

ROMA EDUCATION IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE¹ ANALYSIS OF THE UNDP/WORLD BANK/EC REGIONAL ROMA SURVEY DATA Policy brief



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Low levels of Roma education are part and parcel of the “vicious circle of poverty and exclusion” (Ringold 2000, p. vii) for Roma, and create tremendous costs for national economies (Bodewig et al., 2010, p. 15-21). Given the importance of education for upward social mobility, the provision of inclusive, non-discriminatory, quality education for Roma minorities in Central and Southeast Europe could have a substantial impact on living conditions. Recently, two political initiatives (and policy frameworks) have highlighted the importance of education for Roma inclusion: the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, and the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020. Both require that national governments set up action plans and strategies for addressing the educational marginalization of their Roma minorities, and call for robust monitoring mechanisms.

A number of challenges need to be addressed in regards Roma education. The data from the UNDP/WB/EC Roma regional survey point to two areas that stand out: improving Roma educational participation (including access to education and school completion) and fighting educational segregation. In providing evidence on key indicators (see Box 1), this brief offers benchmarks against which action plans and strategies might be measured. The policy recommendations² point to potential strategies governments might

consider when designing educational policies, in order to narrow gaps in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma.

Educational participation

The UNDP/World Bank/European Commission 2011 regional Roma survey data outline three major problem areas concerning equal educational participation of Roma and non-Roma: access to education, school completion and early school leaving. Gaps in these three areas mutually reinforce each other—low pre-school enrolment rates severely reduce chances of school completion and increase the probability of dropping out of school early.

Access to early childhood education and care. During socialism, the provision of early childhood care and education (ECCE) services in Central and Southeast Europe was centralized, comprehensive, relatively well equipped, and free of charge (Zafeirakou 2006, p. 6). In many Central and Southeast European countries, the first years of transition were marked by large reductions in state support for, and access to, ECCE facilities—and therefore decreases in ECCE enrolment rates. Decentralization processes in many of these

1/ This brief is abstracted from a comprehensive analysis of the educational situation of Roma based on the UNDP/World Bank/European Commission regional Roma survey data (Brüggemann 2012). It is elaborated in the context of the UNDP working paper series on Roma inclusion. The series includes also thematic reports on education, health, poverty, gender, migration and civil society. The individual papers will be released in the course of the coming months and once released, can be accessed at <http://europeandcis.undp.org/ourwork/roma/>.

2/ The rather broad recommendations expressed here may only partly fit local problems. Studies of international scope must be supplemented by national and local level analysis, in order to consider context-specific factors that are key to the development of effective education policies.

It should be also noted that this brief (and the paper based on which it is written) addresses only issues on which the regional survey provides data. Other areas of Roma educational vulnerability—educational achievement, teachers’ attitudes and behaviour—are not less important but are difficult to quantify at this point.

Box: 14 Key findings on Roma education in Central and Southeast Europe

1. Although Roma educational attainment rates have increased since 2004 in a few countries, attainment gaps between Roma and non-Roma remain large throughout Central and Southeast Europe.

2. Self-perceived literacy rates among young Roma have increased in several countries.

3. Gaps between Roma and non-Roma in self-perceived computer literacy are remarkable in all countries.

4. Low pre-school attendance rates strongly contribute to the long-term disadvantages of Roma students.

5. A considerable share of young Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Moldova and (to a lesser extent) the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia³ have never been to school.

6. School attendance rates in several countries indicate late initial school entry of Roma, and show that many Roma leave school early compared to their non-Roma peers.

7. In many countries, Roma who attend school indicate higher absences compared to their non-Roma peers.

8. Bi- and multilingualism are widespread phenomena among Roma families.

9. Large shares of Roma students attend ethnically segregated schools or classes.

10. In Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, and especially the Czech Republic and Slovakia, large shares of Roma attend special schools.

11. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, most Roma students in special schools have mainly Roma school-mates.

12. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, younger household members are likely to end up in a special school if the household head has also attended a special school. Students from certain regions are more likely to end up in special schooling compared to students from other regions.

13. Acceptability of affirmative action in education is high among Roma and non-Roma alike.

14. On average (idealistic) aspirations of Roma are much higher than their educational outcomes.

(See Brüggemann 2012, pp. 82-89 for details)

countries also shifted responsibilities for ECCE provision to municipalities, (*ibid.*, p. 23-26). Poor families have been most vulnerable to these changes, especially to the associated introduction of fees.

A recent World Bank report based on the UNDP/World Bank/EC survey data for new EU member states shows that pre-school education positively correlates with self-perceived learning outcomes for Roma in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. Controlling for socio-economic background and parenting characteristics, de Laat *et al.* (2012, p. 33-34) found that pre-school attendance has a positive effect on children's self-perceived cognitive skills and self-confidence. Moreover, for Roma above pre-school age, attendance is associated with lower probabilities of special school attendance in the Czech Republic and Slovakia; lower probabilities of receiving social assistance in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania; and higher probabilities of secondary school (ISCED 3) completion in all countries (*ibid.*, p. 34-36).

Figure 1 presents data on the shares of Roma and non-Roma aged 3 to 6 (or 3 to 5) who attended pre-school facilities (including kindergarten and nursery) in 2011, as well as on national average net enrolment rates. In most countries, Roma were much less likely to attend pre-school than non-Roma living in close proximity. Differences in pre-school attendance rates between Roma and non-Roma were statistically significant in all countries surveyed, with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Montenegro—the countries with the lowest overall pre-school attendance

rates. The association between group affiliation and pre-school attendance was strongest in Moldova and the Czech Republic: in Moldova, 23% of Roma aged 3 to 6 attended pre-school, compared to 82% for non-Roma. In the Czech Republic, 28% of Roma aged 3 to 5 attended pre-school, compared to 65% for non-Roma. No significant gender differences were found.

School completion. In most Central and Southeast European countries, primary school classifications cover both primary and lower secondary education. Comparing educational attainment data from the 2011 UNDP/World Bank/European Commission regional Roma survey with data extracted from the 2004 UNDP vulnerable groups survey (see Milcher and Ivanov 2004; Ivanov *et al.*, 2006) allows for a comparison of educational attainment rates at different points of time.

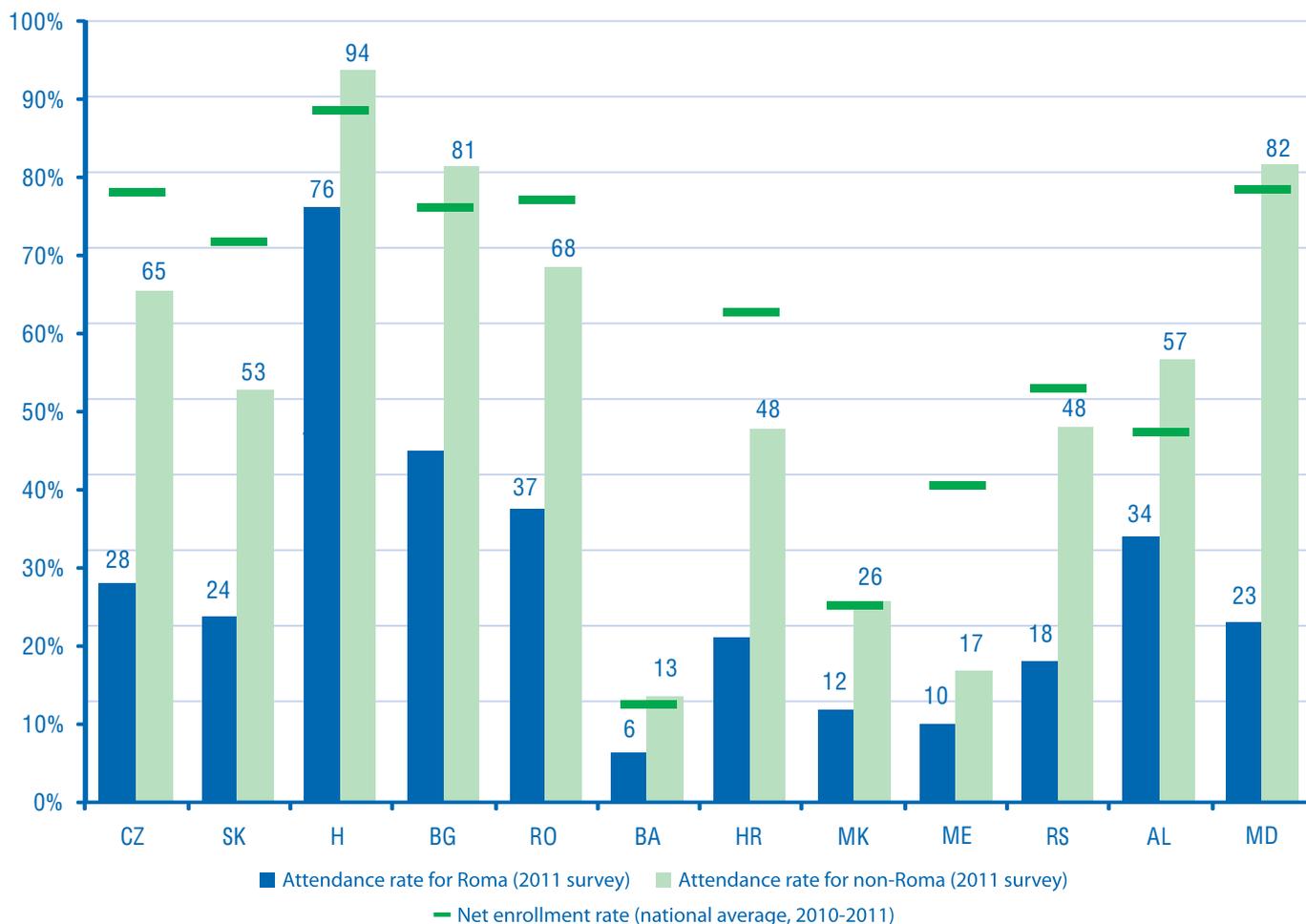
Figure 2 shows the shares of Roma aged 17 to 23 that completed at least lower secondary education in 2004 and 2011. (Depending on the country, lower secondary education in the region refers to four or five years of schooling following primary education.) As shown in Figure 2, many Roma did not complete lower secondary education in 2011. And although more than 80% of Roma completed lower secondary education in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, 2009 national labour force survey data from Hungary and Slovakia indicated that only 1% of the overall population (aged 25 to 64) had not completed lower secondary education (OECD 2011, p. 38).⁴ By this standard, the shares of young Roma that did not achieve this education level (20% in Slovakia, 13% in Hungary) far exceed the national aver-

3/ Hereafter "Macedonia".

4/ Despite differences of methodologies, the data from the regional survey can be compared to provide an idea of the magnitude of the existing gaps between the status of Roma and the national averages.

Figure 1: Pre-school attendance

Shares of Roma and non-Roma children aged 3 to 6 who attended pre-school, kindergarten, or nursery (2011)



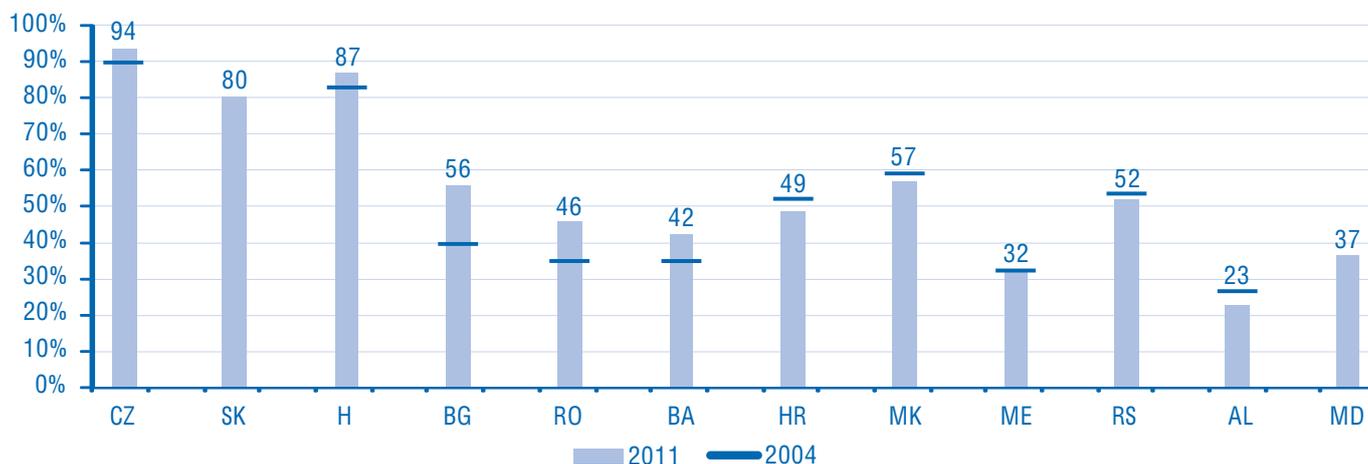
Sources: UNDP/World Bank/EC regional Roma survey 2011; UNICEF TransMONEE database for net enrolment rates.

Notes:

- 1) Children who have been already enrolled in primary school were not considered in the calculation.
- 2) For the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Macedonia, and Montenegro, the age group is 3 to 5 because the TransMONEE reference data refer to this age group.
- 3) For Slovakia and Albania, net enrolment ratios are based on data from the 2009/2010 school year.
- 4) Slightly different results regarding pre-school attendance are presented by FRA and UNDP (2012, p. 13). These differences stem from the fact that the FRA and UNDP results are based on use of a pooled dataset (combining UNDP and FRA survey data), and because a different age cohort has been used for the calculation. Nursery attendance is not included in the pooled dataset.

Figure 2: Roma with at least lower secondary education

Shares of Roma aged 17 to 23 who completed at least lower secondary education (ISCED 2) in 2004 and 2011



Sources: UNDP vulnerable groups survey 2004, UNDP/World Bank/EC regional Roma survey 2011.

Note: The UNDP vulnerable groups survey 2004 did not cover Slovakia or Moldova.

ages. Likewise, in the Southeast European countries, educational attainment rates for Roma were below those reported in Central Europe. Lower secondary educational attainment rates for Roma were below 50% in Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Albania, and Moldova. Moreover, lower secondary educational attainment rates for Roma women in Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia were significantly lower than for Roma men. These figures suggest a structural problem in the making: the employment prospects for more than every second young Roma—and especially for young Roma women—in Southeast Europe, once they enter the labour force, seem quite limited.

Some progress can be seen in the fact that statistically significant improvements in Roma lower secondary educational attainment rates during 2004–2011 were noted in Bulgaria and Romania. In both countries, a higher share of Roma completed lower secondary education in 2011 in comparison to 2004.

Early school leavers. Early leavers from education and training are defined as persons between the ages of 18 and 24 that are not enrolled in school or training, and have not attained at least an upper secondary education (ISCED 3)—including those whose upper secondary education track lasts for less than three years (ISCED 3c short) (Eurostat 2011, p. 203). In many countries, Roma are more likely to have completed short-term than long-term upper secondary education. As such, they fall into the “early leavers from education and training” category.

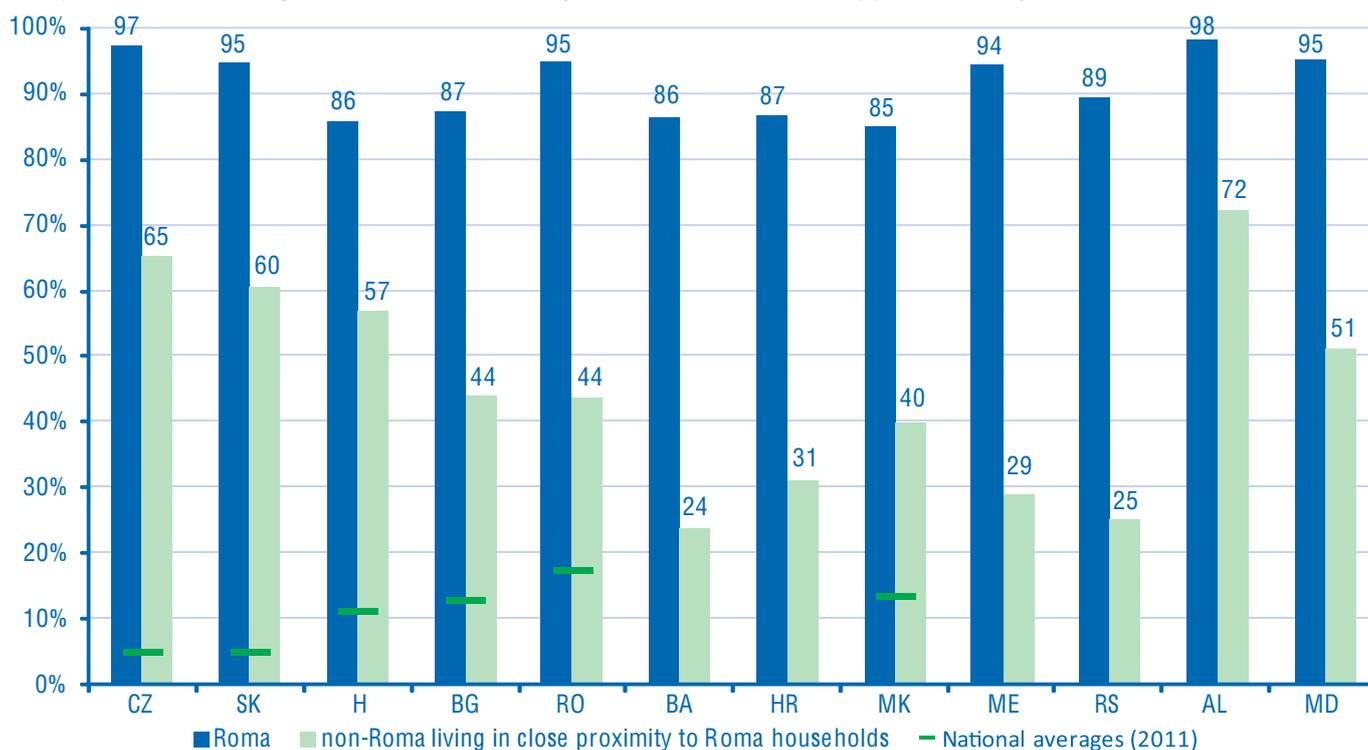
As documented in the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, the European Union seeks to reduce the share of early leavers to below 10% by 2020 (European Commission 2012, online source). According to the European Commission (2011, p. 85), early leavers face higher risks of unemployment or precarious employment and welfare dependency than people with higher educational attainment rates.

As shown in Figure 3, most Roma—as well as a considerable numbers of non-Roma living in close proximity—fall into the “early leavers” category. In Hungary, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, and Serbia, more than 80% of Roma were in this category in 2011. In the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Montenegro, Albania, and Moldova, this share rose to above 90%. The differences between Roma and non-Roma were statistically significant in all countries. The association between group affiliation and early school leaving was weakest in Hungary and strongest in Montenegro: in Montenegro, 94% of Roma were early school leavers, compared to only 29% for non-Roma living in close proximity. No statistically significant differences were found with regard to gender in any country except Croatia, where the share of Roma women who leave school early was 10 percentage points higher than the share of the Roma men doing so.

“Early leavers” are a diverse group, ranging from those who have never attended school to those who have successfully completed a short-term post-compulsory vocational degree. School attendance rates differentiated by age groups

Figure 3: Early leavers from education and training

Shares of Roma and non-Roma living in close proximity aged 18 to 22 who are not attending school and have not completed education higher than lower secondary (ISCED 2) or short-term upper secondary (ISCED 3c)

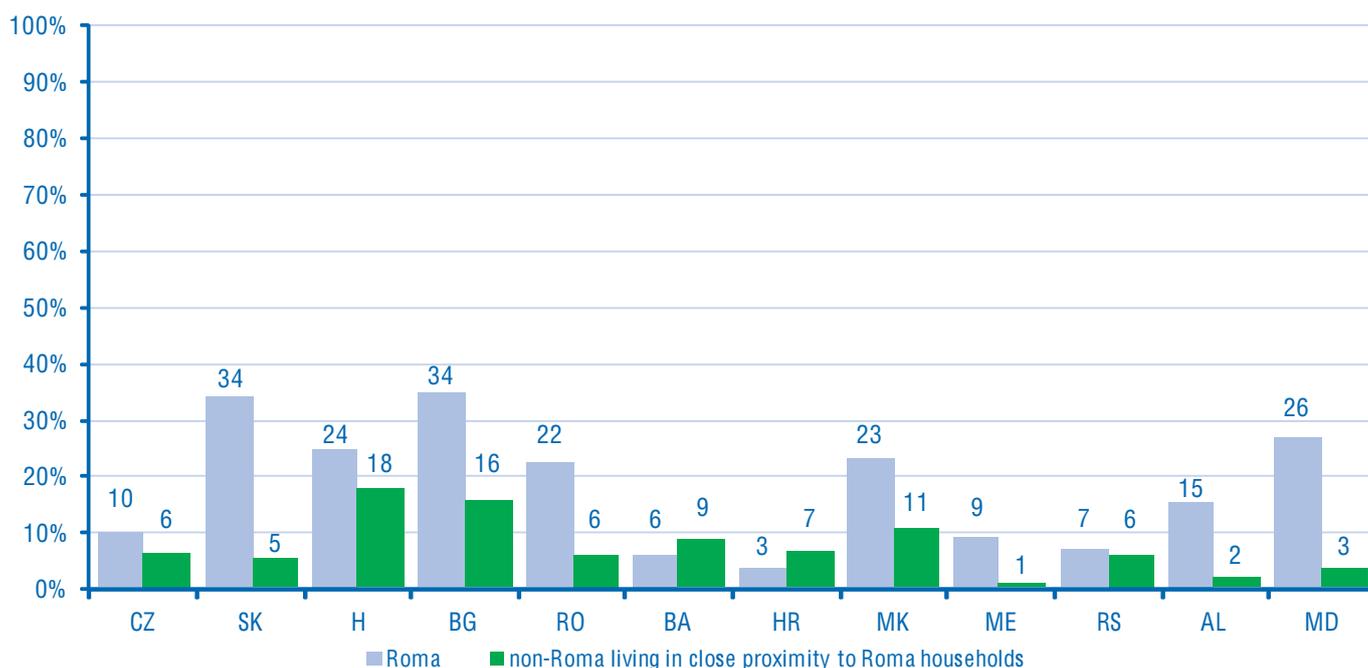


Sources: UNDP/World Bank/EC regional Roma survey 2011; Eurostat (2012) for national averages in 2011.

Note: National averages were not available for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, or Moldova.

Figure 4: Ethnically segregated schools

Share of Roma and non-Roma living in close proximity aged 7 to 15 who attend regular schools with majority Roma student body



UNDP/World Bank/EC regional Roma survey 2011

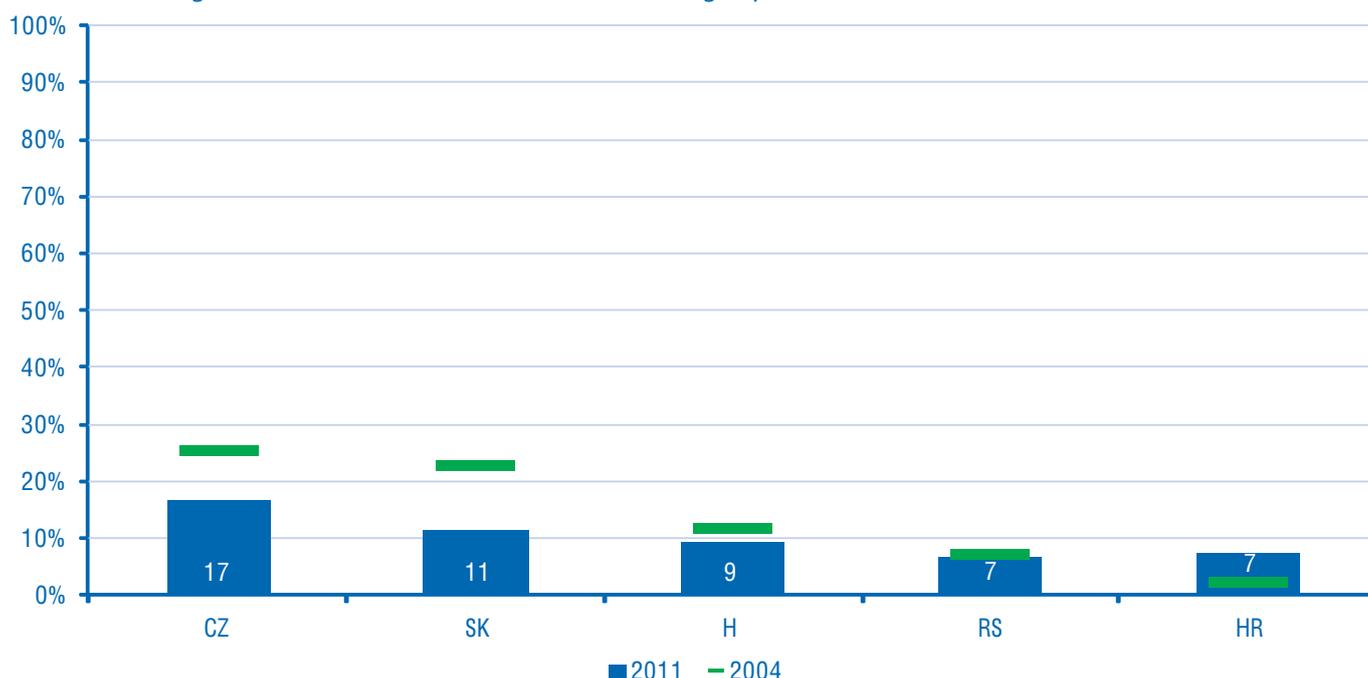
also show different patterns of school participation in different countries. Each of those groups ends up being “early school leavers” for different reasons, each of which needs a special policy focus. Without this, a considerable share of Roma in these countries will continue to be deprived of their fundamental right to education.

Segregation

Educational segregation in the context of Roma inclusion refers to two different sets of circumstances. The first occurs when Roma students, even when being a minority within a given community, comprise the majority of the student body in (what would otherwise be) a “regular” school. The

Figure 5: Roma in special schools

Share of Roma aged 7 to 15 who attend or have been attending a special school



Source: UNDP/World Bank/EC regional Roma survey, 2011.

Note: Special classes that are also considered as segregated settings (Luciak 2008, p. 35) are not included.

second occurs when Roma students are streamed into special schools and classes, leading to their overrepresentation in these settings. When the two sets of circumstances overlap and mutually reinforce one another, special schooling becomes ethnically segregated education for Roma children. This outcome might be called twofold segregation (Brüggemann 2011, p. 201).

Ethnic segregation in “regular” schools and classes. Ethnically segregated schools or classes are understood as those in non-specialized schools (i.e., for the general student population) in which an ethnic minority (in terms of shares in the school age population in a given locality) constitutes the majority in the respective schools or classes. An (arguably) artificial 50% threshold is commonly applied to determine which schools or classes are “ethnically segregated” in this respect (Surdu 2003, p. 1). The UNDP/World Bank/EC regional Roma survey data make it possible to measure numbers of students who report attending schools or classes where the majority of students are Roma. These are referred to as “segregated schools” in this paper.

Figure 4 shows the shares of Roma aged 7 to 15 who in 2011 were reported as attending regular schools with predominantly Roma student bodies (i.e., “segregated schools”). In Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, and Moldova, the shares of Roma attending segregated schools was statistically significantly higher than the shares of non-Roma living in close proximity. In Hungary, Romania, Macedonia, and Moldova, more than 20% of Roma students attended such schools. In Slovakia

and Bulgaria, this share exceeded 30%. The association between group affiliation and segregated school attendance was strongest in Slovakia: 34% Roma attended schools with a predominantly Roma student body, compared to 5% for non-Roma.

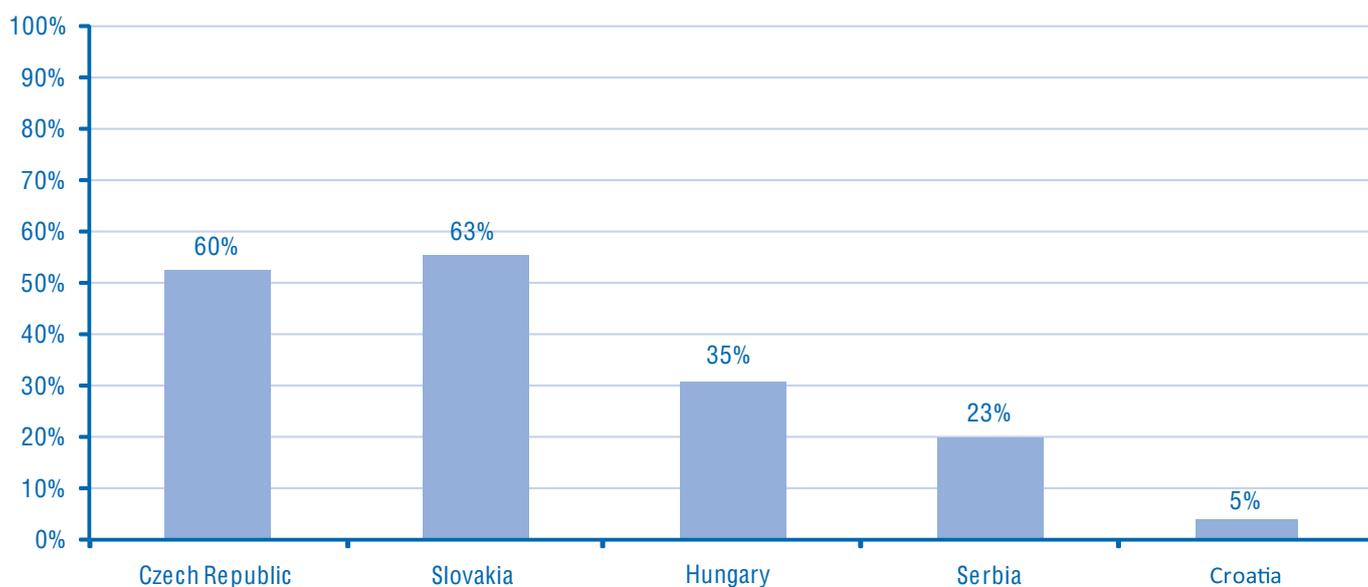
Roma overrepresentation in “special” schooling. The common practice of streaming Roma children into “special” schools or classes results in Roma overrepresentation in schooling that is ostensibly for children with (mental) disabilities or other special needs. This special schooling constitutes per se segregated education—irrespective of the ethnic composition of the student body—because activities in these facilities are separated and different from those associated with regular education. They also offer reduced curricula and rarely enable their students to enter the regular school system or the labour market.

According to the 2011 survey data, the shares of Roma aged 7 to 15 attending special schools (not including special classes) exceeded 5% in Hungary, Serbia, and Croatia, and 10% in the Czech Republic and Slovakia⁵ (Figure 5).⁶ Fortunately, a statistically significant decline in the shares of Roma attending these schools during 2004-2011 was noted in the Czech Republic—from 25% to 17%. However, a statistically significant increase in the shares of Roma attending these schools during this time was noted in Croatia—from 2% to 7%. No significant gender differences were found.

Because Roma students also attend special classes—in segregated settings with reduced curricula—in “regular”

Figure 6: Roma in ethnically segregated special schools

Share of Roma aged 7 to 15 attending special schools who attend schools with the majority of schoolmates being Roma



Source: UNDP/World Bank/EC regional Roma survey, 2011.

5/ A separate UNDP household survey conducted in Slovakia 2010 based on a different sampling methodology found that 16% of Roma aged 7 to 15 attended special schools; another 4% were in special classes (Brüggemann and Škobla 2012, p. 2).

6/ Overrepresentation of Roma in special schooling might not be limited to the countries mentioned above. In Macedonia (Eminovska and Spasovski 2012, p. 22) and Montenegro (Petričević et al. 2009, p. 22), official data suggest that large shares of pupils that attend special schools are Roma. Field experience has recorded Roma overrepresentation in special schools in Bulgaria (Marushiaková et al., 2007, p. 42; Kanev 2012, p. 149) and in Romania (Jigou and Surdu, 2007, p. 10).

schools, Roma in special schools do not constitute the totality of Roma children in special schooling. The reductions in special school attendance rates in the Czech Republic shown in Figure 5 should therefore be treated with caution. “Special schools” were officially abolished in 2005 and replaced with “practical schools” offering reduced curricula (Laubelova and Olahova 2007, p. 23). It is not clear whether survey respondents with children enrolled in these “practical schools” indicated special school attendance. However, the Czech School Inspection reported strong Roma overrepresentation in these schools in 2010 (Gwendolyn 2012, p. 181).

Twofold segregation: special schools with predominantly Roma student body. A particularly severe form of educational segregation occurs when Roma children make up the majority of the student body in special schools. Figure 6 shows the share of Roma aged between 7 and 15 who in 2011 were attending a special school, and who indicated that the majority of their schoolmates were Roma. These results strongly suggest that many special schools in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Serbia are ethnically segregated. In all countries except Croatia, the share of Roma attending ethnically segregated special schools is higher than the share of Roma attending ethnically segregated regular schools. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, over 60% of all Roma who attend special schools are subject to twofold educational segregation: they attend special schools with a predominantly Roma student body.

Policy recommendations

The survey data point to correlations between Roma educational vulnerability and a number of key drivers, which in turn suggest possible areas for policy and programmatic intervention. Four of these stand out in particular:

Universal access to early childhood education. Many studies underscore the important links between early childhood education and future educational progress. Not surprisingly, low pre-school attendance rates disadvantages Roma students over the long term. No further research is needed to make that case: what is needed now is the removal of barriers to early childhood education. These concern physical access (insufficient numbers of kindergartens, remoteness from Roma dwellings), income poverty (the inability to meet basic needs and cover out-of-pocket costs associated with school attendance), and prejudice—non-Roma parents’ unwillingness to have their children attend kindergarten with Roma kids. Holistic efforts to address these barriers are needed as long-term investments in decreasing Roma exclusion and vulnerability. At the same time, steps need to be taken to ensure that pre-schools do not facilitate or reinforce ethnic streaming.

Encouraging greater Roma participation in primary, lower secondary and post-compulsory education. In order to reduce the numbers of early school leavers and increase Roma participation in secondary and tertiary education, govern-

ments need to identify the points in the education system at which early leavers are most likely to drop out (Brüggemann 2012, pp. 38-45). In countries where large numbers of Roma students are not enrolled at all, particular attention needs to be paid to initial school enrolment. Educational monitoring systems in these countries need to better detect school absences, and if necessary enforce attendance. Regular primary schools must be obliged to enrol pupils living in the relevant jurisdictions; toleration of non-enrolment should be sanctioned. If not already established, the right to education for every child with or without proper documents (e.g., resident permits, identity cards) needs to be enforced by law. Other countries might need to focus on preventing teenage absence and truancy; still others should look for mechanisms to keep students in school after compulsory schooling ends.

Transitions from compulsory to post-compulsory schooling are crucial. Ensuring that all Roma complete compulsory schooling, and supporting their transition to post-compulsory education, should be major priorities in Roma education interventions. Efforts to lower the costs of education, investment in school quality (especially in poor regions), and the introduction of financial incentives to subsidize participation in post-compulsory education, should be supported. Out-of-pocket school costs (for travel, extracurricular activities, school materials, meals) are high for poor families. The introduction of attendance subsidies (e.g., conditional cash transfers—higher child allowances combined with the monitoring of school attendance) could lead to better post-compulsory educational attainment rates. Close cooperation between educational institutions at both ends of the transition from compulsory to non-compulsory education, and professional guidance for students who are struggling to enter post-compulsory education, might increase attainment rates.

Redressing discrimination—removing incentives for special school attendance. Inclusive schooling should replace segregated schooling. Abolishing financial and institutional incentives for special school attendance—particularly for diagnostic centres and special schools themselves—would be an important step in this direction. Special schools should serve the very real needs of children with the most severe disabilities (if this is the explicit wish of their parents). By contrast, the great majority of students with special needs should be “mainstreamed” into regular schools. International evidence shows that, when done properly, such “mainstreaming” can be a win-win approach for all involved. Of course, additional resources need to be made available for schools that do face greater burdens in integrating students with special needs. Likewise, personnel in schools that do mainstream Roma children need to guard against stigmatization and new forms of streaming. Proven cases of discrimination against Roma students need to be punished by the educational authorities.

In this vein, the diagnostic tools that are used to determine which students are afflicted by mental disabilities also need to be re-examined, in order to avoid mistakenly identifying

Roma (and other) children with linguistic difficulties, or children who are frightened by testing situations, as children with mental disabilities.

Finally, all special schools with predominantly Roma student bodies should be immediately identified, and be subject to appropriate desegregation activities—progress in which should subsequently be monitored.

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