypsies in two other counties: Primorsko Goranska County and the County of Međimurje. The four counties

together were chosen because they account for a significant proportion of the entire Roma/Gypsy population in Croatia.

Međimurje County

The largest group of Roma/Gypsies in Croatia live in Međimurje County, mainly on the edge of ten towns and villages where spatial segregation is often accompanied by a different nickname for the “Roma part of the town”. The village of Kotoriba is somewhat typical:³⁵

“In the beginning Roma used to live in the village itself, but since their presence was said to impede the development of the village, ie, its expansion, they were given a location some 200 metres away from the village. It is disconnected from Kotoriba village by a canal, over which the Roma built an improvised bridge... In order to compensate for resettlement, the village gave to the Roma some building materials... The settlement now needs to expand because of the growing number of inhabitants.”

All the children we had contact with were quite open and frank about their experiences in education and in schools. They often made efforts to point out what they felt was good about school, as well as difficulties, especially with respect to language. Many children found school difficult because they could not understand fully what was going on in the classroom. In addition, Roma/Gypsy children often pointed out that other, non-Roma/Gypsy children did not accept them. When asked if they thought would it be useful to have some Romani language spoken in

school, the children seemed surprised at such an idea. It was as if it was commonly accepted that Croatian is the sole scholastic language and that they had never considered the possibility that a Romani language could be taught.

There was a widespread recognition that, although school can be somewhat boring, it was worth attending since it might be useful for coping with the environment in the future. Older children were more forthcoming on the issue of enrolment and the pressures they faced. We were told that sometimes it might be necessary for pressure to be put on parents to enrol children. There was a definite sense from those children we spoke with who were not attending school that they were missing out. Most of them stated that they did not have the documentation required for enrolment and that the school did not want to receive them without this. Many said that they wanted to be like other children, and it was their great wish to learn to read and write.

Istria

The County of Istria has, we estimate, some 1,000 Roma/Gypsy inhabitants, with the majority of the population working in trade, benefiting from the area being close to Italy and, in addition, from seasonal summer work related to the tourist industry. One of the biggest problems faced by Roma/Gypsies in Istria is the issue of citizenship. Roma/Gypsies in Istria are nevertheless relatively well organised, willing and able to put pressure on state and local bodies to respond more positively to their needs.

Preschool children

We spoke with three preschool children, all of whom were attending a daycare programme in a state-run kindergarten. They liked their teachers, were having fun with other children, and felt that they were not treated any differently from other children.

Primary-school children

Girl, nine years old

“Kindergarten is better than school. There were no tests and we could play. My parents enrolled me into school. When I finish the school, I will be a kindergarten teacher.”

Boy, ten years old

“My other brothers and sisters are not enrolled in school. School is useful because it develops our brain, we do not fight, we learn to calculate and not to use drugs. I think there should be some Roma language in the school. The teacher treats me differently from other children and this is why I have to learn more. I am not good in maths and do not want to continue schooling.”

Girl, ten years old

“School can be useful in the future, we can teach our own children once we have them. When I started school, the teachers accepted me, but other children did not. They were calling me Gypsy.”

Girl, 12 years old

“When I started school, I did not know the Croatian language. Children were making fun of me. There should be some classes in Roma language in school.”

Girl, 12 years old

“School is good for the future, we can achieve something. My sister finished school. She is a tailor.”

Kozari Bok/Putevi

Within the County of Zagreb, Kozari Bok and Kozari Putevi are two interlinked settlements on the edge of the city, a tram ride away from the city centre, in the vicinity of a chemical industrial zone. Most of the estimated 11,000 population are poor, and most of these are of minority origin: Bosniak/Muslims, Roma/Gypsies and a smaller Serbian community. The settlement expanded in the 1960s and 1970s as Zagreb required cheap labour. It still lacks essential infrastructure, with many buildings being built without planning permission. Already living within a settlement on the margins of the capital, Roma/Gypsies live within a kind of sub-ghetto in Kozari Bok/Putevi itself. Numbering some 700 in total, most members of the Roma/Gypsy community are unemployed, with a few seasonal workers. Few Roma/Gypsies attend the primary school, which has not particularly encouraged additional Roma/Gypsy enrolment, since it is already oversubscribed and operates a three-shift system with oversized classes. In recent years, some Roma/Gypsy families in the community have seized the initiative, organising a pioneering preschool programme, with activists supporting parents, especially mothers, to pursue enrolment through obtaining documents and lobbying the school authorities.

We talked with 12 children, aged from 5 to 14:

Girl, nine years old, not enrolled in school

“I do not want to be anything. I know how to make bread and things like that. I think this is enough. I want to be in the house, to clean and to do the washing.”

Boy, 12 years old

“I do not like when I am punished and have to go into the corner. But I quite like maths, because this is where I am the best. I would like to be a car mechanic.”

Girl, 12 years old

“I am not sure why I am not going to school. It does not matter now.”

Girl, ten years old

“My parents enrolled me in school. I do not like it very much because I do not understand Croatian very well and they do not understand me very well. I am not sure that school can be useful for me. Other children sometimes are not friendly.”

Girl, nine years old

“I can understand Croatian well. I know what they say to me, but I do not know how to answer back so they would understand me, my words are not clear enough. This is very difficult for me because they think I know nothing. That is not true. It is easier for me to draw then. But I would like to be a policewoman and to be that I have to go to school.”

Conclusion

Overall, the picture we have presented in this report is one of cumulative disadvantage and discrimination facing Roma/Gypsy children in Croatia in regard to their relationships with various institutional structures and, in particular, with regard to the educational system. Thus there is a considerable gap between the *de jure* situation regarding minority rights in Croatia and the *de facto* realities on the ground. Whilst there has been a long-standing concern within government with the policy questions of Roma/Gypsies and education, this has been confused and confusing, and there are real problems in terms of co-ordination, and the development of clear and realisable plans of action. Nevertheless, if the issue were to receive greater attention, related to models of good practice both in Croatia and outside, there would seem to be the possibility of real progress being made. In the following section, we make a series of tentative suggestions and recommendations, both in terms of education and more widely, which could be the focus for renewed debate and action.

Recommendations

Given that the Republic of Croatia has ratified, or has deemed to have ratified those treaties already entered into by former Yugoslavia, all relevant international conventions and charters for the protection of human and minority rights, including:

- the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989
- the International Convention on Combating all Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965
- the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education, 1960
- the European Convention on Human Rights Protection and Basic Freedom with 1997 Protocols I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, and XI
- the European Convention on Regional and Minority Languages, 1997
- the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, 1997

and that after the recognition of Croatia as an independent state, the following international conventions were ratified:

- the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ratified 1992)
- the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ratified 1992)
- the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ratified 1995)
- the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ratified 1995)

- the International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ratified 1992)
 - the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (ratified 1992)
 - the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (ratified 1992)
 - the Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified 1992)
 - the Convention on the Status of Refugees, 1951 (ratified 1992)
 - the Optional Protocol, Protection Non-European Refugees, 1967 (ratified 1992)
 - the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948 (ratified 1992)
 - the Geneva Conventions, 1949 (ratified 1992)
 - the Additional Protocol, on Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, 1997 (ratified 1992)
 - the Additional Protocol, on Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts, 1977 (ratified 1992)
 - the Forced Labour Convention (ratified 1991)
 - the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1991
 - the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1991
 - the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1991
 - the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1997
 - the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1991
 - the Minimum Age Convention, 1991
- (all as of July 2000)

Save the Children recommends that:

The Parliament and Government of the Republic of Croatia

- Establish citizenship rights for Roma/Gypsies in Croatia on the basis of long-standing residence, and use a proactive policy of informing Roma/Gypsies of their rights and encouraging Roma/Gypsies to become citizens of Croatia.
- Ensure that all Roma/Gypsies are enrolled in the Croatian educational system regardless of their residence or citizenship, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This will need a more positive and proactive approach in line with best practice throughout the world on the education of stateless children.
- Ensure that in addition to the 2001 census, a systematic study of the status of Roma/Gypsies in Croatia, including their numbers, regional patterns and social status, is carried out. Such a study could then be used in planning for challenging disadvantage over the next decade. Data must be disaggregated on the basis of ethnicity, age and gender, with particular attention paid to ensuring that data on ethnicity are not misused and are based on self-identification.
- Ensure that Roma/Gypsy children have access to preschool facilities in areas of Roma/Gypsy settlements. This will involve supporting existing state kindergartens in employing Roma/Gypsy teachers and assistants, helping to set up classes in the Romani language and funding private and

NGO initiatives specifically addressing access of Roma/Gypsies to preschool.

- Ensure that Roma/Gypsy children in primary school are integrated into the normal curriculum, with additional classes in the Croatian language where appropriate. Wherever Roma/Gypsy children are present in significant numbers in schools, there should be some teaching in Romani languages for all children in the school, and a part of the curriculum should be devoted to Roma/Gypsy history and culture. Schools should make particular efforts to involve the parents of Roma/Gypsy children in schools and to employ liaison workers, mentors and teaching assistants, preferably Roma/Gypsies or those fluent in Romani languages, to facilitate links between home, the community and the school. Special attention should be paid to Roma/Gypsy children in their final year of primary education, to promote access to secondary education. The practice of segregation of Roma/Gypsy children in schools should be stopped. Campaigns should also focus on the need to educate non-Roma/Gypsy children and their parents on Roma/Gypsy issues and rights.
- Provide scholarships for Roma/Gypsy children to attend and complete secondary education and additional scholarships for those who go on to higher education.
- Implement a clear policy of recruitment of Roma/Gypsies into teacher training, including the establishment of new access programmes for those who do not have the required formal qualifications. Teacher training should include

much more attention to cultural awareness and minority-rights issues. This should be based on real, not tokenistic, involvement of Roma/Gypsy communities and organisations in all aspects of such programmes.

- Complete the National Development Programme for Roma/Gypsies as soon as possible, and provide it with adequate funds over a five-year period to implement the action plans.
- Appoint an adviser for Roma/Gypsy education, from the Roma/Gypsy community, within the Ministry of Education. There should also be such advisers at the county and municipal levels in areas of Roma/Gypsy settlement. Roma/Gypsies need to be represented on all governmental and parliamentary committees dealing with minority issues.
- Allocate resources from central government for NGO initiatives on Roma/Gypsy education, based on best practice. These should be channelled through the competition organised by the governmental Office for Co-operation with NGOs, allowing for funding of a wide range of diverse initiatives.
- Ensure that all initiatives for Roma/Gypsies are regularly and systematically evaluated to identify good practice and ensure that lessons learned are integrated into national policy and practice. This evaluation should involve representatives of the Roma/Gypsy community in leading roles.

The international organisations, including the UN Commission on Human Rights, the

Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education and the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, and the European Union:

- Closely monitor the international obligations undertaken by the Croatian government in respect of the right to education, paying particular attention to the right to education of Roma/Gypsy children.

Acknowledgements

The report is based on a compilation of the activist experiences of the authors; many policy papers and research documents; and interviews with policy-makers, Roma/Gypsy representatives, and Roma/Gypsy children and young people. The authors, Jasmina Papa and Ramiza Mehmedi wish to thank all those who gave up time for discussions with them.

Croatia: Notes on the text

1 Per capita GDP is now approximately \$US4,000, comparing favourably with most other post-Yugoslav countries (that in FRY is approximately \$US1,400; in Macedonia \$US1,200; in Bosnia Herzegovina \$US1,260 and in Slovenia \$US9,000).

2 Institute of Statistics – Population Census 1991.

3 Hrvatić and Ivančić, “The Historical and Social Characteristics of Roma in Croatia”, *Journal for General Social Issues (Društvena istraživanja)*, 2000, 9:2-3, Table 1a.

4 There are 553 municipalities in Croatia, some of which have the status of towns or cities. Zagreb is a special case, and is itself a county.

5 Dominic, “Roma: People and/or Social Problem?” Undergraduate dissertation, University of Zagreb, School of Social Work, 1997.

6 Hrvatić and Ivančić (See note 3).

7 Bogdan, “Romany National Community in the Republic of Croatia”, in *Glas Roma: Education and Upbringing of Romani Children in Croatia*, 1994; ERRC, *Field Report: the ERRC in Croatia*, 1998.

8 Štambuk, “Roma in Croatia in the Nineties”, *Journal for General Social Issues (Društvena istraživanja)*, 2000, 9:2-3.

9 Boyashi are one of the groups of Romanian-speaking Gypsies (often with a non-Rom consciousness) that are found throughout Europe. They are also referred to in other contexts as Karavlahs (in BiH, for example) and Rudara/Rudari (in Bulgaria, for example).

10 Štambuk (see note 8), Table 6.

11 Štambuk (see note 8), Table 19.

12 Ringold, *Roma and the Transition in Central and Eastern Europe*, World Bank 2000, p. 10.

13 Štambuk (see note 8), Table 26.

14 Štambuk (see note 8), Table 27. Social assistance is currently 350 Croatian Kuna (HRK) monthly (approximately £GB29), and is claimed by only some 5 per cent of the total population.

15 Centres for Social Work have existed since the early 1970s. They are quasi-governmental institutions staffed by a multidisciplinary team, and responsible for a wide range of legal advice and preventive services for vulnerable families. They continue to have an income support role and a degree of discretion regarding financial and in-kind assistance.

16 Balent, “The experience of the Centre for Social Work in Čakovec”, *Roma in Croatia Today (Romi u Hrvatskoj danas)*, Zagreb, Group for the Direct Protection of Human Rights, 1998, p 90.

17 ERRC, *Field Report: the ERRC in Croatia*, 1998.

18 Dominić, “Roma: People and/or Social Problem?” Undergraduate dissertation, University of Zagreb, School of Social Work, 1997.

19 Interview, November 2000; Butković 2000,

20 Štambuk (see note 8), Table 11.

21 Pintarić *et al.*, “Socio-Economic Influence on the Success (or Failure) of Roma Children in School”, in *Glas Roma: Education and Upbringing of Romani Children in Croatia*, 1994.

22 Pintarić *et al.* (see note 21), p 89.

23 Pleše, “Education of Roma in the Drnje Primary School”, in *Glas Roma: Education and Upbringing of Romani Children in Croatia*, 1994.

24 Viduković-Mukić, Interview, November 2000.

25 Hrvatić, “Towards a Conceptualisation of a Croatian Educational Model for Roma Children”, in *Glas Roma: Education and Upbringing of Romani Children in Croatia*, 1994.

26 ERRC, *Field Report: the ERRC in Croatia*, 1998.

27 Croatia Report to CRC, para 384, 1994.

28 Official Gazette 51, 2000.

29 Government Office for National Minorities Report, 1999.

30 Domazet 2000.

31 Domazet 2000.

32 ECRI, Report on Croatia, 9 November 1999.

33 *Glas Roma*, 1995.

34 ERRC, *Field Report: the ERRC in Croatia*, 1998.

35 *Glas Roma*, 1995.

6 Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: an overview

Although the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) is formally a single country, formed of two constituent republics, Serbia and Montenegro, three separate entries are covered in this report, namely Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo.

FRY is the rump successor state of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, from which other republics broke away in the early 1990s. The break-up was marked by a series of wars which caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, for which the recently deposed former President of FRY Slobodan Milosevic has been blamed as a primary instigator. FRY itself is now subject to pressures towards break-up similar to those which resulted in the end of the old Yugoslavia. Its democratic transition has been delayed by over a decade due to the longevity of the Milosevic regime. His presidency ended only after the October 2000 “democratic revolution”, which brought Vojislav Kostunica to power in his place. All public service institutions, including educational institutions, are in need of thorough structural reform. Serbia’s infrastructure was badly damaged by the NATO bombing campaign in spring 1999. As Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo for all practical purposes already have or are acquiring* separate governance arrangements, with separate sources of democratic legitimacy, the shape of the coming structural renovation will differ between the three territories, cementing their divergence.

Kosovo is formally one of two autonomous provinces of Serbia (Vojvodina being the other). However, after the FRY/Serbian authorities unleashed a military campaign of mass expulsion, murder and pillage upon Kosovo’s majority ethnic Albanian population, following on from a decade of repression, they were stripped of control over the province in June 1999 by the authority of a UN Security Council Resolution. Governance of Kosovo was placed in the hands of a UN interim administration, backed by a 45,000-strong international military force. Kosovo’s 80 per cent plus ethnic Albanian majority clearly has a unanimous wish for full independence, but the UN is mandated to provide “substantial autonomy” within FRY/Serbia only, until a final political settlement is reached.

Under the leadership of President Milo Djukanovic, Montenegro has steered a cautious path in the direction of independence from FRY and parliamentary elections held in April 2001 were widely seen as a referendum on Djukanovic’s independence proposals. Although pro-independence parties won, the margin was narrow, suggesting that swift moves to independence may prove destabilising.

From the late 1980s onwards, ethnic nationalism and the stirring of ethnic hatreds have been a prime political currency, creating very adverse conditions for the advancement and realisation

*Kosovan general elections are scheduled for late 2001.



of minority rights. Within FRY, this has had the most devastating results in Kosovo. For nearly a decade in the 1990s, 90 per cent of Kosovo's children were denied their right to education by the FRY/Serbian authorities on ethnic and linguistic grounds, and had to make do with makeshift private provision. For Roma/Gypsies it

has been the aftermath of the Kosovan war which has proved most catastrophic. From June 1999, they were the victims of a wave of violence perpetrated by returning ethnic Albanians. The majority have fled, either as IDPs to Serbia and Montenegro, or as refugees to Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and other countries.

7 Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: Serbia

As in other countries in the region, Roma/Gypsy children are over-represented in special schools for children with disabilities. For example, Roma/Gypsy children make up about 80 per cent of children in Vojvodina's 13 special schools.

“When testing Roma children, I notice that they have problems with abstract concepts... Or, for example, I ask a child what he should do when he sees smoke coming out of a house. The right answer is that he would call the fire brigade or tell an adult that a fire had broken out in the house. Roma children as a rule reply that the stove should be cleaned or the stove pipes fixed to stop the smoke coming out. Then I have to fail the child.”

Psychologist, special school

“How can a Roma child do a projection of a comic strip at the test when it has never had a comic book in its hands? But that doesn't mean they are not intelligent. Just a couple of days ago, two workmen were trying to get a cabinet into a classroom and couldn't get it through the door. Then a Roma boy from the eighth grade came along and told them at what angle to hold it to get it into the room.”

Psychologist, special school

“They tell me, oh, they tell me,
that I'm just a Gypsy girl
and don't belong in their crowd.
And why that is, I never know,
nor what came over them.”

Roma girl, 12 years old

Summary

Context

Serbia's economy and institutions were corroded or ossified by a decade of wars, isolation and sanctions. Much of its infrastructure was destroyed in the NATO bombing campaign of 1999. Due to the longevity of the Milosevic regime, Serbia's post-communist social and economic transition is beginning only now – a full decade after its Eastern European neighbours.

Roma/Gypsy population

Censuses over the last 50 years revealed a wildly fluctuating Roma/Gypsy population. A decline from the 1981 peak figure of 168,000 is attributable to the rise of inter-ethnic intolerance and war, which made Roma/Gypsies even more likely to declare themselves members of the majority community. Estimates of Serbia's true Roma/Gypsy population range between 360,000 and over 500,000. They form a complex mixture of groups. Most live in shanty settlements on town or village peripheries, and suffer from high unemployment, poverty, and high morbidity and mortality rates. Since 1999, between 30,000 and 80,000 displaced Roma/Gypsies from Kosovo (Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians) have added to the population. They received little state support and harsh, arbitrary treatment. Roma/Gypsies do not have the status of a national minority in Serbia.

Roma/Gypsies and education

The flawed 1991 census showed that 62 per cent of Roma/Gypsies had not completed primary education, and over a third had no schooling or virtually none. Only 4.41 per cent of the 15-19-year-old age-group progressed to secondary education. Although primary education is free, most Roma/Gypsy parents cannot afford to buy the necessary books and other school supplies. Their home environment often blocks Roma/Gypsy children's progress in education – overcrowding and lack of electricity prevents children from doing homework, and parents who are themselves poorly educated do not regard education as a priority. Due to poverty, very many Roma/Gypsy children are required to do wage-earning work, and a large number of girls marry at 13-16, prompting school drop-out. Roma/Gypsy IDP children from Kosovo were initially refused enrolment in Serbian schools.

Language provision

In practice, Roma/Gypsy children do not have access to teaching in Romanes, which is for many their native language. Moreover, there is no systematic provision for Roma/Gypsy children to be taught Serbian at the outset of their school career, thus making it very difficult for them to follow the lessons. Because Roma/Gypsies are not recognised as a national minority, they do not enjoy the right to education in their own language.

This in turn prevents the accumulation of any capacity for its introduction, eg, there are no institutions for teacher training in Romanes.

Special schools

There are no overall official data on the number of Roma/Gypsy children attending Serbia's 38 special schools for children with mental disabilities. Where data are available, 70-80 per cent of the attending children are Roma/Gypsies. Failures of language provision cause Roma/Gypsy children quickly to fall behind in regular schools, and a system of assessment that fails to take into account cultural characteristics often results in their transfer to special schools – a process of “pseudo-retardation”. Free meals and medical care for children in the special schools act as an incentive for poor families to accede to this, condemning their children to an educational dead end.

Balance of NGO and government activity

International NGOs and domestic Roma/Gypsy organisations have been conducting a range of education projects – kindergarten, school integration and study support, with negligible support from the Ministry of Education. A sustained initiative to introduce “Romani with elements of national culture” as an elective subject in Vojvodina schools is led by the NGO *Matica Romska*.

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Introduction – The Roma/Gypsy population

Demography

In 1995, Minority Rights Group International estimated that there were between 400,000 and 450,000 Roma/Gypsies in what was then Yugoslavia, of whom over 90 per cent were in Serbia (ie, a minimum of 360,000 Roma/Gypsies in Serbia).¹ The leader of the Roma Congress Party (*Romska kongresna stranka*), Dragoljub Acković, argues that according to research conducted by his party, the real number of Roma/Gypsies in Serbia is much higher – in excess of 500,000.² The Roma Cultural Society (*Matica Romska*) gives an estimate that is higher again – between 600,000 and 700,000.³ According to the OECD, about 40 per cent of the Roma population are under 14 years of age.⁴

The 1991 census is the most recent official count of the population in the former Yugoslavia. A census for March 2001 was planned, but at the time of writing this had been postponed. Provisional estimates of 7,807,000 for the total population were made in 1998. However, no ethnic breakdown was available. Demographers have major reservations about the 1991 census figures, given that it was conducted at a time when national minorities were subject to considerable pressure from Serb nationalists – enough to lead the Kosovo Albanians to boycott the census. However, it does at least give some indication of ethnic composition.

According to this census, there were 140,237 Roma/Gypsies in Serbia (1.4 per cent). For Serbia

alone, ie, not including Kosovo, this translated in to 94,492 Roma/Gypsies (1.2 per cent).⁵ Other smaller ethnic minorities include Romanians and Slovaks. The largest concentration of Roma/Gypsies was in Belgrade (14,220), followed by 14,162 in the Pirotski District, 8,593 in the Nisavski District and 8,567 in the Jablanički District (all three districts are in southern Serbia). Of the 24,336 Roma/Gypsies registered in Vojvodina, most lived in the North Banat District (6,418) and South Banat District (5,644).

If we look at the numbers of Roma/Gypsies officially recorded in the period 1948 to 1991, we can see a pattern emerging. According to the 1948 census, there were 72,736 Roma/Gypsies in Yugoslavia. In 1961, the number dropped to 31,674. In 1971 it rose again to 78,485 and then again in 1981 to 168,195. In the 1991 census, however, the number fell once more to 140,237. These major fluctuations cannot be ascribed to demographic shifts alone. Instead we have to consider the political context, and how definitions and contexts shifted during this time. It seems that when political, economic and social conditions were more stable, Roma/Gypsies were more inclined to declare their ethnic identity. However, when they felt under threat, such as during the wars in the former Yugoslavia, they felt less inclined to declare their real identity.

The president of *Matica Romska*, Trifun Dimić, believes that the discrepancies between official and estimated figures of Roma/Gypsies in Serbia are due to what he calls “ethnic mimicry,” ie, when Roma/Gypsies opt to declare themselves

as members of the majority community. He cites as an example his own Slana Bara suburb of Novi Sad, Vojvodina, where the majority of the 1,000 Roma/Gypsy inhabitants declared themselves as Serb, Romanian or Yugoslav. Dimić considers that this kind of “mimicry” is a widespread attempt at avoiding racial prejudice.⁶

Different Roma/Gypsy groups and language

Roma/Gypsies in Serbia form a complex mixture of groups. Generally speaking, religion is not a criterion for group division of Roma/Gypsies in Serbia: significant numbers of contemporary Christians are ex-Muslims, and members of the same group practise different religions in different regions.

The oldest wave of Gypsies, who settled in what is today Serbian land in the fourteenth century, comprises several subdivisions. Some of them lost the Romani language and their mother tongue is now Serbian. These include the so-called *beli Tsigani* (ie, white Gypsies), who are Christians, as well as Muslim Roma/Gypsies, who came from Bosnia and Herzegovina. They also include *Tamari* (a name which comes from *Themeske Roma* – ie, local Gypsies) and *Gjorgjovci* in southern Serbia. *Arlia* groups can be found in eastern and southern Serbia (regions which were incorporated into the Serbian state in the second half of the nineteenth century). This group speaks the so-called Balkan (Non-Vlax) dialects of Romanes; most of them are Muslims. Other groups, which also belong to this dialectal group, include *Bugurdzbia* in southern Serbia.

The most widely distributed groups speaking a common dialect of Romanes in Serbia are those speaking Old Vlax dialects. Their forefathers came from Wallachia and settled in Serbian lands mainly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. So-called *Gurbeti* groups can be seen as falling within this Old Vlax dialectal group. Most Gurbets in Serbia are Christians. Whereas some of them are permanently settled and have been so for many centuries, others are former nomads. Related to them in terms of their dialects are a number of other groups, for example the Serbian *Chergara* (or *Kaniara*), the *Dẓhambazi* in southern Serbia, the Bosnian *Chergara* and *Kaloperi* (predominantly Muslims) and so on.

In Serbia (including Vojvodina) there are now only a comparatively few representatives of the

New Vlax dialectal group of Romanes. These mainly consist of *Kelderara* and *Lovara* (most of them migrated into Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s). There are also many Romanian-speaking Roma/Gypsies, mostly with preferred Wallachian identity, the so-called *Karavlas* (called also *Rudara*, *Koritari*, *Lingurari*, *Vretenari*, *Ursari*, *Beyasbi*). In Vojvodina there are also *Rumungri* (Ungrika Roma). Whereas some speak Romanes from Carpathian dialectal groups, others speak only Hungarian.

In contemporary Serbia (including Vojvodina) there are also many Roma/Gypsies who have migrated from Kosovo – some during the 1960s and 1970s, and others during and after the Kosovo crisis. During the war in Kosovo and after the withdrawal of the Yugoslav and Serbian



forces, large numbers of Roma, Egyptians and Ashkali from that region moved to central Serbia and Vojvodina. According to different sources, they number between 30,000 and 80,000 people. Other groups from Kosovo include *Arlia*, *Gurbeti*, *Kovachi* (or *Arabadzhi*), *Bugurdzhii* and *Dzhambazi*. Among these refugees there are also Albanian-speaking Madjups, Albanian-speaking Egyptians and Ashkali, all of whom distinguish themselves from Roma. In addition to these, there are numerous subgroups that cross-cut the groups outlined above, thereby revealing the complexity of these communities.

The socio-economic situation of Roma/Gypsies

Economically and socially, Roma/Gypsies are one of the most disadvantaged population groups in Serbia. As with the rest of FRY and indeed the region as a whole, they suffer from high unemployment, poverty and low levels of education. One study published in 2000 revealed that just 20 per cent of the Roma/Gypsy labour force held regular jobs, and only 5 per cent of these workers were employed in state companies.⁷ Those who did have some kind of work held the least desirable and most poorly paid jobs: day labourers and herdsmen in rural areas, and unskilled workers, street cleaners, garbage collectors and grave-diggers in urban areas. Many Roma/Gypsies in Serbia have moved away from their traditional occupations, such as music. It is possible now to find only a few examples of young Roma/Gypsies entering this profession.⁸

The majority of Roma/Gypsies live in settlements on the outskirts of villages and cities. Housing conditions are extremely poor: houses are often built of tin, cardboard, planks and plastic

sheeting. These settlements are usually built in zoned areas and hence do not have access to running water, sewers, electricity or waste collection. Public transport stops far short of such settlements. Poor living conditions are compounded by poor health. Poverty means a low-quality diet, at best consisting of just bread, potatoes, corn meal and seasonal fruits and vegetables. As a result, there are high morbidity and mortality rates, especially among young children.

The 1999 war in Kosovo, which displaced over 40,000 Roma/Gypsies, further compounded this situation.⁹ Tens of thousands of Roma/Gypsies were forced to find refuge in settlements in central Serbia and Vojvodina. They received little state support, if any. In fact they were subject to harsh treatment from the authorities. The Humanitarian Law Centre (HLC), for example, registered several attempts to force Roma/Gypsies to return to Kosovo in the second half of June 1999. Police turned many back at the border and threatened to deny them humanitarian aid and shelter.

Inter-ethnic relations

There are some examples of attempts at positively promoting Roma/Gypsy culture, such as the Roma Culture Week organised by Belgrade's New Theatre and Dance Centre. This was staged in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Nis from 21 to 26 January 2001. The event presented different aspects of Roma culture in a series of lectures, concerts, exhibitions and performances.¹⁰

However, as is the case across the region, prejudice against Roma/Gypsies in Serbia is

extremely high. Discrimination against Roma/Gypsies can be found in all areas of public life, including mainstream media, such as the Pink and Palma television stations.¹¹ For example, after Vojislav Kostunica's election victory in 2000, Milovan Ilić, an entertainment celebrity and host of the *Minimaks vizija* show on Palma TV, made repeated jokes about Roma/Gypsies.¹²

Numerous surveys have revealed a pronounced "ethnic distance" between the majority populations and Roma/Gypsies in Serbia.¹³ The prevailing view, especially among poorly educated non-Roma/Gypsy respondents in suburban areas, is that all professional and personal ties with Roma/Gypsies must be avoided. As the educational level of the respondents increases, the ethnic distance steadily decreases. A public opinion poll conducted in April 2000 in Nis is a good illustration.¹⁴ By contrast with inhabitants of suburban areas, significantly more respondents in Nis accepted Roma/Gypsies as their equals. Thus 41 per cent of the Nis respondents said that Roma/Gypsy children should be able to learn their native language in addition to Serbian. In terms of marriage, however, both groups of respondents demonstrated almost the same "ethnic distance": asked whether they would marry a Roma/Gypsy, 80 per cent of respondents in suburban areas and 79 per cent in Nis replied that they would not.

The deep-rooted nature of this prejudice is illustrated further in relation to the question of burials. Although half of the respondents in Nis (50 per cent) had nothing against Roma/Gypsies being buried in the local cemetery, the remainder

opted for three other possibilities: a separate section for Roma/Gypsies in the local cemetery (31 per cent), a completely separate cemetery for Roma/Gypsies (23 per cent), and the burial of Roma/Gypsies outside settlements (4 per cent). Respondents in suburban areas were even less tolerant: only 27 per cent said that they had nothing against Roma/Gypsies being buried in their local cemetery, 33 per cent replied that there should be a separate section for them, and 10 per cent held the view that Roma/Gypsies should be buried outside the settlement limits.

Research by HLC revealed that in the period 1992-2000, Roma/Gypsies in Serbia were frequently victims of torture and abuse by the police and subject to physical violence and discrimination by members of the general public. HLC investigated 90 incidents that occurred in this period in which Roma/Gypsies were targets of unlawful police conduct and physical violence and discrimination by private citizens, and registered 26 cases of assaults by "skinheads" and others. The most extreme example is an incident which took place outside a Belgrade elementary school: a group of skinheads inflicted 17 knife wounds on Gordana Jovanovic, a 13-year-old Roma/Gypsy girl.

During this period, HLC also recorded that the homes of several Roma/Gypsies were torched, Roma/Gypsies were beaten up and racist slogans were scrawled on walls. Reacting to these racist slogans, the president of *Matica Romska*, Trifun Dimić, said: "It's not a big problem that some hooligan scrawls these hate messages. The biggest problem is that no one seems to care."¹⁵

The legal status of Roma/Gypsies

Roma/Gypsies are not granted official national-minority status in Serbia. Over the past decade, many representatives of Romani associations, political parties and cultural organisations have addressed the Serbian parliament and federal authorities on several occasions, requesting that the Roma/Gypsy population be officially granted this status, and thereby enjoy human rights belonging to national minorities in Serbia.

In 1990, Dr Svenka Savic, professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, advocated for the recognition of the Roma/Gypsy minority as a national minority at a conference entitled “Social status and culture of the Roma in Vojvodina”.¹⁶ The Commission for the Study of the Life and Customs of the Roma at the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts holds that the Roma/Gypsy minority should enjoy the same rights as other ethnic communities in Serbia. At a conference on the standardisation of the Romani language in Yugoslavia, academician Milos Macura expressed the view of the Commission that Roma should be afforded all the rights and possibilities afforded to other communities in Serbia.¹⁷

Minority rights

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia are bound by all the international instruments in the fields of minority rights, the rights of the child, and the right to education ratified by the former Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. The new state continues to apply the international acts outlined above on the “basis of Yugoslavia’s uninterrupted status as a personality of international law”.

Domestic legislation in Serbia does not specifically target national minorities. Instead, the rights and freedoms of members of national minorities are guaranteed by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia,¹⁸ the Serbian Constitution, legislation on the official use of languages and scripts, and legalisation on elementary, secondary and higher education.

Under the FRY Constitution, all citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of nationality, race, sex, language, faith, political or other beliefs, education, social origin, property or other personal status.¹⁹ National minorities are entitled to preserve, foster and express their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and other peculiarities and to use their national symbols, in accordance with international law.²⁰ The FRY Constitution also guarantees to national minorities the freedom to express their national culture and to use their mother tongue language and script.²¹ It also guarantees the right to:

- access education, information and media in their own language²²
- establish educational and cultural organisations or associations²³
- establish and foster unhindered relations with co-nationals in FRY and outside its borders with co-nationals in other states, and to take part in international NGOs provided that these relations are not detrimental to FRY or to a member republic²⁴
- use their own language in proceedings before a tribunal or government agency or other authority.²⁵

The Serbian Constitution, in conformity with the law, also provides for the use of minority languages and scripts, alongside Serbian, in areas populated by a particular minority.²⁶ It guarantees to members of national minorities the right to education in their own language, in conformity with the law.²⁷ Other minority rights are derived from the provisions of the Serbian Constitution regulating the rights and freedoms of *all* citizens, for example, the freedom to express ethnicity and equality before the law.

The right to education

Members of minorities in Serbia have the right to education from preschool to university levels. However, this is not backed up by a system of state-funded pre-schools, and parents must pay fees. Further still, the right to education in a minority language is exercised only by members of the Albanian, Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian and Ruthenian minorities. In practice, Roma/Gypsies do not have access to education in their own language.

Classroom teaching for national minorities is provided in accordance with the Serbian curriculum. Although there is some scope for developing curricula to suit instruction in minority languages, in practice, textbooks used are usually translated from Serbian. In this way, curricula often serve an ideological function rather than being based on any scientific or educational principle.²⁸ School programmes have to be approved by the Minister of Education. These programmes are drawn up without consultation with relevant experts on multicultural issues and

fail to take into account the principles of multicultural education. For example, school programmes rarely, if at all, contain any reference to the history of different ethnic groups, including that of Roma/Gypsies.²⁹

Children of refugees from the former Yugoslav republics and internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Kosovo have the right to attend school, on condition that they are registered in the territory of Serbia. However, following the conclusion of the Military-Technical Agreement between the Yugoslav Army and NATO and the deployment of the international forces in Kosovo in June 1999, the Serbian Minister of Education, by way of an internal regulation, forbade the enrolment of children of Kosovo IDPs in Serbian schools other than those in areas adjacent to the administrative line with Kosovo. This interdiction was justified on the grounds that the IDPs would soon be returning to their homes in Kosovo. However, in the face of strong pressure from both the public and the IDPs, the regulation was soon withdrawn, and these children were able to attend schools throughout Serbia on the same terms as all other children, ie, on the presentation of the child's birth certificate and registration of residence.

The Serbian Child Welfare Act envisages the right of children to attend preschool facilities for the year prior to enrolment in elementary school.³⁰ It sets out that instruction in these institutions is to be provided in Serbian or, where relevant, in minority languages.³¹ Since preschool institutions are established and funded by the municipalities, the local authorities decide who should receive instruction in minority languages.



However, there are no fixed criteria for this. Although the curriculum has to be approved by the Minister of Education, the institution itself is free to organise preparatory classes in Serbian for children of minority communities.³² Preschool is not free, and fees are adjusted to the incomes of the parents. In areas with a negative population growth, there is no charge for the third child.³³

Elementary school is compulsory and free for eight years. All children who are not diagnosed as disabled enrol in elementary school at seven years of age.³⁴ All elementary schools are state-run: only ballet and music schools can be established privately.

Classroom teaching in either one minority language or in both a minority and the Serbian language³⁵ is provided in areas with an ethnically mixed population, although this does not relate to Roma/Gypsy minorities and the use of Romanes.

It is provided when there are at least 15 children from the first grade who wish to receive instruction in a minority language. Classes with fewer children may be organised, but only with the approval of the Minister of Education.³⁶ For instance, in 1996-97 the Minister of Education approved the forming of a first grade class, which consisted of just five children who wished to receive instruction in Hungarian.³⁷ The Elementary Schools Act does not allow for the possibility of parents or others financing classes with fewer minority students.

The manner in which curricula are taught in two languages is prescribed by the Minister of Education. If classroom teaching is provided only in a minority language, extra courses in Serbian are compulsory. When non-Serb children receive instruction in Serbian, they are entitled to courses in their native language and national culture.³⁸

Regarding the education of minorities, the Secondary Schools Act contains provisions identical to those in the Elementary Schools Act. Broadly, there are three kinds of secondary schools: for students preparing to enter university, art school or vocational school.³⁹ They provide four years of education, with the exception of some vocational schools, whose courses run for three years. Candidates for secondary schools are required to take a competitive admission exam.

Under the Serbian University Act, universities or university departments may be founded by the state or privately endowed. Generally, students need to complete secondary school before being able to enrol at university. On completion of a first degree, students may continue with postgraduate studies.

The decision on whether to provide instruction in a minority language at university level is taken by the university or department concerned. This is subject to approval from the Serbian government. Previously, universities would be expected to provide instruction in a minority language when at least 30 students pursuing the same field of study requested it. However, this is not guaranteed in the current University Act. Likewise, national minorities are no longer entitled to take university admission exams in the language in which they completed secondary school.⁴⁰ Students who wish to study in a foreign or minority language must take a test in the respective language before a committee. Under the law, faculty members must also obtain a certificate from their departments of their ability to teach in a minority language.⁴¹

In practice

The right to education for Roma/Gypsy children

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is the only post-communist country that has not yet embarked on a genuine process of transition. This is naturally reflected in its school system and minorities education policy. Thus far there has been practically no official policy regarding the education of Roma/Gypsies, who have little chance of receiving classroom instruction in their own language. The only gestures have been experimental projects lasting one or more years, implemented in one or two municipalities, and those have been only symbolic contributions to integrating Roma/Gypsies in the school system.

Abandonment and dropping out

According to a recent OECD report, 75,000 Roma/Gypsy children of compulsory school age are not in school. This represents about 10 per cent of total enrolments in grades one to eight in Serbia. The report further notes that most Roma/Gypsy children do not start school at all, start late or drop out after only one or two years.⁴² According to an unpublished World Bank paper, only one-third of Roma/Gypsy children who enter school complete primary education.⁴³

According to the 1991 census, 62 per cent of Roma/Gypsies had not finished primary education, and 36 per cent were without any schooling or at most had completed just three grades. The census also recorded that 22,591 (26 per cent) of Roma/Gypsies in Serbia were illiterate, with rates ranging from 15 per cent illiteracy in the 15-19-year age-group to 71 per

Table 7.1 Educational structure of the Roma/Gypsy population: Elementary

Age-group	Number	No education or completed only grades 1, 2 or 3	Completed grades 4, 5, 6 or 7	Completed elementary education	Continued to higher levels of education	Unknown level of education	Total
15-19	14,965	28.70%	27.53%	38.40%	4.43%	0.93%	100%
20-24	13,274	22.61%	24.98%	36.68%	14.59%	1.14%	100%
25-29	11,289	25.82%	23.52%	34.63%	14.96%	1.04%	100%
30-34	10,255	29.95%	27.08%	29.69%	12.09%	1.16%	100%
35-39	8,557	33.28%	30.09%	26.51%	9.29%	0.8%	100%
40-44	6,493	35.46%	32.68%	22.67%	8.29%	0.89%	100%
45-49	4,598	44.52%	31.56%	16.09%	6.99%	0.82%	100%
50-54	4,505	51.49%	31.05%	11.58%	4.97%	0.88%	100%
55-59	3,901	65.64%	21.60%	7.51%	4.15%	1.07%	100%
60-64	2,986	74.14%	17.95%	4.35%	2.68%	0.87%	100%
65+	3,637	80.36%	13.85%	3.08%	1.51%	1.18%	100%
Age not known	1,342	40.68%	14.08%	22.05%	5.89%	17.28%	100%
Total numbers	85,802	31,045	22,488	23,405	7,788	1,076	100%
Total %		36.18%	26.21%	27.45%	9.08%	1.25%	100%

cent illiteracy in those aged 65 years and over. For reasons outlined above, together with the fact that data is only collected for those aged 15 years and above, the 1991 census is an unreliable source of data. However, it does provide us with some broad indications. Tables 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 show the education structure of the Roma/Gypsy population according to school level based on the 1991 census.⁴⁴

The drop-out rate among Roma/Gypsy children is highest in the third and fourth grades. Though

elementary education is free, parents have to buy textbooks, notebooks and other school supplies for their children, which most Roma/Gypsy parents cannot afford. Roma/Gypsy families have barely enough for subsistence, especially those displaced from Kosovo, and they cannot afford even second-hand textbooks. Children also find it hard to study and so to keep up at school. For example, when children return home after the afternoon shift in school,⁴⁵ ie, after 8pm, Roma/Gypsy children cannot do their homework or study because of the lack of electricity.

Table 7.2 Educational structure of the Roma/Gypsy population: Secondary

Age-group	Number in age group	Total with secondary education*		Trade school for skilled workers	Trade school for highly skilled workers	High school	Secondary technical school	Secondary vocational school
		Number	%					
15-19	14,965	660	4.41%	56	6	17	85	496
20-24	13,274	1,871	14.10%	142	20	50	225	1,434
25-29	11,289	1,566	13.87%	156	28	59	335	988
30-34	10,255	1,070	10.43%	326	29	95	535	85
35-39	8,557	678	7.92%	263	31	52	298	34
40-44	6,493	444	6.83%	187	19	18	197	23
45-49	4,598	261	5.67%	112	21	20	103	5
50-54	4,505	189	4.19%	86	22	9	67	5
55-59	3,901	139	3.56%	76	11	12	38	2
60-64	2,986	65	2.17%	32	2	7	20	4
65+	3,637	48	1.32%	25	2	5	11	5
Unknown	1,342	71	5.29%	12	1	10	29	19
Total	85,802	7,062	8.23%	1,473	192	354	1,943	3,100

Note: * Shows the total who had a secondary education and did not continue to higher or university education.

Due to poverty, many Roma/Gypsy parents feel it necessary to encourage their children to find work and help to contribute to the family income. As a result of this, many children either drop out or do not enrol in school in the first place. A survey in the Mali London settlement in Pančevo, for instance, showed that 69 per cent of school-children were doing some kind of wage-earning work.⁴⁶ For some Roma/Gypsy communities, early marriage is another factor which encourages low enrolment and high drop-out rates, especially among girls. Research carried out in Masuric, for

example, showed that a large number of girls married at 14 or 15 years. The survey carried out in the Mali London settlement also showed that 42 per cent of Roma/Gypsy women were illiterate, and that 44 per cent had dropped out of school between the ages of 13 and 17 due to marriage.⁴⁷ After marriage, Roma/Gypsy women have very little chance of finishing school. Although there are night schools for adults and elementary and secondary schools for students who need only take exams and are not required to attend classes, they do not have crèche facilities.

Table 7.3 Educational structure of the Roma/Gypsy population: University and higher education

Age-group	Number in age group	Higher education		University education	
		Number	%	Number	%
15-19	14,965	4	0.02%	-	-
20-24	13,274	46	0.35%	19	0.14%
25-29	11,289	67	0.59%	57	0.50%
30-34	10,255	89	0.86%	83	0.80%
35-39	8,557	73	0.85%	45	0.52%
40-44	6,493	61	0.94%	33	0.50%
45-49	4,598	34	0.39%	27	0.58%
50-54	4,505	28	0.62%	7	0.15%
55-59	3,901	12	0.30%	11	0.28%
60-64	2,986	8	0.26%	7	0.23%
65 and over	3,637	4	0.11%	3	0.08%
Unknown	1,342	2	0.14%	6	0.44%
Total	85,802	428	0.50%	298	0.35%

Furthermore, most night schools are designed for those already in some kind of work and require payment of tuition fees.

Discrimination is another factor that underpins high drop-out rates among Roma/Gypsy children. Research carried out by HLC, for example, revealed that Roma/Gypsy children in elementary and secondary schools are frequent targets of abuse from teachers and peers as well as attacks by skinheads. In 2000, HLC officially recorded two cases of Roma/Gypsy children dropping out

of school and two cases of transfer to other schools because of violence.⁴⁸

Many see the poor education of Roma/Gypsy parents as one of the main reasons behind high drop-out rates among Roma/Gypsy children. Some argue that for many Roma/Gypsy parents a formal education is not seen as a priority or a precondition for upward mobility.⁴⁹ A survey conducted in the Romani village of Masurica in southern Serbia showed that 36 per cent of the respondents wanted their children to finish only

four grades of elementary school and that 18 per cent were undecided as to whether or not they wanted an education for their children.⁵⁰ The survey in the Mali London settlement in Pančev asked Roma/Gypsy parents what they wanted their children to be when they grew up. As Table 7.4 shows, a high proportion wanted their sons to be craftsmen and their daughters to be hairdressers or nurses. Roma/Gypsies in the settlement who had received an education had done so only up to elementary level. Of those over 15 years of age, 80 per cent had not finished elementary school.⁵¹

Roma/Gypsies and special schools

There are 38 special schools across Serbia, which consist of both elementary and secondary schools. In addition to these, there are 30 regular schools in Vojvodina that have separate classes for disabled children. Apart from Vojvodina, there are no official data on the number of Roma/Gypsies who attend these schools.

In Vojvodina, there are 13 special schools, and Roma/Gypsy children make up about 80 per cent of children in such schools. These schools provide instruction in Serbian, Hungarian, Slovak and Ruthenian. According to the province's Secretariat for Education, Science and Culture, in 1997/1998 there were 440 Roma/Gypsy children enrolled in these 13 special schools, as well as in separate classes. Of these, 83 per cent were taught in Serbian, 16 per cent in Hungarian, 0.5 per cent in Slovak, and 0.5 per cent in Ruthenian. Tuition is not provided in Romanes.

The over-representation of Roma/Gypsies in the special-school system can be ascribed to the

Table 7.4a Parental ambitions: sons

	Number of parents
Mechanic, locksmith, auto mechanic	6
Craftsman (without specifying)	4
Medical doctor	4
Worker (without specifying)	3
Teacher	2
Musician	2
Policeman	2
Director	2
Veterinarian	1
Farmer	1
Soccer player	1
Non-specific answers*	3

Table 7.4b Parental ambitions: daughters

	Number of parents
Hairdresser	7
Nurse	6
Medical doctor	3
Worker	1
Housewife	3
Non-specific answers*	6

* eg, as God wills, anything that would enable her/him to earn her living, a good job, to have an education.

flawed process of evaluation and diagnosis. Roma/Gypsy children who enter regular schools often find it hard to master the curriculum given that instruction is not conducted in their first language, nor are there mechanisms in place to

support bilingual or multilingual pupils. When no additional tutoring is provided, such pupils tend to fall behind. It is most commonly at this point that the school psychologist recommends their transfer to a special school. In line with the Elementary Schools Act, the medical commission then evaluates the pupil and assesses the type and degree of “mental deficiency”.⁵² This involves a series of psychological and other similar tests based on majority norms that do not take into account Roma/Gypsy culture specifics. At the proposal of the commission, the relevant municipal administration body assigns the child to an appropriate school.

Teachers in mainstream schools also play a significant part in the referral process. Frustrated by the excessive curriculum, poorly paid and often prejudiced against Roma/Gypsies, teachers frequently recommend the transfer of Roma/Gypsy children to special schools.

Research carried out by HLC reveals that evaluations of healthy Roma/Gypsy children that result in their diagnosis as “mentally retarded” constitute discrimination against Roma/Gypsies. The medical commissions do not take into consideration the fact that these children often do not speak Serbian as their first language and are socially disadvantaged in many ways. Tests are carried out in Serbian and do not allow for different interpretations, according to different cultural backgrounds.

Although parents may appeal against decisions with the Ministry of Education, Roma/Gypsy parents often accept the evaluation of their child as mentally disabled. Some believe that parents

accept such diagnosis as it enables Roma/Gypsy parents access to the various benefits. For example, a child who is diagnosed as moderately or severely disabled attends school for the whole day rather than in shifts and receives free meals and medical care. Humanitarian organisations such as the Red Cross also offer support to such pupils by providing snacks. However, most Roma/Gypsy parents do not complain against the municipal authorities’ decision simply because they are not aware that they can and, in particular, are not provided with the information and means to take forward a complaint.

The disproportionate number of Roma/Gypsies in special schools is detrimental to Roma/Gypsy children in a number of ways. First, their high numbers in special schools reinforce existing prejudice and fuel discrimination. Secondly, the level of education they receive in such schools is inferior to that provided in mainstream schools and, thirdly, on completion of special school, Roma/Gypsy children have little possibility of continuing their education and even less chance of finding work.

A psychologist at a Kragujevac school for children with slight mental disabilities says:

“We don’t separate Roma children from the others. The procedure whereby children are referred to special schools, their evaluation and educational and general treatment is the same for Roma as for all the other children. The name of the school was this year changed to Dragoljub Božović Žuća Elementary School. This was done so that the children would not be set apart. This is an elementary school for



children with slight mental handicaps. There is no mention of the word “special,” not even in the name.

The curriculum for slightly handicapped children in elementary school is the same as that in all elementary schools, only somewhat condensed, and specific educational and other methods are used in working with the children.

There is in the school a centre for moderately and severely disabled children. It is completely separate and not within the elementary school system. We have no record of the ethnic composition of the student body. We do not ask Roma children to declare their ethnicity.

Generally speaking, there is no difference between the results achieved by Roma children and the other children in this school. There is a higher percentage of Roma children compared to the overall Roma population. There are 2 per cent or 3 per cent mentally disabled

children in the general population. Where Roma children are concerned, the percentage is somewhat higher – about 5 per cent on average.

The higher number of Roma children in special schools compared to others is not due to their natural, inherent mental and intellectual inferiority. Roma children grow up under the unfavourable impact of factors such as poor social status, poor education of their parents, unemployment, psychologically and socially disrupted family relations, inadequate housing, and in different cultural and linguistic conditions.

If their intellectual abilities are to be developed optimally in accordance with their inherent, genetic predispositions, they must be stimulated. Mental retardation arises from both genetic and external factors. The specifics of the Roma population are the result of

their growing up in specific conditions. These children are pseudo-retarded, which means that their retardation is the result of unfavourable environmental factors.

The prerequisites for the normal mental development of Roma children from specific communities are:

- improvement of the social and economic status of the Roma family
- establishment of preschool facilities for these children
- additional tutoring in regular schools and specific methods of work with these children in elementary school, and development of individualisation.”

A psychologist at the Sirogojno Special School in the Zemun district of Belgrade, in which 70 per cent of the 250 children are Roma/Gypsies, told HLC:⁵³

“Roma children are educationally neglected. They don’t understand the test questions and have no work ethic. It is not a priority of Roma parents to have their children go to school. That educationally neglected Roma children can integrate into regular schools is a fairy tale. We end up with frustrated and neurotic children.

When testing Roma children, I notice that they have problems with abstract concepts. This is because of the rather poor vocabulary of the Romani language. For instance, they do not have the word ‘dignity’. A Roma child cannot describe to me the meaning of the word because it has never heard it before. It can’t understand it.

Or, for example, I ask a child what he should do when he sees smoke coming out of a house. The right answer is that he would call the fire brigade or tell an adult that a fire had broken out in the house. Roma children as a rule reply that the stove should be cleaned or the stove pipes fixed to stop the smoke coming out. Then I have to fail the child. I ask if they would rather give money to the Red Cross or to a beggar and Roma children say they would give it to the Red Cross, which is the correct answer. But when I ask why, they say because the Red Cross helps them. That is the wrong answer. Or, for instance, I ask what an apple and a pear have in common. Roma children know they are both fruits. However, when we get more abstract and I ask what makes them similar, they say something like, “They both have stems”. Wrong answer again.

The parents of many of our children also went to this school and, through inertia, enrol their children here. They know it is easier to finish this school than a regular school where the curriculum is harder. And they know that their children will get free meals and snacks, textbooks and, often, humanitarian aid. It is characteristic of them that they take the line of least resistance.”

A psychologist who works at a special school in the Novi Beograd district of Belgrade told the HLC that 80 per cent of the 104 children there were Roma/Gypsies:⁵⁴

“Officially, the Novi Beograd Special Elementary School has no children of average intellect. The problems of the Roma children

are the problems of the whole Roma population. The attitude of us “whites” toward the Roma population is also a problem. Amongst ourselves, we psychologists call the results of intelligence tests administered to Roma children “Gypsy IQ”, meaning that they show up as retarded when they take our “white” tests. But it also means that the tests are not designed to take into account Roma specifics. The problem is that, like the tests, regular schools are not adapted to the Roma population. We in fact help Roma children because, by referring them to special schools, we get them out of regular schools where they are not able to master the curriculum. It is true that the Roma population has a higher percentage of pseudo-retarded children. The reasons are self-evident: poverty and the parents’ lack of education. The curriculum in regular schools is hard even for children of normal intellect. If we had a better education system, there would be fewer Roma in special schools.

Where the IQ of Roma children is concerned, the law backs me up. They are unable to score more than 70 points on the test, which places them in the slightly retarded category. How can a Roma child do a projection of a comic strip at the test when it has never had a comic book in its hands? But that doesn’t mean they are not intelligent. Just a couple of days ago, two workmen were trying to get a cabinet into a classroom and couldn’t get it through the door. Then a Roma boy from the eighth grade came along and told them at what angle to hold it to get it into the room.

Roma children in this school feel themselves to be superior to white children. They are aware that learning is much easier for them. The slightly retarded white children at our school cannot compare with the far more intelligent Roma children.”

When asked by the HLC’s researcher if her special school would have to close down if Roma/Gypsy children were not wrongly assigned to it, she replied:

“I can tell you that all the Roma children now in this school are pseudo-retarded. But we do it to get Roma children out of a hopelessly wrong educational system.”

A neuropsychiatrist with the Mental Health Institute of the Novi Beograd Medical Centre in Belgrade expresses how she views the educational problems of Roma/Gypsy girls:⁵⁵

“Children belonging to different subcultures are educationally neglected, don’t know the language and score poorly in tests. These children not only don’t know Serbian, they don’t know their own language either. Their parents are usually illiterate and have absolutely no appreciation of education. To the test question “From what is bread obtained?” such children reply “From garbage cans”, or when asked “Where does milk come from?” they say “From the store”. The biggest problem is a child who starts school at the age of 9, 10 or 12. What to do with such a child? I can’t place a physically developed girl of 12, the age when she should already be having children according to their customs, in the first grade

together with 7-year-olds. If the child is not too intellectually neglected, I refer it to a school where it does not attend classes and only takes the required exams. If it is, then we try with a special school.”

A therapist at the Milan Rakić Elementary School, which runs a preparatory class for Roma/Gypsy children, speaks of her experience:⁵⁶

“The intelligence tests are not adapted for Roma children, primarily because they are educationally neglected. Roma children start school almost completely ignorant. The one group of children who have taken the preparatory class so far are now in a regular school and have fitted in well. We have 12 children in the preparatory class at present.

Children who have finished the preparatory class settle down in school much better than other Roma children, better even than children from Roma families who are better off but refused to put their children in this programme.

Working with Roma children, we have noticed that their main problem is not knowing the language. Our team consists of a therapist, psychologist, teacher and a Roma university student who interprets for us. The children study both Romani and Serbian. We devote major attention to the study of the languages, and work also on psychomotor retraining, stimulating preoperative and operative thinking, the children’s socialisation, and take them to cultural events. We take them to the theatre, with performances for children in Romani and Serbian, and to the zoo.”

Language provision

For many Roma/Gypsies in Serbia, Romanes is their first language. Although the education system makes it possible for national minorities to be educated in their own language from preschool to university, Roma/Gypsies are the only linguistic minority that does not have a minority-language programme in Serbia. Most Roma/Gypsy children attend schools where the teaching is in either Serbian or a minority language.

A number of attempts have been made in the past to deal with problems of access and relevance, and some basic steps were taken: a Romani grammar, dictionary and primer were published, and Romanes was introduced as an elective subject in several Kosovo municipalities in 1985. Although the project produced solid results, nonetheless it has since ceased to exist. Nine years later, in 1994, the Ministry of Education set up a committee to draft a programme for the study of the Romani language with elements of national culture from the first grade of elementary school. The committee, however, failed to complete its assignment. Elementary schools for Roma/Gypsies were established in some Vojvodina municipalities (Senta, Horgos and Apatin) but yielded poor results.

A former secretary for minority affairs in the Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina commented to HLC on the policies on Roma/Gypsy education in Vojvodina:

“Roma only partially exercise their right to an education in their own language. They may take Romani with elements of national culture

as an elective subject in elementary school, but they do not realise their right to classroom instruction in all subjects in Romani.

The Elementary Schools Act requires at least 15 children from a minority group to state their wish to receive instruction in their own language, a request to this effect by their parents to the Minister of Education, and his approval. Where Romani as an elective subject is concerned, the Minister has approved classes with less than 15 children. A precondition for the introduction of instruction in all subjects in a minority language is that the Ministry announce a public competition for textbooks in the respective language. Teachers would also have to be trained to teach all subjects in that language.

Only the Serbian Ministry of Education can announce a public competition for textbooks. Introduction of minority languages in schools also requires the approval of the Minister of Education. The provincial authorities have no competence in the field of education. The Elementary Schools Act is applied uniformly in Serbia and education is in the purview of the Serbian Ministry of Education. The same holds for secondary schools and universities.

It is necessary to provide trained teachers for future Romani language and culture departments at universities. And this requires:

- an institutional framework
- creation of a social climate to ensure systematic education of Roma
- co-operation with the international community and associations focusing on Roma education issues

- establishment of art and cultural societies which would not provide mere entertainment but present the highest cultural achievements. Roma, for example, need a theatre because it is an essential factor in the education of every people, hence Roma too.

Romani is not an official language because there is no regular education in the Romani language. The main criterion for introducing a minority language as an official language is the existence of organised regular classroom instruction in that language. Such instruction is provided in the Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak and Ruthenian languages, but not in Romani. This is why Romani is not an official language. The criteria are laid down by the statute of the Autonomous Province. When I say regular instruction, I mean teaching of all the subjects in the curriculum in a minority language. That is the condition for realising the right to official use of a minority language.⁵⁷

Under the Child Welfare Act,⁵⁸ introduction of a minority-language programme in preschool institutions requires that the teachers have completed appropriate courses of study in the respective language, or that they have taken and passed a test in the language at a post-secondary school or university department. There are no post-secondary schools or university departments in Serbia with courses in Romani, hence there are no teachers with the required qualifications.

The Minister of Education has not adopted a programme or curriculum for education in Romani. The Elementary Schools Act, however, envisages the possibility that minorities who do

not have schools in their own language could study as an elective subject their language and the basics of their people's history, literature and culture. Thus in December 1998, "Romani with elements of national culture" was introduced as an elective subject for Roma/Gypsy children in nine elementary schools in Vojvodina. The project was launched by *Matica Romska*, and financially supported by the Serbian Ministry of Education and the Vojvodina Secretariat for Education, Science and Culture. The curriculum was drawn up by *Matica Romska* president Trifun Dimić and approved by the Serbian Ministry of Education. The textbooks were also written by Dimić. The non-governmental Open Society Fund financially assisted the printing of a Romani primer and other textbooks. "Romani with elements of national culture" is not taught in a single school in central Serbia, nor is it possible for Roma/Gypsies to acquire a secondary or university education in their own language, the main reason being the lack of qualified teachers.

However, according to the Greek Helsinki Monitor, an elementary school in Obrenovac near Belgrade recently reintroduced elective Romani language classes for Roma/Gypsy children.⁵⁹ In October 2000, the school's new board had discontinued Romani classes, but with support from HLC, the Roma Society of Obrenovac, as well as the Ministry of Education, the classes resumed in April 2001. This is one of only a few examples in Serbia.

NGO practice in the area

Over 20 NGOs with projects focusing on the issue of education for Roma/Gypsy children have emerged in Serbia in recent years, some of which have been founded by Roma/Gypsies themselves. However, none of these projects have been implemented in co-operation with the Serbian Ministry of Education. Instead, they are mainly supported by international NGOs and donors.

With the support of international organisations, NGOs in Serbia have established kindergartens, and organised programmes for preschool and additional tutoring in Romanes. A number of organisations founded by Roma/Gypsies have been particularly effective. These include: the Roma Education Centre, Nis; the Democratic Union of Roma, Belgrade; Roma Heart, Belgrade; the 8th April Community Centre, Belgrade; and the Roma Cultural Centre, Subotica. In addition to local initiatives, since 1996 the Open Society Foundation has introduced the international Step-by-Step programme. This has involved projects aimed at the socialisation of deprived Roma/Gypsy children, and has funded kindergartens developed by the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), entitled "Kindergarten as a Family Centre". CIP adapted the preschool part of the programme for Roma/Gypsy children and has applied it in the past four years in kindergartens in Nis, Kragujevac, Belgrade, Čantavir, Krusevac and Surdulica. The programme was endorsed by the Serbian Ministry of Education and supported by professors of psychology and pedagogy at Belgrade University's Department of Humanities.

Some 500 children between the ages of four and seven attend these kindergartens each year. In smaller communities, the kindergartens are open to all children, which helps Roma/Gypsy pupils learn Serbian and prepare for elementary school. A survey conducted by CIP and the Open Society Foundation revealed that the children who attended the kindergarten in Nis learned Serbian well enough to pass the tests for elementary school. Out of those children who went on to finish their first year in elementary school in 1998-99, 44 per cent of them passed with a grade average of 4, and 26 per cent with a grade average of 5 (see Table 7.5).⁶⁰

The Belgrade-based Society for Upgrading Roma Settlements has organised a supplementary programme for Roma/Gypsy children from grades one to four with the aim of promoting

their integration into the school system. The programme, which includes additional tutoring and activities to motivate the children and stimulate their intellect and socialisation, is conducted in three elementary schools, each of which has two specially trained teachers. This programme was developed without any assistance from the Ministry of Education.

The Roma Information Centre is collaborating with elementary-school psychologists in Kragujevac on a programme called “Children Without Borders”. The objective of this programme is to eliminate ethnic and religious prejudice and foster acceptance of ethnic diversity. The Centre has organised a series of psychological workshops for children from different ethnic and religious communities. Each group comprises five Roma, five Serb and five children displaced from Kosovo between the ages of 11 and 14.

Table 7.5 Results achieved in the 1998-99 school year by Roma/Gypsy children who went to the Nis kindergarten, compared to those who did not

Children who did not attend kindergarten	Children who attended kindergarten
Test 67% passed 33% knew Serbian	Test 100% passed 97% knew Serbian
School attendance Regular – 47% Occasionally absent – 27% Always absent – 27%	School attendance Regular – 99% – –
Results and grade average 40% finished 1st grade Grade average 5 – 0% Grade average 4 – 3% Grade average 3 – 17% Grade average 2 – 20%	Results and grade average 100% finished 1st grade Grade average 5 – 26% Grade average 4 – 44% Grade average 3 – 17% Grade average 2 – 13%

CIP has developed a programme designed specifically for elementary-school teachers. This programme is aimed at overcoming prejudice, developing tolerance and openness, and is scheduled to start in 2001.

The Open Society Foundation provides scholarships for Roma/Gypsy young people engaged in full-time undergraduate and postgraduate education. In 2000, 62 Roma/Gypsy students received such scholarships. The Open Society Foundation also organises English-language courses for Roma/Gypsy students and activists in Novi Sad, Belgrade, Kragujevac, Nis and Subotica. The European Roma Rights Centre is another

organisation that offers scholarships and internship programmes, but specifically for Roma/Gypsy law students.

To inform children about their rights, the HLC has published an illustrated booklet entitled “Children’s Rights” in Romani and Serbian, based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It has been distributed to schools and children across the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Editions in Albanian and Turkish are now also being prepared for children in Kosovo. Save the Children UK helped to publish the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Romanes, and has financially supported projects for the preparatory, preschool and supplementary education of Roma/Gypsy children.

Norwegian Popular Relief finances a project of supplementary lessons for Roma/Gypsy children entitled “New Knowledge Workshop”. The teachers are staff members of the 8th April Roma Community Centre in Belgrade.⁶¹

Numerous other organisations, including Oxfam, the International Rescue Committee, the International Orthodox Charity and the International Committee of the Red Cross, are involved in various projects to promote the education of Roma/Gypsy children.

UNICEF plans to carry out with the new Serbian government a project entitled “Education for All”, with the aim of improving the grades of minority children in special schools. This offers scope for re-evaluating test results of Roma/Gypsy children wrongly diagnosed as “mentally

deficient”. Similarly, the Education Forum in Belgrade was established to draw up proposals for the integration of Roma/Gypsy children in the school system. One of its most important goals is to prevent Roma/Gypsy children from being wrongly evaluated as mentally disabled.

Marcel Kortijade, an expert in Romani studies and professor at the Institute for Nation, Language, Civilisation and Oriental Studies in Paris, has proposed the founding of a department at Belgrade University for the study of the Romani language as standardised at the Fourth World Roma Congress in Warsaw in 1990. To support this process, he also suggested that a group of Roma/Gypsy students be sent to study Romani at his Institute.

Finally, as part of its project “Minority Issues in Education,” the Novi Sad Centre for Multiculturalism has set up a group of experts, including a Roma/Gypsy representative. The purpose of this group is to draft legislation for regulating minority education in Vojvodina. Two round table discussions are planned for when the draft is ready, to allow for input into the final version from members of minority groups.

Voices of Roma/Gypsy children

LB, 12 years old, Desanka Maksimovic Elementary School, Belgrade

They Tell Me

They tell me, oh, they tell me,
that I'm just a Gypsy girl
and don't belong in their crowd.
And why that is, I never know,
nor what came over them.
Isn't my dress just like hers?
Isn't my smile just like hers?
Don't they know that, deep down,
we Gypsies are sound and true?
Like her, I have a mother too,
and my house is big and clean.
And my eyes, just like hers,
sparkle merrily in the sun.
They tell me, oh, they tell me,
I'm just a little Gypsy girl.
Yet they don't know what this means.
We too keep our patron Saint's Day,
and my heart is full of love.

All of the following contributions from children were given in interviews between September and December 2000.

FJSh, 11 years old, at elementary school in Belgrade

"I came to Belgrade from Gnjilane in Kosovo on June 17, 1999, and enrolled in a school here. I am in the fifth grade now. Back in Gnjilane I went to the Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic School. I had excellent grades there. In Kosovo I had Romani language classes at school, but I don't have any here in this school.

I used to have excellent grades, now I have very good grades. That's because I don't have enough space to study. I live together with six people in a small room. The room is in a Romani settlement which doesn't have water or electricity. Mum and Dad don't have enough money to buy me all the books I need. I wish I could have all the books so I could be excellent in school again. My father has finished elementary school but my mother hasn't."

SB, 15 years old, at elementary school in Belgrade

"The kids in my class say I'm a Gypsy and curse my 'Gypsy mother'. A boy in my class called... sometimes hits me when he curses my 'Gypsy mother'. A lot of kids call me 'Gypsy' in the school yard. When we are in the school yard, the kids sometimes kick me and say I'm a Gypsy. I complained to the teacher several times and she said she would tell them to stop it. But they just keep on doing it.

KS, 11 years old, at elementary school in Belgrade

"When I was in the fourth grade, the kids gave me a hard time. They kept saying 'Fuck your Gypsy mother', and called me 'dirty Gypsy' and other names. One of them would start and then everybody joined in, some of the girls too. There are two Romani boys in my class and they insult them too, just like they insult me. In May this year a boy, AS, kicked me and said 'Get out of here, you Gypsy! Just look at you!' AJ hit me in the face with a ball and said 'Why did you steal my money, Gypsy?' My classmate MP shoved and hit me, calling me 'Gypsy'. I didn't complain to my parents, but I told my teacher. I told her that they kept insulting me because I am a Gypsy. She told

off the kids who insulted me and said we were all children and all the same. But they kept on insulting me. I am in the fifth grade now and the kids don't insult me any more. At our school, Serb children don't want to mix with us Romanis. I hang out with my cousin Jelena and other Roma girls. Only one Serb girl is friendly with us. She has never insulted us or called us 'Gypsies'."

ZM, nine years old, at elementary school in Belgrade

"I am in the second grade. The kids at school shout 'cigu-ligu'⁶² at me. They slap me and curse 'my Gypsy mother' nearly every day. I complained to my mother and to my teacher.

He told me to look the other way and keep going if they bothered me again. Several times he saw them hitting me and cursing my 'Gypsy mother' and told them to stop insulting me. A month ago, two older boys hit me and insulted me in the school yard, and cursed my 'Gypsy mother'. One of them held me and the other one punched me in the head. When he said 'Fuck your Gypsy mother' I said back to him, 'Fuck your peasant mother' and tried to get away. But they caught me and made me take it back before letting me go. S and T from the second and fourth grades pick on me a lot, hitting me and saying 'Fuck your Gypsy mother'."



HS, 14 years old, at elementary school in Belgrade

“I’m in the sixth grade. I’m the only Roma in my class. The boys in my class curse my ‘Gypsy mother’ and tell me not to come to school any more. The girls don’t. The boys bonk me on the head. It happens nearly every day. I told my teacher about it and she told me to go to the principal. My teacher told them in class to stop picking on me. I didn’t go to the principal. I told my mother, but she didn’t go to school to complain to the teacher.”

SS, 11 years old, at elementary school in Belgrade

“I’m a fifth-grader. A boy called PŠ keeps giving me a hard time and says ‘Fuck your Gypsy mother!’ He punched me in the arm once during a gym class. I didn’t complain to my teacher. I told my Mum, but my parents didn’t do anything and said they didn’t want to make things worse.”

JV, 14 years old, at elementary school in Kragujevac

“We speak Serbian at home. I don’t speak Romani, but I understand it. I heard at school that non-Romani children swear at Romani kids a lot and curse their ‘Gypsy mothers’. I have never been insulted at school because I’m a Roma. I invite kids who aren’t Romani to my birthday parties and they come. I also go to my Serbian friends’ birthday parties.

When I finish elementary school I’m going to go to a school for hairdressers. I am a very good student. My mother and father have finished elementary school. I have a brother who’s 16. He dropped out of school when he was in the fifth grade. I think he did it because of his teacher. Our grandfather always told

him not to go to school. He said the same thing to me too. He said all I needed to know was how to write my name. He kept saying schooling was useless if you couldn’t get a job afterwards.

The school psychologist told me I could come to the ‘Children Without Borders’ workshops. She said Romani children should take part in them, and that embarrassed me. I felt silly because I don’t want to hear somebody say ‘Here come the Roma’.”

MD, 14 years old, at elementary school in Kragujevac

“I’m a good student and I’m going to go to a school for hairdressers. I can’t speak Romani, but I understand it. I have some friends who are not Roma. They come to my birthday parties and I go to theirs.

When the psychologist told me to come to the ‘Children Without Borders’ workshops she organises and said Romani children should be there too, it made me feel kind of awkward. That’s because there are more Serbs there, some from other schools, and I thought they would look down on me. Later on, I got to like being in the group. When she said ‘Romani children’ back then, I felt embarrassed because I don’t want to be seen as different from everybody else.”

AT, 14 years old, at elementary school in Kragujevac

“My father is a Rom and my mother is Serb. I don’t know what I am. When our school psychologist, asked me to come to the ‘Children Without Borders’ workshops and she said she wanted to have Romani children there too, I felt kind of silly. I thought the others

wouldn't like having me there because I'm a Roma. But I got to like being in the group in the workshops."

BJ, 12 years old, at elementary school in Deronje, Vojvodina

"I've heard that kids in other villages have classes in Romani. When Romani classes started in my school, my father said it was interesting. I was curious to see what they would be like and I found them interesting because I can speak Romani. Romani kids were shy at first but later on they all wanted to come. Our teacher helped us a lot. Ever since the Romani classes started, the Serb kids have been telling us that we are going to a Gypsy school to learn how to steal. Some of them are my classmates and some are from other classes. A boy called TL and one from the fourth grade, SJ, keep picking on me. They sometimes slap us and curse our 'Gypsy mothers'. TL once kicked me in the knees, cursed my 'Gypsy mother' and called me a thief. I hit him back and he went and complained to our teacher. She sent us both to the principal and said we had done a bad thing but that she wasn't going to take sides."

DJ, ten years old, at elementary school in Deronje, Vojvodina

"There are three Romani kids in my class. Nobody ever called me bad names or bullied me because I'm a Gypsy. We all play together during the breaks. We never argue, except when we play soccer, but nobody swears or curses even then. I invite only Romani kids to my birthday parties. I don't invite Serbs and they don't invite me either."

TJ, ten years old, at elementary school in Deronje, Vojvodina

"There are 18 of us in my class. Two are Roma. Romani kids hang out together with Serbs. The Serb kids never threw me out of our soccer team, because I'm a good player. Our teacher told us we have to get along and be friends. She said that because of a fight that broke out between Roma and non-Romani kids during a break. A Serb boy cursed a Roma kid's 'Gypsy mother'.

I invite both Roma and Serb kids to my birthday parties. Of the Serb kids, only NS, who is my best friend, invites me to his parties."

BJ, 14 years old, at elementary school in Deronje, Vojvodina

"I am the only Roma of the 14 kids in my class. When we were younger, Romani and Serb children didn't get along. But we don't have any problems now. I have friends who aren't Roma. Our homeroom teacher has always told us that we should get along with each other. I invite Serb kids to my birthday parties too, and they come."

Recommendations

Given that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has ratified and must apply in Serbia:

- the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ratified 1971, entered into force 23 March 1976)
- the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ratified 1971, entered into force 3 January 1976)
- the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ratified 1967, entered into force 4 January 1969)
- the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified 1990, entered into force 3 July 1991)
- the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (ratified 1964)
- the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ratified 11 May 2001, entered into force 1 September 2001)

Save the Children recommends that:

The Parliament and Government of the Republic of Serbia

- Enact, in collaboration with representatives of the Roma/Gypsy community in Serbia and consulting experts in minority affairs, a Law on National Minorities that would conform with international standards. The Law should specify which ethnic groups in Serbia have national minority status and, hence, enjoy the appropriate rights.
- Ensure preparatory classes for Roma/Gypsy children in at least one preschool institution in each municipality in Serbia. The classes should

be attended by all Roma/Gypsy children, irrespective of the social, cultural and educational backgrounds of their families. Both the Serbian and the Romani languages should be taught in these classes.

- Ensure supplementary classes for Roma/Gypsy children in elementary schools in order to facilitate their integration into the educational system.
- Establish at the Belgrade University Department of Languages a Romani Language Chair in order to train Romani language teachers for elementary and secondary schools.
- Provide incentives and additional resources for Roma/Gypsies entering university. The criteria for the admission of Roma/Gypsies should be milder, and government scholarships should be awarded to all full-time Roma/Gypsy students. These measures would facilitate the creation of a body of university-trained Roma/Gypsies.
- Establish a government team of experts to formulate proposals for the integration of Roma/Gypsy children in regular schools.
- Ensure the presence of a Roma/Gypsy medical doctor on medical commissions evaluating Roma/Gypsy children for admission to elementary school in order to counter-balance the uniform tests, which are not adapted for Roma/Gypsy children, and to avoid the deeply rooted bias and prejudice against Roma/Gypsies having an effect on the placement of children.
- Amend the curricula of elementary and secondary schools. The Ministry of Education should devote special attention to strengthening ties between the ethnic communities in Serbia in order that they could learn more

about each other's history, culture, customs and the like, and thereby promote ethnic and religious tolerance.

- Establish human-rights and ethnic-tolerance workshops designed specifically for teachers.
- Ensure that it works together with children with the aim of eliminating ethnic and religious prejudice, in particular by establishing psychological workshops, publishing the appropriate literature and co-operating with the media in the promotion of ethnic and religious tolerance.

The international organisations, including the UN Commission on Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education and the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, and the European Union:

- Closely monitor the international obligations undertaken by the FRY government in respect of the right to education, with particular attention to the right to education of Roma/Gypsy children in Serbia.

Serbia: Notes on the text

1 Jean-Pierre Liégeois and Nicolae Gheorghe, *Roma/Gypsies: A European Minority*, Minority Rights Group International, London, 1995.

2 *Romologija* 4, Novi Sad, April 1997.

3 Group of authors, *Minorities in Serbia*, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2000.

4 *Thematic Reviews of Education Policy – Serbia*, Pact for Peace and Stability in South-Eastern Europe, Task Force for Education Table 1, June 2001.

5 Population of Serbia according to ethnicity, *1991 census*, Federal Statistics Office, Belgrade, 1993.

6 *Naša Borba*, 5 August 1997.

7 Group of authors, *Manjine u Srbiji* (Minorities in Serbia), Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2000, p. 96.

8 Ilija Marinković, a Romani boy, entered the Vienna Music Conservatory, at the age of 9.

9 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) publication, July 2000. According to the UNHCR, between 40,000 and 50,000 Roma fled Kosovo to Serbia and Montenegro after June 1999.

10 “Vares Aver” (Something Else), *NIN*, 25 January 2001; “Afirmacija manjina” (Affirmation of Minorities), *Danas*, 26 January 2001.

11 The owner of Pink TV is Željko Mitrović, formerly a prominent member of the Yugoslav Left party founded by Mirjana Marković, while Palma TV is owned by Miodrag Vujović, a founder of the Socialist Party of Serbia.

12 Remarks, allusions and jokes of a distinctly discriminatory, nationalistic and racist nature feature all too frequently in Milovan Ilić's show.

13 Ethnic distance, a term used in social psychology, is a measure of the psychological distance between two different ethnic groups expressed in the readiness of the members of one group to accept or reject social relations with members of another group. Social relations are graded from the weakest, such as acquaintance and residing in the same building, to the strongest, such as marriage.

14 Dragoljub Djordjević, *Romi – nase komsije* (Roma – Our Neighbours), sociological-ethnological study of Roma, Niš, April 2000.

15 *Nasa Borba*, 5 August 1997.

16 Organised by *Matica Srpska*, Novi Sad, 25 January 1990.

17 *Romologija 4*, Novi Sad, April 1997.

18 The FR Yugoslavia Constitution was promulgated on 27 April 1992 and Serbia's on 28 September 1990. Autonomous legislative and legal systems were established in the 1990-1992 period and Serbia functioned as an independent state in all but name: government agencies did not apply federal laws and its parliament enacted legislation, decrees and other acts whereby the republic arrogated much of the competence of the federal state. See: Slobodan Vučetić, *Privatizovana država* (A Privatised State), Stubovi kulture, Belgrade, 1996.

19 Art. 20, Federal Constitution.

20 Art. 11, Federal Constitution.

21 Art. 45, Federal Constitution.

22 Art. 46, Federal Constitution.

23 Art. 47, Federal Constitution.

24 Art. 48, Federal Constitution.

25 Art. 49, Federal Constitution.

26 Art. 8 (2), Serbian Constitution.

27 Art. 32 (4), Serbian Constitution.

28 *Ratništvo, patriotizam, patrijarhalnost* (Martialism, Patriotism, Patriarchalism), Analysis of elementary school textbooks, Dr Ružica Roksandić and Dr Vesna Pešić (eds), Centar za antiratnu akciju, Belgrade, 1994.

29 Miroslav Samardžić, *Položaj manjina u Vojvodina* (Position of Minorities in Vojvodina), Centar za antiratnu akciju, Belgrade, 1998.

30 Art. 32, Child Welfare Act.

31 Art. 44, Child Welfare Act.

32 Art. 25, Elementary Schools Act.

33 Art. 30, Child Welfare Act.

34 Art. 39, Elementary Schools Act.

35 In practice, instruction in two languages is provided in classes made up of children of different ethnic groups. Teaching in such classes is in Serbian and a minority language, and the children respond in their native tongue (schools in Pivnica and Kulpin, Vojvodina, where the children are Serb and Slovak). Goran Basić, *Položaj manjina u SR Jugoslavija* (Position of Minorities in FR Yugoslavia), in Collected papers: *Položaj manjina u Saveznoj Republici Jugoslavija*, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts; Conferences, Volume LXXXIV, Department of Social Sciences, Book 19, p. 83.

36 Art. 5, Elementary Schools Act.

37 Group of authors, *Minorities in Serbia*, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade, 2000, p. 20.

38 Art. 5, Elementary Schools Act.

39 Secondary Schools Act, *Službeni glasnik RS* (Serbian Official Gazette), Nos. 50/92, 24/96.

40 This provision was contained in several statutes. See, eg, Art. 21, Education Law of the Socialist Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, *Službeni list SAPV* (SAPV Official Gazette), No. 21.

41 Art. 23, University Act.

42 *Thematic Reviews of Education Policy – Serbia*, Pact for Peace and Stability in South-Eastern Europe, Task Force for Education, Table 1, June 2001.

43 M Mertaugh, unpublished report, World Bank, 2001, cited in *Thematic Reviews of Education Policy – Serbia*, Pact for Peace and Stability in South-Eastern Europe, Task Force for Education, Table 1, June 2001.

44 *Osnovni skupovi stanovništva u zemlji i inostranstvu* (Basic Population Groups in the Country and Abroad), Census Book 15, Federal Bureau of Statistics, Belgrade, 1995.

45 Owing to the lack of space, elementary and secondary schools in Serbia operate two shifts: from 7.30am to approximately 2pm, and from 2pm to 8pm.

46 *Mali London, romsko naselje u Pančevu, Problemi i moguća rešenja* (Mali London, Romani settlement in Pančevo, Problems and Possible Solutions, Society for the Promotion of Romani Settlements and Institute of Criminological and Sociological Studies, Belgrade, 1999, p. 48.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

48 See section “Voices of Roma/Gypsy Children.”

49 The overall social climate in Serbia over the past ten years was not in favour of formal education. The lifestyles and values promoted by the new rich did not include a formal education, leading to the belief that schooling was not necessary for success.

50 Mitrovic, Aleksandra and Zajic, Gradimir, *Decenija s Romima u Masurici* (A Decade with Masurica Roma), in *Društvene promene i položaj Roma* (Social Changes and the Position of Roma), Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade, 1993, p. 96.

51 *Mali London, romsko naselje u Pančevu, Problemi i moguća rešenja* (Mali London, Romani settlement in Pančevo, Problems and Possible Solutions), Society for the Promotion of Romani Settlements and Institute of Criminological and Sociological Studies, Belgrade, 1999, p. 52.

52 Art. 85, Elementary Schools Act.

53 HLC interview, 24 February 1999.

54 HLC interview, 18 February 1999.

55 HLC interview, 1 March 1999.

56 HLC interview, 25 February 1999.

57 This is not so. Compare Art. 11 of Serbian Law on Official Use of Languages and Scripts: “(1) Municipalities inhabited by members of national minorities shall determine which minority languages are in official use in their territory. (2) The language and/or minority languages in official use in a municipality shall be determined by the Statute of the municipality. (3) Minority languages in official use in the Assembly of the Autonomous Province shall be determined by its Statute.”

58 Art. 59, Child Welfare Act.

59 Greek Helsinki Monitor, 16 April 2001.

60 Elementary school grades in Yugoslavia are expressed in numbers, from 1 (fail) to 5 (excellent).

61 The New Knowledge Workshop takes place in the Belgrade suburb of Mali Mokri Lug. Supplementary lessons in Serbian, English, mathematics, use of computers and the Internet are held for six hours twice a week, or, alternatively, for four hours three times a week. There are also art and music workshops, courses in journalism, a counselling service, lectures for Roma/Gypsy women, a children’s choir and band, Romani language courses and field trips for poor Roma/Gypsy children.

62 Allusion to “Ciga” – shortened form of Gypsy in Serbian.