

ROMANI CHILDREN IN EUROPE – THE FACTS

Education

Romani children are much more likely to be placed in segregated and/or low quality education across Europe. Many non-disabled Romani children are put in special schools and classes intended for children with mental disabilities. For example:

- Roma make up approximately 30% of the children within special education in the Republic of Serbia, yet they constitute, at most, 6% of the total population.¹
- In the Czech Republic 26.7% of all Romani pupils are educated in special schools and classes for children with mental disabilities whereas only 2.17% of non-Romani pupils are educated in this environment.²
- In Bulgaria, approximately 30% of Romani children attend completely segregated schools.³
- In Romania only 31.7% of Romani children complete primary school and only 9.6% finish secondary school.⁴
- Despite being legally banned, segregation is said to occur in some 900 Hungarian schools, some being Roma-only and others with separate classes for Roma children.⁵

Basic Facts on Roma

- With about 12 million people, Roma constitute the largest ethnic minority group in the EU.
- Roma have been a part of European civilisation for hundreds of years, as they migrated from the Indian subcontinent
- Although Roma are often described as leading a nomadic way of life, 95% of European Roma are settled in one place.
- Roma have the same rights as any other European citizen, yet poverty and social exclusion is widespread among the Roma population in the EU, as they are frequently discriminated in the fields of education, employment, housing and healthcare.
- Roma do not have an independent national homeland state to provide authority over a certain geographic area. This means that the Roma do not have a unified political body to look after and advocate for their best interests.

Poverty

Romani children are widely affected by poverty in all European countries. Poverty rates among Roma are four times higher than for non-Romani households in the same (geographical) community. The effects of poverty inside the Roma community particularly affect children. Around 40% of Roma live in households where somebody went to bed hungry at least once in the last month because they could not afford to buy food.⁶ According to UNDP survey data, between 70% and 90% of the Roma they interviewed live in conditions of severe deprivation. The proportion of non-Roma in such conditions is significantly lower.

Roma children in state care

Whilst Roma have been accused of “stealing babies”, the fact is that Romani children are much more likely to be taken from their parents than non-Romani children. In Romania, for example, 28% of children in institutional care are Roma, even though they make up just 9% of the population. In Slovakia, 82.5% of children in state care being Roma, from just 9% of the population.⁷

Children are usually taken away from Romani families because of poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, school absenteeism, single parenthood or migration even though many

¹ Open Society Institute, *Roma Children in ‘Special Education in Serbia’* (Budapest 2010), 12.

² European Roma Rights Centre, *Life Sentence: Romani Children in Institutional Care* (Budapest 2011), 19.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Roma Rights Centre, *Life Sentence: Romani Children in Institutional Care* (Budapest 2011).

⁵ Budapest Times, *Roma schools segregation swept under the carpet: DK* (Budapest 2013).

⁶ United Nations Children Fund, *Romani Children in South East Europe* (Geneva 2007), 11.

⁷ European Roma Rights Centre, *Life Sentence: Romani Children in Institutional Care* (Budapest 2011), 7.

countries, such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy and Slovakia prohibit the removal of children from their families on this basis.

The child protection system:

- Romani families in Hungary and Romania experienced discrimination and prejudices against them by child protection workers and social workers.
- In many countries, child protection authorities don't have enough preventative measures in place, in relation to the needs of Romani families at risk of separation.
- Detailed descriptions of child endangerment are lacking in many countries. This may lead to mis-application of child protection provisions and have a negative impact on Romani children and families.
- There are not enough social workers to cover caseloads and there is a lack of skilled social workers.

Is it possible to reintegrate once you have been in state care?

- The rate of family reintegration for institutionalised children is very low.
- Adoption is often the only way to get out of state care. Due to discrimination inside and outside the child protection system the chances for Roma being adopted are diminished. Many Romani children are likely to spend their entire childhood in an institutional setting. Once they leave the institution at age 18 they face exclusion and poverty. This can lead to multi-generational institutionalisation of children from the same families.

Given that Roma are experiencing discrimination in the fields of housing, education, employment and health, they are also disproportionately affected by child removal procedures and the placement of their children in State care.

What about trafficking?

Romani children are also more likely to be at risk of trafficking. There is no indication that trafficking is a "cultural practice" of Roma. Research from 2010 in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia indicates that trafficking in persons affects Roma, especially women and children disproportionately. Roma are trafficked for various purposes, including sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, domestic servitude, organ trafficking, illegal adoption and begging. Romani women and children were the most represented regardless of the purpose of trafficking.

- Romani people represent 50-80% of trafficked persons in Bulgaria, up to 70% in parts of the Czech Republic, at least 40% in Hungary, around 50% in Romania and at least 60% in Slovakia.⁸
- 20% of the trafficked persons interviewed for our latest study were minors at the time they were trafficked.⁹
- Roma are highly vulnerable to trafficking due to structural forms of ethnic and gender discrimination, poverty and social exclusion which result in low educational achievement and high levels of unemployment.

⁸ European Roma Rights Centre, *Breaking the Silence: Trafficking in Romani Communities* (Budapest 2011), 15.

⁹ Ibid, 14.