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THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION PROFILE OF ROMA AND EGYPTIANS

October 2015



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Prepared by: Marsela Dauti, PhD¹

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Paint by Rudina Proda*

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the social exclusion profile of Roma and Egyptians in Albania. Drawing on 34 in-depth interviews conducted with members of the Roma and Egyptian community, community activists, service providers, and government officials in Tirana, this study sheds light on the barriers to social inclusion. The study shows that Roma and Egyptians are locked in multiple traps – poverty, education, health, employment, and institutional traps – that interact with one another and sustain intergenerational poverty and social exclusion. Institutional rules and practices penalize Roma and Egyptians for their impoverishment. Often, service providers and professionals lack an understanding of intergenerational poverty and discrimination, and revert to myths to explain counterproductive behaviors. Social interactions deepen the alienation and distrust of Roma and Egyptians and perpetuate social exclusion. Findings highlight the importance of debunking the myths that exist on Roma and Egyptians. Promoting the social inclusion of Roma and Egyptians in Albania requires a significant shift from the blaming-the-victim approach to an approach that considers the psychological and behavioral consequences of intergenerational poverty and discrimination.

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INTRODUCTION

Zana, a young Roma woman who I met in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Tirana, had a family of five. She shared with me her daily routine:

I wake up at 6 a.m., boil eggs for my little children, feed them, and then leave the shack with my husband. We collect garbage. Sometimes I earn 5,000 (old)^a, sometimes 10 thousand, sometimes I don't earn anything. I spend what I earn. I cook something for my children. My only hope is that my children won't go to bed hungry.

Every member of Zana's family had one or more of the following health problems – asthma, diabetes, migraine, and epilepsy. Zana, herself, revealed symptoms of depression: pessimism, insomnia, and sadness. She lived in a neighborhood filled with conflicts, violence, drug abuse, and crime. Zana paid a rent of 50,000 lekë per month. She lived with the fear of being evicted and the fear of her children getting drown in the nearby river. She loved her children; she was proud of her children; and she felt guilty for not taking her children to school. Zana is one of the many courageous women I met locked in multiple traps.

The easiest and the erroneous way of explaining Zana's situation is to draw on her cultural characteristics. If we were to follow such a path, we would argue that there is something particular about her culture that makes her poor and excluded. For instance, she doesn't work hard enough or she likes to live in a shack that is about to collapse. Unfortunately, these kinds of misconceptions inform public and political debates and, as we will show, even policymaking.

There are lots of myths about the poor. Often, their cultural characteristics are considered as inferior and policies are proposed to 'fix' them. In part, this is influenced by how culture is perceived. Usually, culture is viewed from the normative perspective as a set of shared beliefs, customs, and values. Many scholars argue that culture should be viewed from a cognitive perspective, not a normative one. Referring to Small (2010), "you think of culture almost as a set of glasses that you wear that shape how you see the world ... that is a framed conception of culture, it relies on a cognitive understanding of culture, as opposed to the idea that we differ because we have different values" (para. 6). A cognitive perspective challenges the perception that people from different cultures have some inner differences that separate them from one another.

To explain the social exclusion profile of Roma and Egyptians, we draw on the poverty literature. Research shows that poverty causes stress and negative emotions. Stress is associated with depression, which undermines labor productivity. Stress and negative emotions also decrease the willingness of people to make long-term investments, such as invest in education (Houshofer, 2014). Furthermore, in the presence of negative emotions,

^a Research participants are expressed in old Lek

people prefer short-term rewards over long-term ones. Lerner et al. (2013) shows that sadness makes people prefer immediate gratification, which in the long run might exacerbate their financial situation.

Mullainathan & Shafir (2013) argue that living in poverty results into a mindset of scarcity. Poverty “pushes people to focus on salient, pressing issues at the expense of others that may be just as important but not equally urgent” (Houshofer, 2014, para. 16). For example, if parents are struggling to make ends meet, they perceive little returns to education. Scarcity imposes trade-off thinking. A constant question in the presence of scarcity is: What do I have to give up to buy the most essential items? For instance, should I use cash assistance to pay the medicine or the rent? Corruption and the poor enforcement of law further perpetuate the mindset of scarcity.

Referring to the limited-resource model of self-control (Vohs, 2013), if people are consistently overcoming urges (e.g., food, money, sleep) and making trade-off decisions, “they are more likely to overeat, overspend, and enact other problematic behaviors” (p. 970). Vohs (2013) found that “decisions requiring many trade-offs, which are common in poverty, render subsequent decisions prone to favoring impulsive, intuitive, and often regrettable options” (p. 970). Furthermore, consistent restrictions have a cumulative effect. In other words, “people became progressively worse at self-control the more they resisted unwanted desires” (p. 970). These findings shed light on the reasons behind counterproductive behaviors. In the presence of limited resources, self-control becomes difficult.

Evidence shows that there is a correlation between poverty and counterproductive behaviors (Mani et al., 2013). For example, the poor have difficulties keeping appointments, overspend, or don’t manage their earnings well. Counterproductive behaviors further deepen poverty. To explain counterproductive behaviors, Mani et al. (2013) refer to the mental processes required by poverty. If the poor are deeply preoccupied with financial concerns, then they allocate fewer cognitive resources to what they consider less important. Poverty “captures attention, triggers intrusive thoughts, and reduces cognitive resources” (Mani et al., 2013, p. 978).

These insights into the psychological and behavioral consequences of intergenerational poverty are important because supporting Zana is not about blaming her but rather about understanding the underlying causes of her impoverishment and exclusion, and designing the right incentives to lift her out of poverty. This not-so-easy approach would allow us to support Zana and her family thrive.

This study focuses on the social exclusion² profile of Roma and Egyptians in Albania. It addresses the following questions: How do Roma and Egyptians experience social exclusion? How do the experiences of social exclusion vary by individual characteristics, such as gender and age? What are the perspectives of service providers and community activists on social exclusion? What kind of strategies can be utilized to address social exclusion and enhance access to services for Roma and Egyptians? Social exclusion is examined in relation to the following services: employment and vocational training, education, health, social housing,

² In this study, social exclusion refers to “the systematic denial of entitlements to resources and services, and the denial of the right to participate on equal terms in social relationships in economic, social, cultural or political arenas” (GSDRC, n.d., para. 1).

justice, and social protection.

To address these questions, in-depth interviews were conducted with members of the Roma and Egyptian community, community activists, service providers, and government officials in Tirana. The study shows that poor Roma and Egyptians are locked in multiple traps that plunge them into permanent poverty and social exclusion. Institutional rules and practices penalize Roma and Egyptians for their impoverishment. Often, service providers lack an understanding of intergenerational poverty and discrimination, and revert to myths to explain counterproductive behaviors. Interactions with service providers deepen the alienation and distrust of Roma and Egyptians, and perpetuate social exclusion.

The rest of the report is divided into 3 sections. Section 2 describes the methodology; section 3 introduces the findings; and section 4 presents conclusions and recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

The study draws on in-depth interviews conducted with members of the Roma and Egyptian community, service providers, government officials, and community activists in Tirana. Overall, 34 in-depth interviews were conducted, out of which one was a group interview with community activists (number of study participants: 45; 60 percent were women; age range: 18 – 63). Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 1:30 hours.

Interviews with community members focused on their experiences of social exclusion; interactions with state officials, service providers, and professionals; and ways of addressing social exclusion. Questions with representatives of civil society organizations focused on their work; type of interventions implemented in Albanian communities; ways of addressing social exclusion; interventions that have worked (or not); and suggestions for addressing social exclusion. Questions with service providers and officials focused on their work with Roma and Egyptian communities; ways of addressing social exclusion; and suggestions for addressing social exclusion. Questions with community activists focused on their efforts of advocating for policy change and promoting the rights of Roma and Egyptians. Interviews were conducted with representatives of the following organizations: Fëmijët e Botës dhe Shqipërisë, Arsisi, the Transitional Center of Emergencies, People's Advocate, the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, and Tirana Legal Aid Society.

Two types of purposive sampling strategies were used: range sampling and comparable case sampling. The purpose of range sampling was to capture the variation within the population, specifically capture the experiences of women, men, young adults, and older adults. Range sampling was also used to identify service providers in the areas of employment and vocational training, education, health, social housing and urban integration, justice, and social protection.

The recruitment of community members was assisted by the staff members of the organization Fëmijët e Botës dhe të Shqipërisë. The organization has a long experience in some of the most impoverished neighborhoods of Tirana. Some of the interviews were conducted in the community and others in the organization. The researcher, together with a staff member, visited the neighborhoods served by the organization, such as Bregu i Lumit, to conduct interviews. Members of the Roma and Egyptian community were approached and asked to participate in the study. In the introduction, it was explained that the purpose of the study was not to assess the work of the organization. Community activists and state officials were contacted on the phone or via e-mail and were asked to participate in the study.

Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data (Bernard, 2011). Four theme-identification techniques were used during the data analysis process: repetition, similarities and differences, metaphors and analogies, and indigenous typologies (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

FINDINGS

The following themes emerged from the analysis: the poverty trap, the health trap, the education trap, the employment trap, and the institutional trap.

The poverty trap

Roma and Egyptian families are trapped in deep poverty. They share little space with many household members. Cash assistance is often used to pay off debts. Being in debt has the unintended consequence of straining relationships within the family and neighborhood. To survive, Roma and Egyptians utilize many strategies, such as mobilize all family members to earn a living and make trade-offs. However, such strategies do not allow them to escape the poverty trap. Breaking the poverty trap requires that they save, have access to a stable job, and secure housing. The poverty trap interacts with the nutrition trap, the health trap, and the employment trap, further perpetuating social exclusion. For instance, poor Roma and Egyptians can't afford eating healthy and taking essential nutrients. As a result, their health deteriorates. In turn, their labor productivity decreases and poverty deepens.

Zana³ and her family of five shared a small room. Rita shared two rooms with her in-laws. Moza lived with her sister-in-law and brother-in-law. She said: "We are three families under the same roof." Drita lived in a small room with her sons, nephews, and niece. The oldest son had cancer and the youngest one mental health problems. She could not afford paying the electricity bill. This is how Drita described her situation:

Once the elections were over, our power was cut. We couldn't afford paying the electricity bill. Long live our government!

How much do you have to pay? I asked her.

600,000 lekë. Where can I find 600,000 lekë? They don't care. Winter is coming. What is going to happen to us? I hope I find a stove. Otherwise, we will be shivering ... I haven't paid the electricity bill because I didn't have any money. I don't have a refrigerator. I don't have a washing machine. The only items I have in the house are two sofas.

Being part of a large household has both advantages and disadvantages. A large household serves as a safety net. Household members rely on one another, especially in cases of emergency. Resmije left her job because of health problems. She could not rely on her husband because he was unemployed. However, her mother-in-law gave her a hand and helped her get medical treatment. Resmije said: "We are very fortunate to live with her. I don't

³ The names of study participants have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

know what we would do without her.” Then, she added: “She goes to the nearby villages and sells used clothes.” Moza also mentioned that sharing a small space with her in-laws was not easy: “We quarrel all the time, even over small and unimportant things. My children are always interrupted and cannot do any homework.” Sano looked after her nephews and nieces. I asked her if they were doing well in school. “How can they do well in school?” she responded. Her three grandsons and granddaughter shared a single room with their grandmother and two other family members who suffered from mental health problems.

Parents were deeply concerned about their children going to bed hungry. A young mother said:

Children want to eat much more; they want fruits, they want everything but we can't afford it. If I work, today I didn't because I am sick, we will see what we will do. We will go to a shop and get something. If we owe more than 50 thousand lekë, they won't give us anything.

One of the survival strategies of Roma and Egyptians is the mobilization of all family members. They beg, collect plastic bottles or other items. Lida shared her experience:

I wake up at 6 a.m. I wake up my kids as well and we go begging. I earn 5 or 6 thousand lekë. Then, I get back home and prepare food. It is never enough; I have three kids. I clean, cook, wait for my husband. If I don't have anything to eat, I wait for my husband and when he gets back home, I prepare something to eat.

One of the commonly held assumptions is that Roma and Egyptians are happy with their life. They are carefree and don't spend too much time thinking about the future. They don't care about their children. They just want to have fun and drink raki. “Where there is more poverty, there is more fun,” said one of the community workers. The interviews reveal the opposite. Roma and Egyptians were overwhelmed by suffering and hardship. “It is difficult to live our life. We collect garbage and it is getting more difficult,” said one of the interviewees. Then, she added: “We have to beg and it is not easy. We beg because we have no other way to survive. We have kids. We don't have a shelter. It is hard and it is getting harder.”

Another survival strategy is using cash assistance to pay off debts. This is how one of the interviewees described cash assistance: “We don't solve any problem with the cash assistance. We just pay off the debt. When we enter the [local] shop and buy something we promise to pay it later on. At the end of the month, we take the assistance to the shop.” Similarly, another interviewee said: “I go from one shop to another and promise each and everyone of them that I will give them the money. I lie because I want to eat, regardless of the fact that I feel ashamed when I walk in the neighborhood.”

Being in debt has multiple repercussions: it results into strained relationships in the

neighborhoods as well as within the family. One of the interviewees shared that “she [the shop owner] screams at me, yells at me, offends me. She threatens me. Her son is a police officer.” The debt collector might take revenge or decide to cut the source off.

Living in poverty means always making trade-offs. Consistently, Roma and Egyptians are involved in a struggle of what they need to buy and what they can afford buying. They have to make difficult choices. They buy soap instead of shampoo. Parents give up food for their children. “What did you have for breakfast?” I asked one of the mothers. “My husband and I didn't have anything. I prepared something for my children and then we left. We will have lunch and dinner when we get back from work.”

One of the ways through which Roma and Egyptian families can break the poverty trap is by saving money. But why aren't they saving money? The inability to save is influenced by many factors. First, as their experiences reveal, they have too little earnings:

I am the head of the household. I have two daughters and two sons. We live in difficulties, as they say, we work on the black market. We collect cans and other things. It is very difficult to live in this place. We suffer a lot as you can see. But we try; we sacrifice. We try for a crust of bread, not for big things. You can see that we don't have any assets.

We can't rely on our savings because we don't have any. Hence, we want to have something every day. At least, we should have as much [money] as we spend.

“Can you save anything from what your sons bring you home at the end of the day?” I asked Lida. She said:

[I can get] a crust of bread. Let me open the refrigerator and you can see. This is what is inside my refrigerator. They [my sons] will bring bread but nothing more. We work and eat. We can't save anything for the future.

Interviewees shared that the money that they earn is mostly used to buy food and pay the rent. Anila said:

We get 5 or 10 thousand lekë. We will keep 1,000 or 500 lekë for the rent and then spend the rest for food. We have to buy detergent as well. We are seven people in the house ... When we get the [cash] assistance, we use it to pay off the debt.

Second, they have many demands because of the large family size. A monthly income of 300,00 lekë for instance is too little for a family of 9.

Another way through which the poor can escape the poverty trap is by having a stable job. We will show that stable jobs, even when they exist, often turn out to be unstable. Salaries are not delivered on time or they are too small. In the next sections we will discuss how health shocks and counterproductive behaviors undermine the saving efforts as well.

The lack of secure and affordable housing reinforces the poverty trap. "Housing is first," said one of the interviewees. Then, he added: "The main problem is that we don't have a house or our own land where we could build a shack, which I know it is mine and I don't pay a rent. I use what I collect to feed my children."

Another interviewee explained that winter is the most difficult and dangerous season:

We live in danger. Every winter, we suffer a lot. The river rises so high that we barely leave the shack. We are afraid to go out. We stay inside; we can't leave our children alone. The child might be playing and then suddenly he disappears. Five children were drowned in the neighborhood.

Only a few families had invested in their houses. Usually, they had a stable source of income. Even in such instances, they were concerned that they might get evicted.

Many things that Roma and Egyptian parents do go unnoticed. They forgo food for their children, protect children from drowning, and go to bed hungry. Many parents took pride on their children. "Thanks to God I have wonderful children. I don't know what is going to happen later on but for now I can say that my children are wonderful," said one of the parents. Artan wakes up early in the morning to collect trash. He takes his son with him. He has divided the work in such a way that his son does the easiest part. For instance, his son looks only for recycled materials or watches over garbage bins. "This is why I take my child with me because he hurt his foot burning cables. He would burn cables and bring money home. I take him with me, otherwise he will hurt himself," said Artan. Then, he added: "Living means struggling."

The poverty trap is closely related to the nutrition trap. Interviewees could not afford nutrient-rich foods, such as fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, or fish. "We cannot afford fruits," said a young Roma mother. Then, she added: "We haven't had meat in a year." Another young mother said: "Sometimes we get cash assistance and sometimes we don't ... We want to eat much more but we can't afford it." Then, she mentioned that she goes to bed hungry. Similarly, another mother said: "Children want to eat much more; they want fruits, they want everything but we can't afford it. If I work, today I didn't because I am sick, we will see what we will do. We will go to a shop and get something. If we owe more than 50 thousand lekë, they [shop owners] won't give us anything."

Service providers and community workers lacked an understanding of intergenerational poverty and its impact on individuals and families. They blamed Roma and Egyptians for their actions. Furthermore, they shared what they considered as puzzling acts, for instance Roma and Egyptians overspending, drinking too much, or not taking their sick children to the hospital. A few examples are listed below:

Their income is pretty high; probably, 2 or 3 times higher than our income. But if they earn 20 or 30,000 lekë, they spend it today and there is nothing left for tomorrow.

The child has broken his arm. Why don't they take him to the hospital? ... Why do they expect us to take their children to the hospital?

We find them jobs and they say that they will go tomorrow, the day after tomorrow but they never go.

They don't have the work spirit. I know them very well. They don't have it and I have seen them in the community. I tell them I will take you to the place; I will introduce you [to a potential employer]. They won't come. It is easier for them to take their family members begging than go to work.

They went to the hospital just for a check-up. They neglected the child. They said he is fine. He doesn't have temperature. The doctor is not to blame for this. This is it.

On the other side, members of the Roma and Egyptian community explained that they were overwhelmed by the difficulties that they face, and they are often blamed for their marginalization. They shared their own perspectives:

They [men] drink because of stress. They see that they can't provide for their families.

He might have 30-40,000 lekë and he wastes all of it. I tell him why? Why don't you save this money? You can spend it on your children. He turns to me says: I can't change my life with this money.

They lie to you because they don't trust you.

I want to guarantee you that they are not interested in collecting garbage. They want to work and have a stable job. But where? Would they collect garbage if they were lazy?

The next section focuses on how the poverty trap interacts with the health trap.

The health trap

Roma and Egyptians live with multiple health and mental health problems. Health and mental health problems interacted with one another, further deepening poverty and exclusion. Usually, health costs exceeded food costs. Only a few individuals could afford buying medicine. The majority took medicine only in cases of emergency, relied on neighbors and relatives, or did not take medicine at all. The following discriminatory practices were identified in hospitals and health centers: rejection, unequal treatment, atrocious treatment, and segregation. Doctors and health professionals use offensive language. Study participants had poor knowledge of health problems. Their access to health services was facilitated by community workers who often characterized the behavior of poor Roma and Egyptians as puzzling.

Roma and Egyptian families live with multiple health problems. They reported gastrointestinal infections; ulcer; high blood pressure; headaches; sight problems; asthma; diabetes; epilepsy; kidney, ear, and heart-related problems. Mental health problems were common as well. Interviews revealed symptoms of depression, such as feelings of worthlessness and helplessness, pessimism, insomnia, and sadness. A few examples are listed below:

I stay awake at night. I think about the next day. What am I going to do tomorrow? Where will I work? We try to find work. When we get back home we try to buy what we can with what we earn. The house needs flour, detergent, many things. I can't afford anything.

I wake up at 4 o'clock and I think what am I going to do. Today, for instance, my children are sick. What will I do? Where will I go?

I have high blood pressure. I am old. What can I do? This is where I live. Life is hard ... I live in distress. I have raised the children of my son; they are orphans. I am distressed because of my son as well. He is sick. The other one lives in difficulties. I have so many problems.

He [the son] was hit by a car and since then all he does is screaming. He screams all the time, everywhere. The little ones live in distress. He screams at them and they get scared ... I keep them close to myself but they are scared.

There were many instances of families where almost all members suffered from health problems. Flora had problems with her kidney, ears, and heart. She had asthma as well. Her mother had cancer and her father diabetes. The oldest son had asthma and heart problems, and the youngest one suffered from epilepsy. Vjollca had ulcer, high blood pressure, and heart problems. Her youngest daughter suffered from migraine. Yllka showed me the list of medicine that she was supposed to take. Then, she said:

I haven't done all the [medical] tests but what I know is that I have headaches all day long. Because of thyroid problems, something worse appeared, something really bad. The doctors think that I suffer from something really bad. My kidneys are failing me. I have asthma as well.

Mental health problems usually follow health shocks. "When did all these health problems emerge?" I asked Yllka. She responded by saying:

When my daughter got sick. I have been depressed for a long time. I was paralyzed for six months. I took medicine for a year and then I stopped taking them. I could not afford them. They were very costly.

Vera established a causal relationship between the process of searching trash bins and health problems: "My father-in-law had a heart attack. He was collecting trash, which led to gastrointestinal infections. He didn't have any other option. He had to collect trash." Similarly, another interviewee shared that her children got sick after they started begging in the street of Kosovo. Other interviewees established a causal relationship between the poor living conditions and health problems, for instance floods and fever.

Often, health costs exceeded food costs. "How much do you spend on your health problems every month?" I asked one of the interviewees. "Thousands of money. Don't ask me about it. We spend 300 – 400 thousand lekë. The medicine is very expensive. Even though we work, we can't save anything." Only a few families could afford buying medicine. Others took medicine only in cases of emergency, relied on neighbors and relatives, or did not take medicine at all. Liza shared a long list of health problems. "How do you afford health costs?" I asked her. She said:

I do not get the medicine at all. The medicine for my stomach alone costs 40,000 lekë; for my blood pressure costs 18-19,000 lekë. But I can't afford them. I might get a pill or two if I am very sick or ask my neighbors for help if I feel dizzy. To be honest with you, I can't afford them.

Often, savings disappear because of health shocks. Lindita saved 200,000 lekë during the first 6 months of work. But she spent 185,000 lekë to treat a health condition caused by the difficult working conditions.

However, health recovery is not only about taking medicine but also about eating healthy, among others. Interviewees shared that they could not afford eating healthy. While explaining the health conditions of her family members, a young mother said: "I am suffering a lot with

the little one. We can't afford taking him to the hospital. He needs the medicine, tea, juice. He needs fruits as well. But we can't afford all these. It is very difficult."

The interactions of Roma and Egyptians with doctors and health professionals perpetuate social exclusion. They are rejected both actively (e.g., by being bullied, teased, or ridiculed) and passively (e.g., by being ignored). The following discriminatory and exclusionary practices were identified: rejection, unequal treatment, atrocious treatment, and segregation. Doctors and health professionals use offensive language. Below are a few examples shared by the interviewees:

My son had high temperature. We went to the hospital but no one would touch him.

We took our daughter to the hospital. She was about to give birth and they didn't touch her. They said that she will give birth by herself and they didn't touch her. They didn't take care of her. They destroyed her. I don't know how she survived.

I told to the doctor that when my child gets better, I know what I will do. Now, I can't do anything. Why? Because I am black and you are white. It shouldn't matter for the hospital if you are black or white. God created everyone!

Vera shared her experience:

Two days ago, we took my niece to the hospital ... I took some food for her and I went to the hospital. When I got to her room, I saw that the nurse had almost destroyed her arm. They couldn't find her veins and they couldn't stop stabbing her. The child was sinking in blood ... I got scared, I got scared. I said: I am going to the director. What are you doing to this child? ... There were other instances when I took my children to the hospital and the people there would segregate us. They would look for separate rooms; other people didn't want to share the same room with us.

Did you raise your voice? Did you complain about this? I asked.

Where? The doctor is supposed to know the rules of the hospital. The same for nurses. Where? They were the first who changed the room. The thing is that when you go to the hospital, they should respect you. They should understand us ... We try our best. We dress well. We respect them. They should respect us as well. There are so many things. What can I say? We are hopeless!

Many interviewees explained that the attitudes of doctors and health professionals are influenced by their inability to pay. Gëzim discussed his recent experience in a hospital:

If you don't pay them, they won't touch you. They move you from one room to another. A week ago I was in the hospital. We waited for the doctor for more than an hour. Why should it be like this? Why should they act in such a way? Is it because we are Roma? Why should they differentiate us? We are all human beings.

Interviewees revealed poor knowledge of health problems. This is how one of the Egyptian mothers explained the health problems of her child: "He had something in his thyroid. A few years ago, he had a surgery. Something went wrong and they had to change something." When I asked her to provide details, she shrugged her shoulders.

Often, the access of parents to hospitals and health centers was facilitated by community workers who characterized the behavior of poor Roma and Egyptians as puzzling. Why do they turn to us for help? Why don't they take their children to the hospital? Why is it that the child broke his arm and the mother does not take him to the hospital?

"Why did you turn to the association for help?" I asked Vera. "You could have taken him to the hospital." This is how Vera responded: "If I were to take my son [with a broken arm] to the hospital, they wouldn't touch him. They would ask for an X-ray, bandage, medicine. They would say buy this and buy that. This is why I came to the organization." Vera had to choose between paying the rent and covering health costs. "If I don't pay the rent, they will move me out." By turning to the organization, she avoided paying all the costs – transportation, treatment, and medicine. Furthermore, she avoided interacting with health professionals. When the community worker asked her to join him in the hospital, she said that she didn't feel well. She did not reveal the real reason.

Another community worker discussed his recent experience with a parent who was advised by the doctor to keep the child in the hospital but his mother decided to take him out. He said: "I don't understand them. The doctor told her [the mother] to leave the son in the hospital but she did not consider what he said. What am I supposed to do? I can't convince the mother. The next time I meet with the doctor, he is going to say don't bother me again." I interviewed the mother and asked her about her decision. She said: "The doctor told me that my son needs intensive care. I could not leave him there because I have another child who is sick at home. Who will take care of her?" By removing the child from the hospital, she could take care of both children.

The majority of mothers said that they are depressed and hopeless. They wanted doctors and health professionals to become more attentive to their needs, as one of the Egyptian mothers advised:

Listen to what she says. Listen to her thoughts. Respect them. If you see that something is not going well, please be patient. Don't raise your voice; do not scream. We have suffered a lot; we are filled with anxieties. We might make mistakes because we don't know certain things but we should be respected. If you are kind to us, we will be relieved.

They [Egyptian mothers] have suffered a lot. They have suffered a lot because they don't have housing, they don't have jobs, their children are sick. Some of the mothers are not treated well by their husbands and they don't know where to express what they feel.

The education trap

Education costs put heavy pressure on the family budget that the majority could not afford. Surviving means focusing on immediate needs and thus perceiving little returns to long-term investments, such as education and health investments. Poor Roma and Egyptians cannot escape the education trap in the presence of an exclusionary school environment. Teachers facilitated social exclusion through segregation, the use of offensive language, grade discrimination, and bullying. The families that had escaped the education trap or were on the path of escaping it lived in heterogeneous neighborhoods, had secure financial sources and housing, and at least one of the parents had some education. Educated parents held teachers accountable and demanded justice for their children. Parents utilized numerous strategies to break the chains of discrimination and the education trap. The extent to which they were successful was influenced by both individual and environmental factors.

Should poor parents send their children to school or put food on the table? Often, they choose the latter. "Why should I take my child to school?" said one of the parents. "If she begs, she will earn 10-15,000 lekë." Parents were overly concerned about education costs. Below are some examples of their explanations:

They want to go [to school] but I couldn't afford it ... I have tried a lot. At least, they don't go to bed hungry.

My son dropped out of school. We didn't have food to eat, so he helped us collect plastic bottles and similar things. I would beg and he would go around. The same with my daughters.

I could not meet the needs of my children. This is why they didn't get much education. I had to buy them books and other items and we couldn't afford it. Others had good shoes, better clothes, better bags, and my children didn't go. I would tell them to go and they wouldn't go ... What could I do: pay the rent or buy food?



I wanted my children to go to school but it is all about the budget. I couldn't take them to school because I had to buy books, notebooks, etc., and I could not afford it.

The problem hasn't been that my children didn't want to go to school. It was an issue of budget. I could not take them to school because I had to buy books, notebooks, and other things as well and I could not afford buying them.

Parents emphasized the importance of their children standing on equal footing with others. One of the parents, a single mother, could not afford paying for the school uniform. However, she did not give up:

The other parents have already paid for school uniforms. I asked the teacher and the school principal to write down my name. I can't exclude my child from the rest of the classroom. If the child does not feel equal, then he won't be willing to read and write.

Similarly, another parent said:

My neighbor did not want to take her daughter to school, even though her daughter wanted to go. She didn't have money to buy her shoes, sweat jacket, and other clothes as well ... Can you take your child to school if it is raining and he doesn't have a sweat jacket? ... If the girl goes to school with old clothes, her friends will make fun of her. This is why we don't take our children to school.

Parents reported that their children are more likely to miss school during winter. They keep children at home because they can't afford buying winter clothes, which tend to be more expensive than summer clothes. Thus, school attendance has a seasonal pattern.

Besides lacking the financial means to support the education of their children, parents perceived little or no returns to education. A young mother said: "We want our children to get educated but education does not make a difference." Astrit had two high school diplomas. Disappointed, he said: "My education hasn't served me for anything."

Children's performance is highly influenced by what they learn in school. But what happens after school? Do children study at home? The answer to this question – in all cases – was 'no'. There were two main explanations for this. The first explanation is that the family environment is not conducive to learning. Fatime shared one room with her three grandparents and two sons – one of them suffered from a severe mental illness. In addition, the room did not have any table or chairs. She characterized her grandparents as stressed out and hyperactive. "My children need special treatment in school," she said overly concerned. They had problems concentrating. Then, she added: "They don't learn. They need special attention. Someone should look after them." The second explanation is that illiterate parents cannot assist their

children with schoolwork. "Can you help your children with homework assignments?" I asked one of the interviewees. "I can't. I have never been to school. My husband as well." Similarly, when I asked a young mother if she helps her daughter with schoolwork, she said: "I don't know how."

Despite the fact that illiterate parents could not help their children, they emphasized the importance of education. Lule regretted dropping out of school: "If I were to have education, I would have had everything. I wouldn't suffer as I am suffering right now. I would have found a job. I would have known how to live. I am suffering because I made the wrong decision of leaving school."

The school environment facilitates social exclusion. Interviewees shared instances of teachers and peers bullying and mocking them. There were several instances of respondents who reported that their decision of leaving school was influenced by the attitudes and behaviors of their teachers and peers. Teachers facilitated social exclusion through segregation, the use of offensive language, and grade discrimination. Often, these practices interacted with one another. A Roma mother shared her experience:

The teacher used to separate my daughter from the rest of the classroom. My daughter would come home and tell me that she didn't want to go to school. She [the teacher] used to say: "only you" ... I went to school and met with the teacher. I told her: Listen, I want to have a talk with you. You are the teacher of my daughter for four hours; for these hours, you will be her mother. I want you to tell me why is it that my daughter doesn't want to go to school ... I met with the school principal and I asked her: Are you racist? I told her: Listen, my daughter has all she needs to be in school. I get help from an organization. I am doing my best to keep her in school. She said: You [Roma] are always like this. So, you are racist, I told her. Listen, I said, you are not better than me. I left the school and I told my daughter: If the teacher hits or insults you, don't say anything. She is very sensitive; she cries a lot. Two days after all this, the teacher hit her with a pencil in the head.

Besides segregation and bullying, parents reported grade discrimination and the use of offensive language, as the following two examples demonstrate:

I asked her [the teacher] to attend a class. I observed a white student reading and my daughter reading. My daughter was reading fluently and the white student could barely read. My daughter got a five and the white student an eight.

A teacher asked my daughter: are you *jevgë* or *gabele*? She said: "when my teacher asked this question I hated myself. I put my head down and I didn't speak." Then, she started crying because her classmates started making fun of her. I went to the school principal and I had a fight with him.

One of the community activists shared the example of a child who was humiliated in front of his peers. The teacher told him: "You smell really bad. Go home and wash yourself." "When you make such a remark in the classroom, you have completely destroyed the image of the child," said the community activist. Other interviewees shared instances of classroom peers bullying and mocking their children in school.

Despite the difficulties, parents were committed to the education of their children. Many parents shared their hopes and aspirations:

I will do whatever I can. I don't want my children to suffer as I did. I want them to have better opportunities.

My only hope is that my grandchildren will get educated.

I have overlooked my needs, so I could fulfill the needs of my children. If you take your child to school, you want him to be on an equal footing with others. You don't want your child to be isolated; you don't want your child to feel different.

Parents utilize numerous strategies to break the chains of discrimination and the education trap. One of the parents explained that "If the teacher recognizes that my daughter is Roma, then she will give her low grades. To avoid this, I ask a person I work for to attend parents' meetings." One of the fathers explained that he does not attend parents' meetings intentionally. He said: "If others recognize that my child is poor, then they neglect her."

Some students did better than others in school. Parents, community workers and activists provided the following explanations for their success: (a) the family lives in a heterogeneous neighborhood; (b) at least one of the parents has some level of education; (c) the family has access to secure housing; (d) the family could afford health costs; and (e) the father is not alcohol dependent. The parents who had some level of education shared examples of visiting their children in school and holding teachers accountable. They were more vocal than others.

The parents who had invested in their children's education were deeply concerned about education returns. As we explain below, discrimination is perceived as the main barrier to the participation and integration of Roma and Egyptians in the formal labor market.

The employment trap

Employment and vocational training programs emphasize the importance of integrating Roma and Egyptians in the formal market (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, 2015). This study shows that the formal market perpetuates the social exclusion of Roma and Egyptians through numerous mechanisms, such as low and delayed salaries, and discriminatory attitudes. Study participants characterized discrimination as the main barrier to their participation in the labor market. Even when they had some level of education, they did not perceive any returns to it. Furthermore, the lack of connections and networks perpetuates economic disadvantage.

A widespread myth is that Roma and Egyptians don't like to work. This myth was challenged by the members of the Roma and Egyptian community. One of the interviewees said: "I want to guarantee you that they are not interested in collecting garbage. They want to work and have a stable job. But where? Would they collect garbage if they were lazy?" There was a general perception that the distribution of jobs is based on personal and political connections. "We are treated differently," said Astrit. "Can you take an example of being treated differently?" I asked. It starts when five people apply for a job and only one gets it. The one who gets it is not from our community."

The formal labor market poses five risks for Roma and Egyptians. First, salaries are delayed. The participation of Roma and Egyptians in the formal labor market is characterized by insecurity. One of the interviewees was part of the formal labor market. However, she did not receive the salary on time. This is how she explained the impact of salary delays:

I woke up in the morning and I went to the shop. She [the owner] said: your debt has increased. When will you pay it off? If I get the salary, I will pay off the debt. This is what concerns me. I haven't received the salary in four months ... Because I am distressed, I start yelling and screaming at my children. This is all because I can't afford it."

Second, salaries are low. While discussing the difficulties that Roma youth face in the labor market, one of the interviewees turned to me and asked: "Can you live with 200,000 lekë per month? Think about yourself. Will this be enough? What if you had six children?"

Third, daily needs can't be met. For the poor, daily income is more important than monthly income. They can't rely on assets and savings. If they don't obtain income by the end of the day, then they will go to bed hungry. Astrit attended a vocational training course but found it very difficult to complete it:

I attended the course for 6 months. It was going pretty well but when you attend the course you have to think about other things as well. You have to find a stable job and bring income to your family. It is too much to wait for the salary at the end of the month. You need daily income to feed your family. Otherwise, you will not survive.

Interviewees were involved in physically demanding jobs that undermined their health. A young woman described her short work experience in the following way:

I worked for a company that collected plastic bottles. The salary was good. I used to get 300,000 lekë per month; 10,000 lekë per day. The work started at 7 a.m. and finished at 5:30 p.m. The smell was horrible. We were working outside all day long; it didn't matter if it was a rainy or a sunny day.

Fourth, cash assistance is interrupted. "Has your husband attended a vocational training course?" I asked a young woman. She responded by saying: "If he finds a job [in the formal market], then we will not get [cash] assistance anymore."

Fifth, the job does not last for long. A placement in the formal market is usually perceived as insecure. Roma and Egyptians might be discriminated against, treated badly, or fired.

In the presence of discrimination, interviewees perceived little returns to education. "We have trained boys and girls," said a community worker. "They have received certificates as hairdressers, barbers, etc. but this did not have any result. Congratulations on receiving the certificate but you can't do anything with it!"

A few respondents had attended vocational training courses. However, none of them had found a job. Artan discussed the experience of his son:

My son has attended a vocational training course.

Can you tell me a bit more about the course? I asked.

He completed a course on solar panels.

Did he find a job?

No, he didn't find a job.

What do you think is the reason?

They say he is [pause] gabel. He will steal our equipments, he will harm us. They don't trust us. They should give us a chance and then see how we will do. Rather, they stare at you; your skin color, your clothes.

Similarly, another parent shared the experience of his son:

My son finished a vocational training course. He got a diploma but he doesn't have any job offer. He is registered in the labor office and goes pretty frequently but hasn't heard from them. I haven't heard from them as well. This is why we work in the black market.

Poor Roma and Egyptians lack connections and networks that could facilitate economic and social mobility. One of the interviewees said: "Others rely on one another, help one another. But this does not happen with us because they view us as second-class citizens. It is very difficult."

Community workers shared that their efforts of connecting unemployed Roma and Egyptians with labor offices were useless. Roma and Egyptians did not show interest in the labor office. Even when they received phone calls, they did not respond. To gain insights on this, I asked one of the interviewees: "The people at the labor office complain that even when they call

people and connect them with places of work, they do not respond. Why do you think this is the case?" He said:

They don't like the salary. Maybe, they would get 5,000 old lekë per day; they would get 150,000 lekë per month. They can't afford living with this amount of money. Working for 7-8 hours for 5,000 lekë; meanwhile, you can earn 10,000 lekë if you work in the black market.

His wife added:

You have to think about all problems; 5,000 lekë is not enough. You can't afford buying food, let alone afford health-related expenses or buy sandals for your children.

In the next section, we discuss how Roma and Egyptians are trapped by institutions that perpetuate their exclusion from the labor market and other sectors as well.

The institutional trap

Roma and Egyptians are trapped by institutions that perpetuate discrimination, alienation, and exclusion.

Reaching the scores

One of the concerns raised by interviewees is that they are in and out of the cash assistance program. "Sometimes we get cash assistance and sometimes we don't ... We want to eat much more but we can't afford it. We are in a very bad situation," said one of the interviewees. "Did they provide any explanation for why they removed you from the cash assistance program?" I asked him. He responded by saying:

They said that you will not benefit because you haven't reached the scores. What kind of scores should I reach? I am unemployed. My wife is unemployed as well. I am registered in the labor office ... What kind of support do you provide me as a government? You are sinking me even deeper. If I don't have a job, I will end up stealing, killing people, cheating. I will end up doing something.

Zana was unclear of why her son did not receive cash assistance: "They removed him from the program. I don't know why. They say that he has improved but I don't think so. As a mother, I understand my child very well. I don't think he has improved." A community worker reported that he, and his colleagues as well, assist poor families to collect and submit all documents to municipal offices. The only response that they get is that they "didn't reach the scores." To obtain further insights, they rely on personal connections in municipal departments.

While discussing their removal from the cash assistance program, interviewees drew comparison with others and highlighted their powerlessness. Gëzim said:

I work for a person who receives cash assistance. He has a business; has a house; has a car. I work for him and I don't receive assistance. He gives me 5,000 lekë and receives assistance. They [officials] have to address such things. We need an office where we can express these problems and find solutions.

They [government officials] say that he is just an Egyptian. If we don't solve his problem, he will do nothing. He doesn't have any power and he won't do any damage ... They think they have reached the sky and for as long as they will be in that position, things will be as they want them to be. It shouldn't be like this.

"A period of silence"

Interviewees emphasized that state policies and programs sustain social exclusion: they are not based on community preferences, and penalize Roma and Egyptians for their impoverishment.

Imposed priorities. One of the concerns raised by community activists is that interventions consist of imposed priorities, not the preferences of Roma and Egyptians. A community activist said:

There is a discrepancy between what communities need and what officials do. A community might need the sewage system fixed; meanwhile, officials build a community center. Roma and Egyptians are viewed as a target, not as partners. What happens very often is that their voice is not heard.

Punishment, not support. Government interventions were mostly perceived as a tool for officials to punish rather than support Roma and Egyptians. One of the interviewees said: "The government tells me that my child should not beg. Well, my child is begging out of need, not out of pleasure. If I were to have a job, I wouldn't take my child on the street." A community activist shared that policy interventions are usually followed by a *periudhë qetësie* (lit: a period of silence):

Let's take the example of the initiative of the [former] minister for street children. Ok, let's remove children from the street and return them to their family. What is the family going to do? What will they eat? The plan is not well-thought-out. Parents should find a job; children should go to kindergarten, school, and they should socialize. They removed children from the street and this was followed by a period of silence. They will return again because they don't have any means to live.

Short-term interventions. Often, community interventions are short term. Such interventions were characterized as ineffective. One of the community workers shared that “even though we used to help the families, provide them housing and everything, this wouldn’t make a change.” Similarly, another community worker said: “You support them and they seem to do well but the moment you change the support, for example you don’t help them with the rent, they turn to where they were ... You support them for 5, 6 months and then the family goes back to where it was.”

Empty numbers. The number of children who attend school has increased but this does not mean that their academic performance has improved. One of the parents said: “My daughter is in the third grade and she doesn’t know how to read. I don’t know why she hasn’t failed.” “How does it come that she is in the third grade and she can’t read?” I asked. She responded by saying: “I spoke with the teacher and I told her that my daughter should not pass. She said that we are told to pass everyone and she will pass.” If teachers do not pass everyone, then they will receive poor evaluations. Thus, there is no relationship between the number of students who pass and their performance. This suggests that the standards used to assess teachers’ performance should be revised. The emphasis should be on the quality of education and learning experiences.

One-dimensional interventions. State policies and programs do not take into consideration the complexity of problems that Roma and Egyptian families face. One of the members of the Egyptian community appreciated the emphasis on vocational training. His son attended a vocational training course. However, he could not find a job. For him, you can’t promote inclusive employment if you don’t fight discrimination. He said: “They [youth] will attend the course, get a diploma but they can’t go anywhere.”

Changing behaviors. Community workers viewed it as their task to change the behavior of Roma and Egyptians, such as teaching them discipline or money management. As the head of a national center was describing her work, she said: “We focus on family empowerment.” Then, she defined family empowerment as “convincing them [Roma and Egyptians] to follow rules.” In the field, community workers held Roma and Egyptians accountable. They were under interrogation. “Why didn’t you call the labor office?” “Did you clean up your room?” “Did you wash the dishes?” “Why did you leave the job?” “Why don’t you wake up early in the morning?” “I work hard; you should as well.” These attitudes penalize Roma and Egyptians for their impoverishment and deepen their alienation.

Bureaucratic meanders

The length and cost of formal procedures alienate Roma and Egyptians from state institutions. One of the interviewees asked: “How can I go to Pogradec [to obtain a certificate]? We barely fill our belly with bread. We spend all day collecting trash. We are suffering.” Another interviewee said: “I have taken my son to the hospital so many times. They want so many papers that I gave up.”

Community workers and activists were overwhelmed by the bureaucratic procedures and sought to solve problems through personal connections. For instance, they convinced school

principals to enroll Roma and Egyptian students in school even they did not have all the paperwork completed. School principals decided to enroll students out of their good will, not because they were legally obliged.

One of the ways through which institutional actors sustain the exclusion of Roma and Egyptians is by persistently ignoring them. A member of the Egyptian community and a community activist as well shared her experience:

We received a note [from a local government official] saying that we should move to another place; otherwise, we will all drown in the river. Where? I asked them. They said we don’t know. What we know is that you should move ... We went to the People’s Advocate. He said that we should go the municipality because it all depends on the municipality. We went to the municipality and they said that it is out of our hands.

Others shared instances of discrimination. Gëzim said:

Discrimination is omnipresent, especially in institutions. If you are waiting in line, they [officials] say: Wait, it is someone else’s turn. You are so infuriated that you want to quarrel with them ... We were waiting in line [in the office of economic assistance] when she said: “Stop talking you crazy gypsies, stay calm” ... The evil lies in institutions.

Overall, the social protection system was characterized as inefficient. Specifically, service providers and community workers mentioned that the social protection system lacks responsiveness, transparency, and accountability. One of the community activists said:

Service providers should collaborate with one another: report and address cases. Service providers should be obliged to report and refer cases; it should not be up to them. This can fight discrimination and prevent severe problems. In practice, the system is broken ... The mechanisms of accountability are missing: Who will guarantee that the child has books? The child received vaccination? Who will deal with formal procedures? If the child lives in a shack and doesn’t have residential status, what are you going to do? How will you register him in school? What will happen if he is not registered in school?

During elections, candidates promise that they will change the face of impoverished neighborhoods. Poor Roma and Egyptians were familiar with such promises:

It is only during elections that they remember us. They make promises; will do this, will do that. They just promise, they don't do anything. What kind of promises do they make?

They promise that they will find you a job – based your education and profession; that they will support your children's education. Everyone knows that these are election promises ... My neighborhood doesn't have good roads, electricity. Everyone collects plastic bottles; the children watch over garbage bins. They want to eat. It doesn't matter what you do. Hunger doesn't wait!

There have been a few instances when members of the Roma and Egyptian community have joined state institutions. Being close to power, they might have greater opportunities to affect decision making. But how do they view their impact on institutions? Disappointed, they said that usually they take notes or take care of the logistics. They don't make any substantial contribution. When they raise their voice, e.g. challenge myths and stereotypes held by government officials, they are either ignored or criticized.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study focuses on the social exclusion profile of Roma and Egyptians in Albania. Drawing on 34 interviews conducted with members of the Roma and Egyptian community, community activists, service providers, and government officials, the study shows that Roma and Egyptians are locked in multiple traps that interact with one another and perpetuate intergenerational poverty and social exclusion. Institutional rules and practices penalize Roma and Egyptians for their impoverishment. Often, service providers and professionals lack an understanding of intergenerational poverty and discrimination, and revert to myths to explain counterproductive behaviors. Social interactions deepen the alienation and distrust of Roma and Egyptians and perpetuate social exclusion.

It is critical to debunk the myths that exist on Roma and Egyptians. This can be achieved in different ways, for instance by exposing individuals – through the media, (revised) textbooks, and public debates – to the realities of Roma and Egyptian families. The information should not just focus on their impoverishment, but also on their dreams, hopes, and resilience. Furthermore, the attention should shift from the blaming-the-victim approach to an approach that considers the psychological and behavioral consequences of poverty and discrimination. This shift allows examining the complexities that surround counterproductive behaviors and the ways that they sustain intergenerational poverty and social exclusion over time.

The increased emphasis on Roma and Egyptians has increased their visibility. But what has also happened is that ethnicity, rather than intergenerational poverty and discrimination, has become an explanation for their marginalization. Specifically, counterproductive behaviors are often attributed to the cultural attributes of the community. Using ethnicity, rather than intergenerational poverty and discrimination, as an explanation has reinforced the idea that Roma and Egyptians are too different from the rest of the population.

Discrimination against Roma and Egyptians is deeply embedded in institutions. One of the ways through which institutional actors perpetuate social exclusion is by enacting policies that punish rather than support Roma and Egyptians. Such policies are founded on the assumption that the behavior of Roma and Egyptians should be 'fixed'. Policies that punish deepen the alienation and distrust of Roma and Egyptians and perpetuate social exclusion. Another way through which institutional actors perpetuate social exclusion is by disempowering Roma and Egyptians in state institutions. These efforts divide Roma and Egyptians and their efforts of acting collectively and bringing about change.

The analysis shows that a multidimensional approach is needed to address the complexity of problems that characterize Roma and Egyptians. Let's take the example of education. Providing school textbooks is not sufficient. Supportive programs, such as after-school mentoring programs, transportation, and nutrition programs are important as well. Service providers and community activists argued that a multifaceted program is needed to address the complexity of problems; however, they raised the concerns that the social protection system is too inefficient and lacks mechanisms of accountability; political will is lacking; and

policymakers perceive multifaceted interventions as too expensive and irrelevant to their constituents.

Escaping traps requires that poor Roma and Egyptians make long-term investments. Banerjee & Duflo (2011) argue that the poor might make long-term investments in the presence of two preconditions. First, they have positive expectations about the future. If they have lost hope, expectations do not run high. Indeed, the poor might revert to counterproductive behaviors because, as many interviewees emphasized, “there is nothing else left.” Second, there is a sense of stability. If people live under the constant threat of eviction or other risks, they will give up. Supporting Roma and Egyptians is about guaranteeing both preconditions.

The examination of numerous traps that keep Roma and Egyptians locked into poverty and exclusion suggests that the emphasis of family-level interventions should be on promoting health and mental health, specifically providing support in cases of health shocks and treating hopelessness, pessimism, and stress. Community interventions should focus on making poor Roma and Egyptians aware of existing opportunities, such as scholarships. Community members demanded programs on building life skills, health skills, body care skills, cooking skills, and communication skills. Community workers, activists, and leaders provided numerous suggestions: expanding social and psychological services in schools; providing secure housing; supporting new talents – e.g. in sports, music, trade; offering mobile health and reproductive health services, and dental care.

This study also shows that for as long as formal procedures will be too long and costly, and officials will employ exclusionary and discriminatory practices, Roma and Egyptians will be alienated from state institutions. Mani et al. (2013) provide numerous suggestions on improving service delivery, for instance, providing simple application forms as well as providing help in filling out applications, and sending reminders (e.g., to attend courses). If services are too demanding and place heavy burden on the poor, they will give up. During service provision, it is important to encourage Roma and Egyptians and instill hope in them. The importance of encouragement and hope was revealed during an interview with an Egyptian mother:

You [the doctor] should listen to her thoughts, listen to her thoughts, respect her. You see that something is not going right, be calm and speak softly. Roma mothers have suffered a lot. They are filled with anxieties and sometimes they don't know. They might make mistakes. They should be respected. They should be taught, for instance this shouldn't be done like this but like that. Don't worry. We are here to support you. Things will be fine. If the mother hears these, she will be relieved.

Lifting Roma and Egyptians out of poverty and promoting their social inclusion is not about ‘fixing’ their behaviors but rather about removing deeply-ingrained institutional barriers and supporting them to gain control over their lives.

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