

Roma Early Childhood Inclusion

Overview Report



Roma Early Childhood Inclusion

The RECI Overview Report

Author

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As per the United Nations Security Council Resolution 817, the UN adopted the provisional reference name “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.” Most international organizations, including the EU have adopted the same convention. In line with the UN resolution, UNICEF refers to the country as the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The Open Society Foundations refer to it by its constitutional name, Republic of Macedonia. Given that this publication is supported by EU, it was resolved by the three sponsoring agencies REF, Open Society Foundations and UNICEF to use the name “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.”

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Design and layout/Judit Kovacs/Createch Ltd.

Printed in Hungary/2012



This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction, Methodology and Sources

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The Sponsoring Agencies

The *Open Society Foundations* work to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. To achieve this mission, the Foundations seek to shape public policies that assure greater fairness in political, legal, and economic systems and safeguard fundamental rights. On a local level, the Open Society Foundations implement a range of initiatives to advance justice, education, public health, and independent media. The Foundations place a high priority on protecting and improving the lives of people in marginalized communities. The Open Society Foundations are key drivers of the Roma Decade. The Open Society Foundations have considerable experiences in working in partnership with and strengthening Roma civil society organisations, but also in collecting and analysing data and the evaluation of projects and programmes. The Early Childhood Program (ECP) promotes healthy development and wellbeing of young children, through initiatives that emphasize parent and community engagement, professional development and government accountability. The ECP's rights-based approach and social justice framework give particular attention to minorities; children with developmental delays, malnutrition and disabilities; and children living in poverty. In Central Eastern Europe/Eurasia, large ECP initiatives focus on addressing the situation of Roma children, children with disabilities and children who do not have access to services. The ECP continues to support and collaborate with the national and regional early childhood NGOs, established through its flagship Step by Step program, including the International Step by Step Association (ISSA).

The *Roma Education Fund (REF)* was created in the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005. Its mission and ultimate goal is to close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. In order to achieve this goal, the organization supports policies and programmes which ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems. Through its activities, the REF promotes Roma inclusion in all aspects of the national education systems of countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion, as well as other countries that wish to join in this effort. The objectives of REF include ensuring access to compulsory education, improving the quality of education, implementing integration and desegregation of Roma students, expanding access to pre-school education, and increasing access to secondary, post-secondary and adult education, for example through scholarships, adult literacy courses and career advice for secondary school students. REF is currently engaged in an early childhood initiative funded by the European Union. The project supports more than 4,000 children from ages zero to six to access early childhood education and care services in 16 locations across four countries (Hungary, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia).

UNICEF has been working in the CEECIS region since the 1990s with the objective of protecting and promoting the rights of children, especially those from the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. UNICEF is a member of the Steering Committee of the Roma Decade. UNICEF is engaged in developing a systematic and coherent engagement with Roma issues through the key entry points of early childhood development and basic education. UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. UNICEF is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and strives to establish children's rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children. UNICEF insists that the survival, protection and development of children are universal development imperatives that are integral to human progress. UNICEF mobilizes political will and material resources to help countries, particularly developing countries, ensure a "first call for children" and to build their capacity to form appropriate policies and deliver services for children and their families. UNICEF is committed to ensuring special protection for the most disadvantaged children – victims of war, disasters, extreme poverty, all forms of violence and exploitation and those with disabilities.

Acknowledgements

The Open Society Foundations, REF and UNICEF would like to acknowledge with appreciation and gratitude the leadership provided by Dr. John Bennett in conducting the Roma Early Childhood Inclusion research. He was responsible for developing the research methodology, training national researchers, supporting the drafting of the national RECI reports in the Czech Republic, Romania, Serbia, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, supporting and participating in national consultations, and contributing significantly to the final versions of the reports. Dr. Bennett also prepared the RECI Overview Report, which is as an interpretative summary of the four national reports.

The sponsoring agencies acknowledge with thanks the hard work of the national researchers and writers of the reports who are Martin Kaleja and Milada Rabušicová for the Czech Report; Nadica Janeva, Enisa Eminovska and Violeta Petroska-Beshka for the Macedonian Report; Margareta Matache and Mihaela Ionescu for the Romanian Report; and Zorica Trikić, Sunčica Macura-Milovanović, and Marija Aleksandrović for the Serbian Report. Eben Friedman did a meticulous job of editing and finalising the Macedonian Report.

A Note on Terminology

The text seeks to comply with the European Union and the Council of Europe's adopted usage of the term 'Roma'. The term includes – as in recent official EU, Council of Europe and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) documents – Roma, Traveller, Sinti and other groups commonly (though inaccurately) described as 'Gypsies'.¹ Readers should note that the usage of the term is not intended to deny the diversity that exists across both Roma and Traveller groups. A significant and growing Roma middle class exists, which participates fully as citizens in the countries and societies in which they live, without sacrificing their ethnic and cultural identity.

For readability purposes, the adjective 'Roma' will generally be used, in particular when referring to the Roma people as a whole or to groups or individuals, e.g. Roma children, Roma families. The adjective 'Romani' will generally refer to languages and culture.

1 "Gypsies" is a term that is highly contested and can only be used with the greatest caution, as many groups described as such in the press and media would refute the term. Among the groups that accept the term, albeit capitalised, are English Gypsies or Romany people in the UK; see Hancock (2002), *We Are The Romani People/Ames sam e Rromane Dzene*, Interface Collection, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, xvi–xxii.

Preface

Every European nation has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and therefore has an obligation to protect and promote, with equity and without discrimination, the rights of all children. Yet, across Europe, the majority of poor Roma children face a challenging present and a difficult future. Their possibilities to succeed in life are severely constrained by prevailing negative attitudes towards their families and communities. From the very start of life, Roma children have reduced opportunities to develop to their full potential.

The *Open Society Foundations' Early Childhood Program*, the *Roma Education Fund* and *UNICEF* are committed to tackling the pervasive violation of rights experienced by Roma children in the region. We believe that early childhood development is one of the most important keys to breaking the cycle of poverty and exclusion, a cycle that has proven so difficult to counter with sporadic and short-term measures.

Some of the most persuasive arguments about the critical importance of early childhood are those proposed by Nobel laureate economist James Heckman, who notes that investing in disadvantaged young children is a rare public policy that not only promotes productivity but also fairness and social justice. Investments in high quality services for young children and their families, particularly those who are poor and disadvantaged, lead not only to the protection of children's rights, but also to later savings in public expenditure. These savings are achieved because early interventions help families to improve their children's health and well-being and to make the most of subsequent educational opportunities. Children are therefore more likely to succeed in later life, and are less likely to require social welfare and other benefits. And yet, in spite of a growing body of evidence that establishes early childhood as the most significant period for human capital formation, most governments invest inversely, prioritising programmes that target older children and adults.

The Open Society Foundations, REF and UNICEF have collaborated to develop the series of *Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (RECI) Reports*. The research partnership was initiated in response to the commitment of each organisation to the rights of Roma children. All three organisations are committed to enabling young Roma children to access and benefit from appropriate, inclusive and effective early childhood development services.

The RECI Reports build a detailed picture of early childhood policy and provision frameworks, highlighting the barriers and opportunities for improving the access of Roma children to appropriate and high-quality early childhood services. The principal objective of the Reports was to make information and data on young Roma children's exclusion available to decision makers and key stakeholders with a view to advocate for equitable early childhood policies and programmes. This exercise was a first attempt in the Central and Eastern European region to capture and present systematically the situation of young Roma children. Four such Reports have been prepared, one for each country: the Czech Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Romania. Through examining available data, each *RECI Report* identifies priority early childhood policy issues and concerns in respect of Roma families and children. The views of Roma communities and families, and Roma women and men, gathered through focus group discussions and interviews, have been incorporated in the country reports. Technical experts, representatives of ministries of health, education, and social welfare, academics as well as members of civil society organisations, had the opportunity to read draft versions of the reports and to contribute from their respective points of view to the articulation of policy reforms and practical steps required to improve the situation of young and disadvantaged Roma children.

This *RECI Overview Report* is based on the country reports and compares and contrasts respective policy contexts and service delivery models. It proposes a series of recommendations for more comprehensive and inclusive early childhood services and provides a clear agenda for action by governments. The findings and recommendations of the *Overview Report* are particularly relevant at this point in time as the recent Europe 2020 strategy requires member states and those seeking accession to the European Union, to develop national strategies for Roma inclusion. Moreover, two years of pre-school education for all Roma children has been one of the targets of the Roma Decade, since its inception. It is the belief of the collaborating agencies that the time is right for governments to act. Comprehensive early childhood services for all children, starting with the prenatal period and extending through the early years of primary education, must be expanded, with an explicit focus on the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups such as the Roma, so that the reality of Roma inclusion is realised for this generation of young Roma children and beyond.

The country reports were prepared by local researchers. Dr. John Bennett, an eminent international expert on early childhood development, designed the research framework, guided the local researchers and authored the *RECI Overview Report*. For more information on the RECI Reports, copies of the reports and for additional resources on early childhood and Roma inclusion please visit the Roma Children website: www.romachildren.com.

Open Society Foundations

Early Childhood Program
London

Roma Education Fund

Budapest

UNICEF

Regional Office CEECIS
Geneva

2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chapter 1 Introduction, Methodology and Sources

The *Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (RECI) Project* is sponsored by three leading European organizations – the Open Society Foundations, the Roma Education Fund and UNICEF. Its purpose is to gather data and information about the inclusion of young Roma children in the early childhood services of four Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries: the Czech Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania and Serbia. For each country, national researchers and specialists have researched and written a *RECI National Report*, based on a common format. The findings of each report were discussed and cross-checked in each country during a national consultation organised by the sponsoring organisations. However, although these Reports provide valuable new information and insights into the condition of Roma people, the national authors in each country faced a serious difficulty. Data on young Roma children were often scant and unreliable as many governments fail to collect disaggregated data on young children and their participation in services.

The final section of Chapter 1 presents a brief introduction to the Roma people and their present situation in Europe. The Roma population (along with those assimilated to the group) is recognised as the biggest ethnic minority in the European Union, with between 10 and 15 million people (12 million is the most cited figure). They are, for the great majority, EU citizens and live in all 27 member states. It is estimated that as many as 50 per cent of this population is composed of children below the age of 15 years.² The chapter provides a brief overview of the origins and languages of the Romani peoples; their demographic patterns and a brief note on their discrimination.

Chapter 2 Issues Identified in the RECI National Reports

The following are some of the key issues identified in the *National Reports*:

Progress in policies is being made but a large gap exists between aspirations and implementation. Among the reasons advanced for the slow progress are the following:

- Though national legislation in each of the four countries has developed remarkably, it rarely requires public authorities to take specific actions or to achieve measurable results.

² *Breaking the Cycle of Exclusion: Roma children in South East Europe*, UNICEF Serbia; February 2007.

- In policies targeting Roma, a lack of indicators, institutional audits and evaluations severely hamper knowledge of which policies work.

Extreme poverty, intolerable living conditions, low educational levels and lack of employment undermine Roma family life and the health of infants and young children. The great majority of Roma families suffer from severe poverty, which research identifies as one of the greatest barriers to the holistic development of young children (Marmot Review, 2010). The impact of poverty is reinforced by family stress (due to lack of employment and income), malnutrition (sometimes severe), and intolerable living conditions, for example, severe overcrowding, lack of running water and other community infrastructure.

The social exclusion of the Roma is greatly reinforced by the discrimination and prejudice of the majority population. The National Reports and various European surveys (notably the Gallup Poll organised by EU Fundamental Rights Agency in 2009 and the EU Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS, 2009) testify to the widespread prejudice against Roma groups in the four countries. Prejudice ranges from negative stereotyping to political extremism, with threatening marches on neighbourhoods, used to injure, intimidate or evict Roma residents.

The early development of Roma children, during infancy and the pre-kindergarten period, is not sufficiently supported. The early development of Roma children is often neglected, partly for two reasons: firstly, because of a general under-estimation of the importance of the period 0–3 years, with Central and South East Europe (CSEE) governments spending little on specific developmental programmes for children in the age group. Secondly, national spending on the public services that critically affect young children, that is: public health, social protection, and family policies, is in most instances, well below the EU average.

National kindergarten and primary education systems are failing to recruit, include, retain and educate Roma children. The basic findings of the National Reports can be summarised as follows:

- A high percentage of Roma children never enrol in the education system.
- The participation rate of Roma children in preschool education is extremely low.
- The drop-out rates of Roma children, especially in lower secondary education are extremely high. Drop-out rates are even higher in segregated educational settings.
- Roma adolescents, in particular girls, have a very low transition rate into upper secondary education.
- The total years spent by Roma children in the education system is, in general, about half the national average.

The lack of disaggregated data on Roma children and their progress prevents evidence-based planning or are used as an excuse for planning and budgeting overall inclusive policies. The lack of accurate figures about Roma families and children prevents realistic planning, monitoring and evaluation and can be sometimes used as an excuse for not providing sufficient funds for inclusive policies. Ministries and organisations working for social inclusion do not know the exact number of Roma children, what measures are successful, or whether they were implemented effectively. Without data and research, policy units remain in the realm of opinion: no data, no problem, no progress.³

3 See the Open Society study by McDonald, C. & Negrin, K. (2010), *No Data: No Progress*, Budapest, OSI.

Chapter 3 Conclusions and Principles of Action

1. Roma children are valuable: Europe and its member states cannot afford to neglect their future

Because of the demographic profile of the Roma population and given the ageing of Europe and its chronic lack of labour, Roma children are an extremely valuable asset to be educated and brought into the skilled workforce. Action needs to be taken urgently: to invest more in the developmental readiness of Roma children for both kindergarten and school and to eliminate the many barriers experienced by Roma families to access public services.

2. In addition to legislation, governments need to invest in communication and education to renew majority notions of citizenship and democracy

An urgent task is to change negative majority attitudes toward the Roma and particularly – within the scope of the RECI project – negative attitudes toward Roma children among majority children and their parents. Already, much is being done at EU levels for example, through the PROGRESS programme, including the ‘For Diversity: Against Discrimination’ information campaign.⁴ These activities need to be supported at national level by similar information programmes and through establishing anti-discrimination bodies and/or procedures that can be invoked whenever rights and obligations are disregarded.

Discrimination against young Roma children takes the form of: the non-provision of services; enrolment procedures that favour dual-income parents; a hostile or neglectful kindergarten climate; lack of outreach to parents; the practice of streaming or ‘ability-grouping’, or even the segregation of Roma children into ‘special’ schools and classes. The text reviews these practices and proposes some solutions, including a focus by governments on the purposes of education.⁵

3. The major responsibility for early childhood policies remains with national government. Their efforts will be more effective if linked closely with the Roma initiatives of the European Union

Member States are primarily responsible for Roma integration, including access to the key areas of employment, health care, housing and education which hold back Roma inclusion. The successful inclusion of Roma children in kindergartens and schools will not happen unless countries take on their responsibilities, begin to set measurable goals in health care, housing and employment and coordinate the policies and activities of different ministries.

Roma early childhood programming should be part of national social inclusion and education policies. The mainstreaming of Roma inclusion issues into national policy areas – rather than treating them as a separate issue (which may isolate Roma children even more) – is in line with Principles No. 2 and No. 4 of the *Common Basic Principles on*

4 See <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fdad/cms/stopdiscrimination/about.html?langid=en> for details of the campaign.

5 In addition to seeing education as fitting the needs of the economy, the UNESCO Delors Report (1996) proposes broader goals that are particularly relevant to young children: *Learning to be; learning to do; learning to learn; and learning to live together*. Learning is fundamentally a social activity and its goals should include – in addition to its utility for individuals – the protection and practice of democracy. Inclusive education helps to foster a cohesive social culture among both parents and young children. Connolly’s (2009) research in Northern Ireland finds that in polarised situations, children – even by the age of 3 years – have already begun to absorb from their parents ugly discriminatory attitudes, which must be countered in the early childhood centre.

Roma inclusion.⁶ These principles promote ‘explicit but not exclusive targeting’ as well as ‘aiming for the mainstream’.

In certain circumstances, for example in the case of very young children, services need to be brought to where people are, with the support of the local community.⁷ In a situation characterised by lack of services, community-based programming for very young children becomes necessary. In addition, community programming supports the role of the family in the upbringing of children and assists minority groups to preserve their language and culture.

The EU framework offers Member States and pre-accession countries powerful policy and financial tools to develop and implement effectively Roma inclusion policies. Among the key initiatives in which the EU is actively involved is the 2005–2015 *Decade of Roma Inclusion*⁸ and the *Integrated Platform for Roma inclusion*.⁹ In addition, through its *Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process*, the EU coordinates and supports Member State’s actions to combat poverty and social exclusion.

4. In contexts of extreme poverty and exclusion, developmental readiness for school requires a multi-dimensional concept of early childhood programming that places a strong emphasis on early intervention and women’s education

In contexts of extreme poverty and exclusion, a multi-dimensional concept of early childhood services is needed. Before getting Roma children into centre-based kindergartens and school, community intervention programmes are urgently needed to ensure the developmental readiness of young Roma children within the family and community.¹⁰ These interventions should include pre- and postnatal health, parenting and adult education, play and stimulation programmes for toddlers, conducted in the relevant Roma dialect.¹¹ Such interventions can be implemented in an economical and sensitive way by the local health and paediatric services, in consultation with Roma communities and NGOs, and with the help of Roma health and education assistants. Only Roma participation can ensure the legitimacy, accountability and success of such services.

Interventions will also pay special attention to the education of girls. In all countries, the educational level of mothers is a significant indicator of a child’s success (or lack of it) in school. The improved education of Roma girls will make possible the early stimulation, language inputs and educational support that future Roma children will receive.

- 6 See <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st10/st10394.en09.pdf>; “Explicit but not exclusive targeting of the Roma is essential for inclusion policy initiatives. It implies focusing on Roma people as a target group but not to the exclusion of other people who share similar socio-economic circumstances...”; “All inclusion policies aim to insert the Roma in the mainstream of society (mainstream educational institutions, mainstream jobs, and mainstream housing)...”.
- 7 ‘Local community’ may mean a grouping smaller than the local municipality. In many instances, the latter may not be sensitive to the concerns of Roma parents.
- 8 See <http://www.romadecade.org>.
- 9 http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/roma-platform/index_en.htm.
- 10 *Developmental readiness for school* includes not only verbal and intellectual skills and knowledge, but also social abilities and health and nutritional status that predict preparedness for life and not just for school. (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001). This concept is distinguished from *school readiness* which normally refers to “preparation for school” – i.e. is limited to the knowledge and 3R skills deemed necessary to participate in primary education. (UNICEF, 2008).
- 11 At present there are some 80 different varieties of Romani-chib, or Romanës, spoken by differing Romani groups – see <http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/whatis/language/origins.shtml>.

5. For successful policy implementation, effective governance of the sector is critical

All the RECI *National Reports* refer to weaknesses in the current governance of early childhood programming for majority and Roma children. A common critique is the failure to develop and coordinate national policy. Ministries continue to pursue their traditional aims without reference to each other or to Romani (and other) NGOs working in the field.

The Overview recommends for consideration the establishing of an Early Childhood Council in every local government to coordinate policy for social inclusion, child health and education, from infancy to school age. This Council could involve a wide range of stakeholders, including Roma representation in those municipalities where Roma communities exist.

6. Effective kindergartens and schools for excluded children need clear goals, high quality, expanded services, outreach to parents and appropriate pedagogies. A free place in kindergarten should be provided for at least two years to every child coming from an 'absolute poverty' background

In summary form, government policymakers might wish to consider the following goals for young Roma children at different ages:

Table 1. An early childhood development agenda for Roma children

| Developmental stage | Issues to address |
|-------------------------------|---|
| A. Conception – birth | Ensuring quality pre- and postnatal health care for mothers and infants within the communities, through visiting health services and the use of Romani bridging personnel. Reasonable family living standards. Counselling for self-care, preparing for delivery, parenting and family planning. Parent education. |
| B. Birth – age 3 years | Birth registration. Communication and counselling for health care, nutrition and feeding, with an emphasis on infant-caregiver interaction; attention to the play, social development and language development of toddlers through providing a responsive, rich and stimulating learning environment. |
| C. 3–6 years | Access to quality early learning opportunities in public kindergartens: a safe, hygienic and stimulating environment; qualified providers; a quality curriculum; developmentally appropriate and inter-active; culturally and linguistically sensitive; gender sensitive; active parental participation; continuous assessment of programme quality and child development outcomes. |
| D. 6–8 years | Focus on developmental school readiness; getting schools ready for children, eliminating all forms to segregation, special schools and classrooms; getting families ready for children's schooling. |

Source: adapted from UNICEF, 2008.

Research suggests that steps A and B above are critical, that is, to secure reasonable living standards for Roma families from which to ensure health, social care and stimulation for young children in the first three years. The need – and the pseudo need as well – for special schools and classrooms would quickly disappear if Roma families had better living conditions in which to rear their children and if the early services and kindergartens were empowered to do comprehensive work.

In all countries, every disadvantaged child (including Roma children) should be given an entitlement to a free place in kindergarten for at least two years before compulsory

schooling and disadvantaged Roma parents provided with the necessary supports to enable their children to take up such an entitlement. Recent analyses of the funding of pre-school provision suggest that the CSEE countries could achieve such an aim *within their present budgets*, if afternoon kindergarten services (which cater for dual-working parents) were financed more equitably by users and abolished where they are not needed. In communities where, at present, no kindergartens exist, community services for families and young children under 3 years of age should be extended upwards to include children of kindergarten age and should employ trained Roma teachers and assistants to initiate and supervise these services.

7. Evidence-based policy in favour of Roma children will not be achieved without research, consultation and data collection

The Open Society Foundations have contributed to the debate on the lack of data on Roma children through its publication: *No Data, No Progress* (OSI, 2010),¹² which makes the case for the collection of disaggregated data, noting that the lack of reliable data about Roma communities remains a major obstacle to reducing inequality and eliminating discrimination. The Open Society Foundations have also made detailed recommendations on the why, what and how of data collection and monitoring within the context of the Roma Decade.

Concerns are expressed by Roma people concerning data collection and its uses. These concerns need to be taken at face value and robust systems of data protection established.

Reasons for greater optimism about data collection now exist: there is new focus at European level on rigorous data collection, benchmarking, monitoring and evaluation. The European Commission in its recent communication: *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*¹³ calls attention to the need for better data in individual national plans for Roma inclusion.

12 <http://www.romadecade.org/files/downloads/General%20Resources/No%20Data%20No%20Progress%20Country%20Findings.pdf>.

13 http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/discrimination/docs/com_2011_173_en.pdf.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction, Methodology and Sources

Key Messages of Chapter 1

- A major purpose of the RECI National Reports is to provide information to policymakers in the four participating countries. Reliable data can help to open discussions concerning the lack of access of Roma children to early development services and to propose certain key principles of action.
- The Roma constitute Europe's largest minority (about 12 million people).¹⁴ It is a young population: 35.7 per cent are under 15 compared to 15.7 per cent of the EU population overall. Only a small proportion of these children complete primary education. From 10 to 36 per cent enrol in secondary education. Across the region, less than two per cent of Roma have access to higher education.¹⁵
- Roma children present a real opportunity for an ageing Europe. Through continuing education, starting in their homes and kindergartens, these children can have a better life, contribute to their own culture and join their fellow citizens in building the economies and societies of their respective countries.

1. Overview of the RECI Project and Methodology

The need for the *Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (RECI) Project* stems from the convergence of different rationales:

1. The unacceptable poverty and discrimination against Roma families and their children in European countries.¹⁶

14 According to the Council of Europe; see http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/default_en.asp.

15 *Education for Some More than Others? A regional study on education in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEECIS)*; UNICEF Regional Office for CEECIS, 2007.

16 We are aware also that there are many successful Roma people, that Roma groups differ from each other and that Roma society is socially stratified. Our concern is for the many Roma children who live in dire poverty and are denied the educational opportunities that could break the inter-generational transmission of poverty and enable countries to avail of the positive contribution to society that Roma children can make.

2. The commitment of the Roma and their organisations, backed by the European Union and international organizations, to change the situation.
3. The realisation by governments that the Roma population is growing more rapidly than majority populations and, in several countries, will soon constitute a significant part of the workforce.
4. The understanding that the early childhood period is the foundation stage not only of individual development but also of lifelong health and education. Investments must be made from the beginning if Roma children are to acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills to continue education and become part of a skilled European workforce.
5. The lack of reliable data on young Roma children in the Central and South-Eastern European (CSEE) countries – in particular, concerning their health, developmental and education status – hinders the development of evidence-based policies.

Methodology

A major purpose of the RECI Project is to gather reliable data and information about the inclusion of young Roma children in the early childhood services of four Central and South-Eastern European (CSEE) countries: the Czech Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania and Serbia. For each country, a *RECI National Report* has been researched and written by national early childhood specialists, one of whom, in each country, was of Romani origin. The reports follow a common format, agreed in advance by the sponsors and the lead researcher. The main conclusions of the reports and the data on which they were based were validated in each case by a national meeting of all the stakeholders, including Roma and government representatives. Further conclusions and recommendations were drawn from the national consultations and are included in the national profiles in Annex 1.

The present *Overview Report* is an interpretative summary of the four *National Reports*. It falls into three parts: Chapter 1, which serves as an introduction to the project and describes the methodology used; Chapter 2, which outlines the issues and challenges that emerge from the National Reports; and Chapter 3, which proposes conclusions and policy orientations.

The validity of the *Overview Report* depends greatly on the data provided in the National Reports and on the validity of the processes and selection criteria used by the national authors. As will be seen in Chapter 2, data on Roma children and their families are both scant and unreliable.¹⁷ Not only do many Roma individuals not choose to declare themselves as Roma, but governments also fail to collect reliable data on the ethnic background of impoverished populations and service users. Even for as simple an indicator as population size, census data significantly undercount the actual number of Roma people because of the common practice of relying on self-identification. Data on Roma education are also frequently lacking because of legislation and regulations that are interpreted to prohibit the collection of data based on ethnicity or misinterpretations of the existing legislation. For example, Czechoslovakia stopped collecting disaggregated data on Roma in 1990, and Hungary followed suit in 1993. As a result, policy toward Roma families is often based on traditional ministerial reflexes rather than on data-based evidence. The *National Report* authors have been careful to cross-check the figures that they propose, but given the weakness of data collection in this field, errors of interpretation are possible.¹⁸

17 See “No Data, No Progress”, <http://www.romadecade.org/files/downloads/General%20Resources/No%20Data%20No%20Progress%20Country%20Findings.pdf>.

18 The most widely accepted figures for Romani populations can be found on the Council of Europe’s web site; see www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/Source/documents/stats.xls.

Qualitative data on the situation of the Roma in each country were collected through literature reviews and semi-structured interviews with key informants, such as central and local government policy makers, Roma experts and NGOs, early childhood centres and educators, and various focus groups. While the authors were unable to use a strictly representative sampling approach in the organization of focus groups and interviews, a broad range of actors were consulted and a broad variety of perspectives obtained. Thus, while the reports often offer insights rather than a rigorous analysis of interviews, it is reassuring from a methodological perspective to know that a strong concordance of views emerges across the different countries concerning the general situation of Roma populations.

2. The Roma People

Origin and languages: According to the Council of Europe, the term “Roma” refers to a variety of groups of people who describe themselves as Roma, Gypsies, Travellers, Manouches, Ashkali, Sinti, as well as other self-ascriptions.¹⁹ Strong linguistic and genetic evidence exists to suggest that ancestors of the original group or groups emigrated from the north-western Indian lands (possibly from Rajasthan and what is now modern-day Pakistan), in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, via Persia, Anatolia and the Balkans to Central and Eastern Europe by the fourteenth century and on into western and northern Europe by the early fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They speak a number of related dialects of the Romani language,²⁰ which are Indic in origins and contain admixtures of Persian, Greek and the Balkan languages, frequently mixed with words from the majority national language of the country in which modern Roma populations live. In some cases, these dialects are heavily influenced by the dominant language to form contact languages such as Anglo-Romani or Scandinavian Romani. Some groups have maintained their language competence whilst others have lost theirs, due to assimilative processes or attempts at forced eradication of Romani language and culture, in a national context.²¹

Today, with an estimated population of around 12 million people, they constitute the largest ethnic minority in Europe, present in all 27 EU Member States. Because of their heterogeneous background and the range of countries and environments in which they live, there cannot be a single inclusion strategy suitable for all Roma groups. A Hungarian survey has shown, for example, that the share of Roma with less than basic education was 23 per cent for the Romungro Roma (whose native language is Hungarian), 42 per cent for the Bayash (native Romanian speakers), and 48 per cent for the Wallach or Vlach Roma (Kalderash and Lovari whose mother tongue is Vlach Romani)²² (Puporka and Zádori, 1999). There is a need, therefore, for differentiated approaches that take

19 The term “Roma” used at the Council of Europe and elsewhere refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as “Gypsies”; see “Glossary on Roma and Travellers”, <http://www.coe.int/lportal/web/coe-portal/roma>.

20 Called *Romanës* or *Rromani-chib* in Romani dialects; see Lee, Ronald (2005), *Learn Romani/Das-duma Rromanes*, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press; Hancock, Ian (2002), *We Are the Romani People...* Interface Collection, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, chap. 14 ‘Amari Chib: Our Language’, pp. 139–149.

21 Policies aimed at this process have been in existence since the early seventeenth century in Spain and particularly under the reign of the Habsburg Empress, Marie-Therese (1740–80) and her son, Joseph II (1780–90). Late nineteenth century and early twentieth century attempts to eradicate Romani language and culture, in Norway for example, were frequently sponsored by the national churches, hand-in-hand with forced sedentarisation and removing children from parents to raise as non-Romani, involuntary sterilisation programmes and ultimately, under the racial hygiene laws in many states, such as Sweden, during the 1935–1945 period, the reduction of the Romani populations.

22 See Matras, Yaron (2005), *Romani: A Linguistic Introduction*, Cambs: Cambridge University Press, pp. 5–13.

account of the different backgrounds of Roma groups and individuals and of the different geographical, economic, social, cultural and legal contexts of the countries in which they live. However, a unifying feature of the situation of Roma across Europe is the widespread rejection and social exclusion practised toward them by majority populations. As a result, too many Roma children live in dire poverty and are denied the educational opportunities that could break the inter-generational transmission of deprivation and exclusion.

Discrimination: Historically, Roma populations have been a target for discrimination and xenophobia. During the Second World War and the Nazi occupation of central Europe, between 200,000 and 800,000 Roma people²³ lost their lives because of their ethnicity.²⁴ Under the communist regimes, Roma communities, though restricted in the expression of their cultural traditions and language, fared better; children were more integrated into education systems and most of Roma adults were employed in the state-controlled economies. However, the period of transition from 1989 led to a heavy loss of employment amongst Roma, forcing many families into long-term unemployment and the need to seek social assistance.²⁵

Box 1. World Bank Policy Note on the Economic Costs of Roma Exclusion (2010)

On the occasion of the 2nd EU Roma Summit in Cordoba, April 8–9, 2010, the World Bank presented a *Policy Note* focusing on the economic benefits of eliminating the productivity gap between Roma and majority populations in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania, and Serbia. These four countries represent more than two-thirds of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. The analysis is based on quantitative data from seven household surveys in the four countries and information from interviews with 222 stakeholders – government and non-government officials and Roma and non-Roma. The Policy Note finds that Roma want to work but cannot find jobs in the countries studied. The public perception often holds that Roma do not want to work and are overwhelmingly dependent on social assistance programmes, such as guaranteed minimum social assistance. Yet, according to the Policy Note, work rates – often in the grey economy – are higher among Roma males than those of non-Roma in 3 out of the 4 countries, although very high numbers are officially unemployed. In other words, Roma men are willing to work, but cannot find official jobs. 20 per cent of Roma men looking for jobs remain unemployed, while among Roma women, 39 per cent seeking jobs cannot obtain work.

In sum, although they have been an integral part of European society for about seven hundred years, Romani cultures are rarely spoken about or included in school programmes, beyond stereotyped references. In their daily lives, Romani people face discrimination and social exclusion, based on racial prejudice, stereotyping and as a consequence, are confronted by profoundly negative attitudes, frequently articulated by populist politicians, ultra-nationalist political parties and the mass media.

Demographic patterns: Roma populations have been traditionally concentrated in south-eastern, Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, with the largest populations in

23 Romani scholars such as Ian Hancock would suggest figures of between 600,000 and one million, based upon the evidence; see “We Are the Romani People (Ame Sam E Rromane Dzene),” Interface Collection, University of Hertfordshire Press: Hatfield.

24 See Matras, Yaron (2005), *Romani: A Linguistic Introduction*, Cambs: Cambridge University Press, pp. 5–13.

25 European Commission (2004), *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union: Employment and Social Affairs. Fundamental Rights and Anti-discrimination*.

Turkey and the Balkans although today, they are migrating northwards and westwards throughout Europe in search of work.²⁶ Reliable data are hard to come by, but they form a significant (estimated) proportion of the population in Bulgaria (around 10 per cent), Slovakia (9 per cent), Romania (8 per cent), and Hungary (7 per cent). They are also present significantly in the western Balkans, including Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Many Roma do not possess identity documents; or are included in the general category of minority groups, or for a variety of reasons, prefer not to identify as Roma.²⁷

Today, Roma groups have significantly higher fertility (and mortality) rates than mainstream populations in the CEE countries. According to the recent *EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*:

The Roma population is young: 35.7 per cent are under 15 compared to 15.7 per cent of the EU population overall. The average age is 25 among Roma, compared with 40 across the EU. The vast majority of working-age Roma lack the education needed to find good jobs. It is therefore of crucial importance to invest in the education of Roma children to allow them later on to successfully enter the labour market. In Member States with significant Roma populations, this already has an economic impact. According to estimates, in Bulgaria, about 23 per cent of new labour entrants are Roma, in Romania, about 21 per cent.

The RECI Report draws a more child-centred conclusion. If given the opportunity, Roma children – through education – can have a better life and contribute to their own culture and to the economies and societies of their respective countries. No country with a sizeable Roma minority can afford not to address issues of social justice and education in regard to these children.

Chapter 2: will outline, *inter alia*, the extent of the discrimination and social exclusion of Romani populations in the four countries studies, in particular, across core indicators such as housing, employment, nutrition, health, development and education. In different Roma communities, both young children and women (especially in the child-bearing years) are exposed to particularly high risks in these areas.

26 Statistics drawn from the Council of Europe's Roma and Traveller Division (updated 14/09/2010), available at <http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/romatravellers/Source/documents/stats.xls>.

27 *Roma children in South East Europe – The Challenge: overcoming centuries of distrust and discrimination*. Regional Office for CEE/CIS Region, Social and economic policy for children; Discussion paper, March, 2007.

CHAPTER 2

Issues Identified in the RECI *National Reports*

Key Messages of Chapter 2

- Progress in policy formulation is being made but a large gap exists between aspirations and implementation. There are far too few tangible gains for Roma families and children on the ground.
- Extreme poverty, intolerable living conditions, low educational levels and lack of employment gravely undermine Roma family life and the health of infants and young children.
- The social exclusion of the Roma is greatly reinforced by majority prejudice and discrimination.
- The early development of Roma children, during infancy and the pre-kindergarten period, is not sufficiently supported.
- National kindergarten and primary education systems are failing to recruit, include, retain and educate Roma children.
- The lack of disaggregated data on Roma children and their progress prevents evidence-based planning and monitoring.

1. Progress in Policy Formulation Is Being Made But a Large Gap Exists Between Aspirations and Implementation

Substantial human and financial resources are now being invested in Romani issues – far greater than in any years since the CSEE countries made the transition to market economies. The European Union has become involved and its leadership has been critically important in moving forward the agenda for Roma inclusion.²⁸ At the level of the RECI project, progress and good will is also recorded. During the preparation of the National Reports, many policymakers and administrators voluntarily gave of their time to provide data and research and to attend various meetings at country level.

The four *National Reports* point, however, to the gap that exists between policy aspirations and their implementation. Roma families still endure grinding poverty and an

28 Romani NGOs have been highly critical of the recent *EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020*, in particular, for its lack of ambition on education; for its failure to include gender and Romani youth dimensions; and for not mentioning the rising levels of anti-Gypsyism, hate speech and institutionalized discrimination. See: http://www.romadecade.org/eu_shuts_out_roma.

intolerable health and housing situation. In some domains, such as employment and the segregation of Roma children in special education, their situation has actually worsened in the past ten years. For example, in a survey organised by the European Fundamental Rights Agency, 17 per cent of Roma interviewed indicated that they had experienced discrimination by public health-care personnel in the previous twelve months. According to the *EC EU Framework Communication*, the use of prevention services among the Roma population is low and over 25 per cent of Roma children are not fully vaccinated.

Table 2. Comparative life expectancy rates among national populations and Roma

| Life expectancy (LE) at birth | EU-27 | Czech Republic | The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia | Romania | Serbia |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|---|----------|-----------|
| Average LE of national populations | 79 years | 77 years | 73.5 years | 74 years | 74 years |
| Average LE of Roma population | 69 years (estimate) | | 68 years | 64 years | 58 years* |

Source: RECI National Reports, 2010.

* This figure for Roma women is supplied by the Serbian Institute for Economic Research, 2009, compared with a life expectancy for Serbian women of 76.6 years (UNICEF MICS, 2011).

In sum, there are far too few tangible gains for Roma families and children on the ground. The reasons advanced by the RECI reports for ineffectual implementation can be summarised under the following headings.

Weaknesses in national legislation: New laws and statutes, although a huge improvement on previous legislation, rarely require public authorities to take specific actions or to achieve measurable results. For example, though the countries under review have anti-discrimination legislation – and sometimes a specific anti-discrimination body – those minorities without an external country to back them are often unable to defend their rights effectively. Thus, the segregation of Roma children into special and Roma-only schools continues to exist, despite several condemnations of the practice by the European Court of Human Rights. Another weakness identified is that legislative and policy texts often carry the proviso: “according to budgetary possibilities and priorities determined”, resulting in a recipe for inaction. Young children rarely receive budgetary priority even in countries that take seriously the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*. A fortiori, young children do not receive a fair share of investment or services in contexts where funding is scarce and where the equitable and universal provision of pre-school services is not a statutory obligation for local governments.

Lack of capacity to coordinate policy initiatives in support of Roma inclusion coming from external sources. Because of insufficiency of expertise and critical mass (that is, sufficient numbers of competent administrators), government departments often fail to integrate external initiatives from the European Union and other sources into national policy or to absorb effectively the different funding sources placed at their disposal. This has been a constant criticism made by the European monitoring bodies (see, for example, the general comments of the EC Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion report, 2008 or of the EC Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, 2010). A country example is that of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where the EU Commission wrote in its 2009 Accession Progress Report:

Little progress has been made in the area of anti-discrimination... Administrative capacity in this area remains insufficient. Ethnic minorities, particularly the Roma

community, suffer from discrimination in various spheres of economic, social and cultural life. The situation of people with disabilities has not improved.

Lack of capacity to develop and coordinate a unified national policy for Roma inclusion. All four countries under review have national plans, strategies or programmes for Roma but, according to the Romani organisations and external experts, these plans are not rigorous enough. They may lack, for example, essential planning components such as firm financing commitments; defined goals and measurable outcomes for children; delivery dates; or the nomination of responsible agencies. Implementation can be equally haphazard. All *National Reports* speak of weak coordination across the ministries with regard to policy planning, implementation and monitoring. Vertical coordination toward local government can also be overlooked with local governments unwilling or unable to implement central policies. At the local level, ministries still continue to pursue their traditional aims without effective reference to each other or to the local governments and NGOs working in the field.

In their reports, the four countries have privileged particular themes:

- *Too many new laws and regulations but too few concrete targets and evaluation mechanisms.* According to the **Romanian** report, the profusion of new regulations has led to confusion and misinformation on important matters, such as, access to health services or enrolment in kindergarten. Clear targets for the reduction of child and family poverty among Roma have rarely been set. In parallel, specific strategies for Roma inclusion do not provide an agreed framework for addressing children, but tend to remain locked into sectoral approaches.
- *Wasteful, complicated procedures,* such as those required to obtain a child allowance. In **Serbia**, for example, it is reported that fifteen different documents may be required – a formidable obstacle for illiterate Roma parents who, in addition, may also be displaced persons.²⁹ **Serbia** also reports the difficulty of implementing radically new policies, such as inclusion, using the same staff.
- *Weak inter-departmental co-operation and local lack of accountability:* **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** reports that there is no one-stop-shop or place to which Roma mothers – who for the most part are illiterate – can turn to for information or support in their efforts to raise their young children. The child is attached at one moment to this ministry and its bureaucracy and then to another. In consequence, no real locus of responsibility exists to evaluate outcomes for Roma families and children.
- *Punitive attitudes:* The *National Report* from the **Czech Republic** suggest that services for young Roma children can be characterized by a bureaucratic insistence, that Roma parents should fulfil their obligations. Such punitive attitudes destroy Roma trust in the goodwill of state services. They also run counter to a professional, democratic approach that would seek to build bridges toward excluded families and communities.

29 Many Kosovan Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians remain in Serbia and Montenegro as displaced refugees from the conflicts and their aftermath in 1999–2000; in Serbia alone between 40,000 and 50,000 IDP's identified as 'Roma' live in very poor conditions; see OSCE/ODIHR (2010), *Sustainable Solutions for Displaced Roma, Ashkali & Egyptians and Policies to Improve the Reintegration of Repatriated Roma*, Belgrade: OSCE/ODIHR, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/75578>.

2. Extreme Poverty, Intolerable Living Conditions, Low Educational Levels and Lack of Employment Undermine Roma Family Life and the Health of Young Children

The poverty levels of Roma adults and children differ from country to country, between urban and rural areas and among different types of Roma communities. In the following paragraphs, figures are provided on Roma employment, health, housing, child poverty, etc. with examples from the four countries.

In the **Czech Republic**, Roma families and children are disproportionately poor and dependent. While the overall unemployment rate in the Czech Republic is approximately 10 per cent, the unemployment rate among Roma is estimated at around 60 per cent, with a 70–90 per cent unemployment level in some communities. To its credit, the Czech Republic has traditionally achieved low levels of child poverty and a high level of infant survival, but the monthly social assistance provided in 2006 for two family types – a lone parent with one child and workless families with three children – is in the lower third of EU countries (Bradshaw, 2006). In addition because of their low life expectancy, Roma people benefit much less from state pensions and support in old age – a sphere of social security that is far more costly to the public exchequer than child or welfare benefits.

In **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, the low social and economic status of the Roma is illustrated by the following indicators: unemployment is highest among the Roma population, reaching 73 per cent of the population aged 15–64, compared to 31 per cent of Macedonians and 27 per cent of Albanians. The Roma have also the worst poverty levels: 63 per cent of the Roma population live below the poverty line, compared to 27 per cent of Macedonians and 29 per cent of Albanians. According to a UNDP survey, 36 per cent of the Roma families live in substandard dwelling units and the average living area is 50 per cent smaller than that of non-Roma families.

In the period 2006–8, the national poverty rate in **Romania**, was 23 per cent, while the Roma poverty rate was 67 per cent (World Bank, 2010). Roma employment figures are estimated to be 26 percentage points less than the average male employment rate and in terms of wages paid, they are 50 percentage points less. Many of the poorest Roma families do not touch any social benefits. The life expectancy of Roma is about 64 years³⁰ compared with the overall Romanian life expectancy of almost 74 years. Mortality rates among Roma infants are three to four times higher than the national average.³¹ According to UNDP/ILO data, more than 40 per cent of children in Roma households experience severe undernourishment, bordering on starvation.

In **Serbia**, World Bank estimates suggest that 60.5 per cent of the Roma population falls within the category of “very poor” (based on an absolute poverty rate of 8,883 dinars per month), compared with 6.1 per cent of the average population (World Bank, 2010). Within the poor Roma population, women and children are especially at risk and mothers under a great deal of stress:³²

They (the majority of population) say that the Gypsies do not look after their children, and that is not true! We do take care of them, but we simply cannot manage everything. Imagine having five or six children, would you be able to do everything you planned. Every mother cares for her child. (A mother from a Focus group).

30 UNDP Report (2004). *Avoiding the Dependency Trap: The Roma in Central and Eastern Europe*.

31 Fleck Gabor, C. Rughinis (2008).

32 Kovac Cerovic, (2007).

Table 3 provides a rapid overview of the situation of the poverty and unemployment situation of Roma across the four countries.³³

Table 3. An overview of Roma poverty and unemployment in the four countries

| Country | Poverty | | | | Unemployment rate of Roma adults (per cent) |
|--|---|---------------------------|---|-------------------|---|
| | Per cent Roma living in households below \$4.30 per day (PPP) | | Per cent Roma living in households below \$2.15 per day (PPP) | | |
| | Income based | Expenditure based | Income based | Expenditure based | |
| Czech Republic | \$11 daily 25 per cent | \$11 daily 45 per cent | not available | not available | 11.7 (60 per cent+) ³⁴ |
| The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia | 52 per cent | 33 per cent | 22 per cent | 9 per cent | 71 per cent |
| Romania | 67 per cent | 66 per cent | 22 per cent | 20 per cent | 44 per cent |
| Serbia | 58 per cent | 57 per cent | 30 per cent | 26 per cent | 51 per cent |

Source: Adapted from <http://web.worldbank.org>; accessed April, 2011.

Housing: The Roma housing situation in the four countries is very inadequate, a situation that is replicated in much of Europe, including in the rich countries to which workless Roma people move in desperation. Thousands of Roma families live in favela-like settlements, in shelters patched together out of mud, cardboard, metal sheets and plastic, sometimes located in environmentally hazardous areas. Frequently, these settlements have poor access to public services, employment and schools; and without adequate access to public utilities such as water, electricity or gas. In Romania, Roma people live mostly (60 per cent) in rural areas or at the periphery of municipalities. 74 per cent of their communities have severe budgetary problems, 67 per cent have poor access (dirt roads only) and 23 per cent lack electricity and potable water.³⁵

Illiteracy: The UNDP the World Bank and other organisations provide official literacy rates for the Roma population. In general, these figures are more positive than those found in the National Reports, which provide functional illiteracy rates for Roma populations in excess of 50 per cent in all countries, reaching as high as 80 per cent for women in rural settlements. Given that many Roma children do not have the majority language as their mother tongue,³⁶ that many do not complete primary education and that the children of illiterate parents are more likely to have limited literacy,³⁶ the figures in the *National Reports* may be more realistic.

33 See UNDP, *Vulnerable Groups in Central and Southeast Europe* (statistical profiles), <http://vulnerability.undp.sk/>; UNDP (2006), *At Risk: Roma and the Displaced in Southeast Europe* [The primary universe under study consists of all the households in Roma settlements or areas of compact Roma population]; World Bank (2008), *Czech Republic: Improving Employment Chances of the Roma*, Roma NGOs give much higher figures – in some instances, in excess of 60 per cent – for unemployment among Roma in the Czech Republic.

34 11.7 per cent is the official figure. The World Bank (2008), *Czech Republic: Improving Employment Chances of the Roma* and Roma NGOs gives a much higher unemployment figure among Roma in the Czech Republic – in some instances, in excess of 60 per cent. The World Bank (2010) also testifies that Roma men are among the most active seekers of employment in the CEE countries.

35 Badescu, G., V. Grigoras, C. Rughinis, M. Voicu, O. Voicu (2007).

36 Hughes, D. et al. (2010), *Developmental outcomes of Canadian kindergarten children from diverse language backgrounds*, Centre for Child Studies, McMaster University.

3. The Social Exclusion of Roma is Greatly Reinforced by Majority Discrimination and Prejudice

According to the findings of the European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS) 2009,³⁷ majority discrimination and prejudice greatly reinforces the social exclusion of Roma.

BOX 2. The EU Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS) 2009

EU-MIDIS asked a sample of Roma respondents about discrimination they had experienced, in the past 12 months or in the past 5 years, in nine areas:

1. When looking for work.
2. At work.
3. When looking for a house or an apartment to rent or buy.
4. By health-care personnel.
5. By social service personnel.
6. By school personnel.
7. At a café, restaurant or bar.
8. When entering or in a shop.
9. When trying to open a bank account or get a loan.

47 per cent of all respondents indicated they were victims of discrimination based on their ethnicity, in one or more of these areas, during the previous 12 months. In the Czech Republic, Roma respondents reported the highest levels of overall discrimination (64 per cent), closely followed by Hungary (62 per cent).

In the context of being victims of crime, and racially motivated crime, the EU-MIDIS survey was even more explicit:

On average – 1 in 4 Roma respondents were victims of personal crime – including assaults, threats and serious harassment – at least once in the previous 12 months.

On average – 1 in 5 Roma respondents were victims of racially motivated personal crime – including assaults, threats and serious harassment – at least once in the previous 12 months. Roma who were victims of assault, threat or serious harassment experienced on average 4 incidents over a 12 month period.

81 per cent of Roma who indicated they were victims of assault, threat or serious harassment in the previous 12 months considered that their victimisation was racially motivated.

In the *National Reports* – several of which cite the Gallup Poll made for the EU Fundamental Rights Agency in 2009 – the following information is provided:

37 European Agency for Fundamental Rights (2009), *EU-MIDIS European Union Minorities & Discrimination Survey, Main Results Report, Conference Edition*, http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/eumidis_mainreport_conference-edition_en_pdf.

In **Romania**, majority perceptions of the Roma minority continue to focus on stereotypes of criminality, violence, and lack of interest in schooling. Of non-Roma respondents, 25 per cent think that Roma children should not play with other children and 35 per cent consider that residential mixing of the populations is not to be recommended (INSOMAR, 2009).³⁸ More than 60 per cent think that current treatment of the Roma people is legitimate. Most agree with the following statement: “If I were an employer, I would not hire a Roma because the most of them are lazy and they steal!” In sum, majority perceptions validate the discriminatory treatment that Roma experience, with many respondents indicating that Roma “get what they deserve.”³⁹ Similar attitudes emerge from the other three countries.

Even in **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, in which attitudes toward the Roma seem most tolerant (the majority of respondents depict the Roma, on an individual level, as good, peaceful, hospitable, happy, communicative and talented for music),⁴⁰ negative views about the Roma are also current.

In the **Czech Republic**, according to Eurobarometer 2008, 47 per cent of the majority would not wish to have a Roma neighbour (the average figure for the European countries surveyed was 25 per cent). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child also made reference to Roma children in its Concluding Remarks on the Czech *Second Periodic Report* of 2003 and expressed its concern “at the negative attitudes and prejudices among the general public, media representations, incidents of police brutality, and discriminatory behaviour on the part of some persons working with and for children, including teachers and doctors.”

Alongside prejudicial stereotyping, more sinister activities exist. Political extremism and violence against the Roma has been witnessed in the Czech Republic, Romania and Serbia. Violence can range from threatening marches on Roma settlements to mob and skinhead attacks in which weaponry and firebombing have been used to intimidate or evict Roma residents. In Hungary, Roma adults and children have been murdered by organised, ultranationalist gangs.⁴¹ In a context of economic crisis, extremist politicians – even parties – have emerged, openly hostile to Roma citizens. Through racist rhetoric, they have created a climate in which rights violations are more likely to occur with impunity.

38 *Discrimination phenomena in Romania – perception and attitudes* (August 2009). CNCD, INSOMAR.

39 *The interethnic climate in Romania before EU integration* (2006). Department of Interethnic Relations.

40 Even in the above cases, stereotypical representations of Roma as ‘happy’ and ‘talented in music’ are considered positive by the respondents.

41 See Human Rights First (2010), *Combating Violence Against Roma in Hungary*, Blueprint, <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/HungaryBlueprint.pdf>.

BOX 3. A disturbing backdrop to Roma talks (European Voice, 7 April, 2011)

Dressed in black uniforms resembling those of the banned paramilitary Hungarian Guard, members of the Jobbik party last weekend marched through the Hungarian village of Hejoszalonta, intimidating the local Roma community. The demonstration was part of the extreme-right party's campaign of 'uniformed interventions'. On 10 March, Jobbik brought more than 1,000 black-clad neo-Nazis to besiege the Roma quarter of Gyöngyöspata, another Hungarian village. Such incidents are neither uncommon nor exclusive to Hungary. They are a blunt reminder of the anti-Roma sentiment that is common to most European countries.

The incidents in Hejoszalonta and Gyöngyöspata form a sinister backdrop to this week's meeting of the EU Roma Platform, hosted in Budapest by the Hungarian presidency of the Council of Ministers, which will offer an initial opportunity for policymakers and civil society to discuss the 'EU framework for national Roma integration strategies' that the European Commission launched this week (5 April, 2011). The Commission's proposal represents a step forward in that, as European Voice noted last week ("Strategy sets targets for education and jobs"; 31 March–6 April), it asks all member states to target the socio-economic exclusion of Roma people and devote enough money to achieve real results.

Investment, targeted intervention and monitoring are steps that are needed to help promote integration of the Roma. But poverty, sub-standard education, and lack of access to justice and decent housing experienced by Roma people are inextricably linked to the discrimination that they face and can be solved only as part of a greater effort to tackle anti-Gypsyism.⁴²

Other examples of prejudice and discrimination referenced in the National Reports

As the RECI focus is on young children and their families, the examples of prejudice and discrimination broached in the National Reports mention predominantly denial of health care, of social protection and of access to kindergarten and education, and finally, disproportionate placing of Roma children into special or practical schools.

Structural and institutional discrimination

Racism and discrimination do not refer only to individual beliefs and attitudes but include also the built-in features of institutions, e.g. the way in which health, education, social services and justice systems are structured and work. For example, in under-funded health systems, prevention work may not be possible and financing may exist only for urgent medical responses. In such instances, the tendency will be not to neglect the extension of the public health and education network to the remote areas in which Roma families live. The health authorities may not make available sufficient numbers of health personnel to ensure pre- and post-natal health, and the various checks and immunisations that rural and low-income infants need.

For this reason, in each of the countries reviewed, there are far more accidents at birth among Roma mothers and infant mortality rates are significantly higher than the national

42 Source: European Voice (2011) – Ruus Dijksterhuis, European Roma Policy Coalition, Brussels.

average, for example, more than twice as high as the national average in **Serbia**. In **Romania**, the infant mortality rate (IMR) is more than six times higher than that of Sweden.⁴³ Relatively few doctors, pharmacists or nurses are available to serve remote populations, particularly in rural areas, where, according to UNICEF reports, the risk of infant mortality is four times greater than in urban areas. It is heartening to note that, according to the EUROSTAT Child Well-being Index, **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** does excellent work for child well-being.⁴⁴ Strong primary and preventative health programmes are in place – including for Roma populations – focussed on mother and infant health, backed up by home visits performed by community nursing services. More than 99 per cent of births, rural as well as urban, are professionally assisted, with over 95 per cent of births in hospital. Premature and low-weight births among Roma women are 7.2 per cent, slightly above the EU-27 average and immunisation covers over 95 per cent of all children. The Czech Republic does not provide disaggregated figures on the health status of Roma children and families.

Insufficient attention to ensuring that Roma families are provided with identification documents

In addition to the distance that many Roma have to travel to attend the nearest health clinic, the access of Roma communities to health care is hampered by their lack of birth certificates, identity and other documents required by the health and education services in any countries. In **Serbia** for example, at the end of the conflicts in the regions, more than half of all Roma people did not possess a health certificate or identification document and approximately one-third did not have a health card.⁴⁵ It is reported in the **Czech Republic** and **Romania**⁴⁶ that in addition to documentation barriers, the Roma face discrimination from public health care personnel. The consequences can be serious for children. Lack of registration and parents not possessing identity documents can mean that birth certificates will not be issued for their children. In many instances, Roma may have been resident and held citizenship for generations, but they and their children now lack the documents to prove it. The notion of citizenship (in the sense of being a resident, holding a passport and having certain rights and duties) is sometimes confused with belonging to the majority ethnic group or language. After nearly seven hundred years of residing in the nation-states of Europe, Roma groups are still not considered by many Europeans as citizens of the EU.

The segregation of Roma children in school education

Although a promising start has been made in Serbia to end the practice, the segregation of Roma children within education systems remains a significant challenge, in many countries in the region, including in the four countries reviewed. To justify the practice of segregation, children are tested at the age of 5, 6 or 7 for entry into primary school. True to the defectology tradition still influential in CEE countries, these tests look for weaknesses and not strengths. In addition, they are generally culturally biased in the sense that they are designed with the majority child in mind and are administered through the majority language (few psychologists speak Romani languages). According to the National Reports, the time spent with each child may be as short, as 15 minutes.⁴⁷

43 Report of the Presidential Commission for analysis and elaboration of policies in the field of public health care in Romania, 2008.

44 For a summary of the EUROSTAT findings see http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/emcc/content/source/eu06015a.htm?p1=ef_publication&p2=null.

45 UNICEF Serbia; February 2007.

46 Cases of segregation of Romani women in maternities were signalled by Romani Criss.

47 Not only is the methodology suspect but the fact that disability and cognitive delays in Roma children are routinely attributed to cultural and racial factors, rather than to the serious malnutrition and poverty of expectant and nursing mothers, is a matter of real concern.

As a result of these tests, a disproportionate number of Roma children are allocated to special classes or placed in special schools where simplified curricula are used. 'Graduation' from these schools has little value in the eyes of potential employers or of society at large.

The following table provides a brief summary of the information about segregated education found in the *National Reports*:

Table 4. Percentage of total children in special class-rooms, centres or segregated schools who are Roma

| Per cent | Czech Republic | The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia | Romania | Serbia |
|--|---|---|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Per cent Roma children in special schools, classes or segregated schools | 26.7 per cent – MoE figure* (c.70 per cent – Romani NGOs) | 36 per cent (primary) | 60 per cent and 2** per cent | 32 per cent and 38 per cent*** |

Source: RECI National Reports, 2011.

* Romani organisations in the Czech Republic place the figure at around 70 per cent (see text below). Source: *Persistent Segregation of Roma in the Czech Education System*, REF, 2011.

** The Romania National Report provides a figure of 70 per cent, based on research from 2001.⁴⁸ Research conducted in 2008 for the Romani CRISS Organization in 2008 found that of the 90 schools studied, 67 per cent had some segregation of Roma pupils.

*** Source: *Roma children in "Special Education" in Serbia: overrepresentation, underachievement, and impact on life*, OSI. 2010. 30 per cent in special schools (almost wholly for intellectual difficulties) and 38 per cent in special classes.

The Czech Republic. Until recently, the Czech Republic did not collect data on children disaggregated by ethnic minority. For this reason, reliable information on Roma children is extremely scarce. Apart from Roma children in full secondary education and above (estimated at about 3.3 per cent), estimates by the Romani organisations suggest that over 70 per cent of Roma children attend practical schools (former special schools). The Czech Ministry of Education has researched the issue and provides a figure of 26.7 per cent. However, research undertaken in 2008 on a sample of 20 practical primary schools by the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC, 2009), in co-operation with the Roma Education Fund, confirms that Roma children continue to be placed disproportionately in practical primary schools:

- In 8 out of 19 practical schools, Roma children accounted for more than 80 per cent of the student population;
- In 6 out of 19 practical schools, Roma children accounted for between 50 and 79 per cent of the student population; and
- In only 5 out of 19 practical schools did Roma children account for less than 50 per cent of the student population; 14 per cent being the lowest.

According to the Czech *National Report*:

Roma children are transferred from basic to practical schools 28 times as often as other children. Roma children who stay in basic schools are 14 times as likely to repeat a year as other children, which implies that a considerable percentage of Roma children finish

48 European Roma Rights Center (2001), *State of Impunity: Human Rights Abuse of Roma in Romania*.

basic school having completed only the sixth, seventh or eighth form, and are thus unable to apply for vocational training. One of the causes is the language barrier. Most Roma children entering the first grade of basic schools speak a Roma ethnolect of Czech. (Czech National Report, 2009)

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Different sources confirm that Roma children are disproportionately represented in special schools, being placed there generally for socioeconomic reasons rather than for educational purposes. The data from one study show that in over 50 per cent of the special schools and special classes in Skopje that were visited, Roma children made up a disproportionate number of the student body.⁴⁹ Similarly, the director of a primary school in Bitola visited for the study in May 2009 reported that 19 of the 47 pupils (39.6 per cent) enrolled in special classes are Roma. “Combining the data on overall enrolment in special education from the 2008–2009 school year with figures on the number of Roma enrolled in special education from the previous year, yields a rough estimate that Roma account for approximately 36 per cent of all children in special primary education and 28 per cent of the total in special secondary education.” (Macedonian National Report, 2010)

Romania. In Romania, research from 2001 indicated that up to 70 per cent of the students in special schools are Roma.⁵⁰ In 2004, Surdu (2004) analysed school facilities, teacher qualifications and pupil outcomes in segregated schools and explored the causes of this problem in Romania. The author also presents possible policy options to improve the quality of education for Romani children. According to EUMAP, in 2007, the practice of guiding intellectually challenged Roma children into special schools for children with mental disabilities continues.⁵¹

Box 4. Special testing of Roma children at Dumbraveni, Sibiu, Romania

In Dumbraveni, Sibiu County, Roma children who failed to graduate from the same class for 2–3 years in a row were transferred to the local special school. Following the results of special testing, the Education Commission decided that many Roma boys and girls had mild mental health problems and issued certificates showing they are children with special educational needs. At least 90 per cent of the children attending the special school were Roma children. Upon a complaint sent by Roma CRISS, the National Council for Combating Discrimination sanctioned only the special school and issued a recommendation to desegregate the school. To date, the situation in Dumbraveni has not yet been resolved.

Source: Romania National RECI, Report, 2011.

Serbia. Serbia is an exception to the rule, at least, from a legislative perspective. Its new *Law on the Fundamentals of Education* (2009) recognises that children with disabilities or learning challenges should have opportunities for education equal to those of other children.⁵² What is perhaps most impressive about this law is that inclusion is viewed as intrinsic to the mission, values, and practices of public education. A new *Law on*

49 M. Dulca, Draft Report, 2007 (p. 27).

50 European Roma Rights Center (2001), *State of Impunity: Human Rights Abuse of Roma in Romania*.

51 *Equal access to quality education for Roma* (2007), Romania, EUMAP.

52 Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System, Article 2, paragraph 1/5.

Pre-school Education goes in the same direction and innovates in the matter of assessing children with disabilities and learning difficulties. No longer will these children be placed in categories or assessed in terms of special placements, but solely in terms of the supports they will need in mainstream schools.

However, the traditional unwillingness of local governments and majority parents to accept Roma children in majority kindergartens and schools will inevitably slow the inclusion of Roma children. The *National Report* estimates that from 30–50 per cent of Roma children in **Serbia** are placed in sub-standard kindergarten premises and displaced units, inappropriate for young children. In sum, Roma children do not have equal resources placed at their disposal (good teachers, infrastructure and equipment adjusted to their age, appropriate didactic methods and additional educational programmes). Members of focus groups are of the opinion that discrimination is more easily noticed in primary schools than in kindergartens, as the number of Roma children in the latter is extremely low in Serbia.

4. The Early Development of Roma Children, During Infancy and the Pre-Kindergarten Period, Is Not Sufficiently Supported

The early development of Roma children, during infancy and the pre-kindergarten period, is not sufficiently supported in the four countries, partly for two reasons. Firstly, because there seems to be a general under-estimation of the importance of the period prenatal to 3 years and thus, there is little spending on specific developmental programmes for children in the age group. Secondly, spending on general public policies that critically affect young children, namely public health (in particular, preventive health services), social protection, and child and family policies, remains well below EU averages. To take these points in order:

A general under-estimation of the importance of the period prenatal to 3 years with little investment in developmental programmes for children in the age group

Health and well-being in the early childhood period is a critical determinant of health and educational status in later life (Lancet, 2005, 2007; Marmot Review, 2010). While risk factors affecting health can and will occur throughout the course of life, early childhood is a critical (and potentially vulnerable) stage where extreme poverty and malnutrition have lasting negative effects on subsequent health and development. Table 5 provides a series of indicators relevant to early child development and education in Serbia.

In the Table, both the high mortality rates of Roma infants and the condition of the surviving infants merit attention. Unnecessarily high mortality rates should not leave indifferent any society that is based on human rights and social justice. Neither should the effects of ill-health and early malnutrition in children who survive be a matter of indifference. Low-birth-weight contributes significantly not only to infant mortality, but among the infants who survive, it is strongly correlated to other risks. This is apparent from the table in the greater incidence among Roma children with a disability, being stunted or having a special education need. Infant malnutrition and stunting strongly impact on cognitive development and education attainment. (Mother and Child Nutrition Organisation, 2009).

Table 5. Early childhood indicators from Serbia

| Serbia | National population | Roma settlements |
|--|------------------------|------------------|
| Infant mortality rate (IMR) | 7 per thousand | 14 per thousand |
| Child mortality rate before 5th birthday | 8 per thousand (2010)* | 15 per thousand |
| Low birth weight infants – 2,500 grams | 4.8 per cent | 10.2 per cent |
| Underweight prevalence-weight for age (-2SD) in children 0–59 months | 1.6 per cent | 6.6 per cent |
| Stunting prevalence-height for age (-2SD) in children 0–59 months | 6.6 per cent | 23.6 per cent |
| Suspected pneumonia | 5 per cent | 18 per cent |
| Received all vaccinations (18–29 months) | 58.5 per cent | 26.6 per cent |
| Immunization rate | 87.0 per cent | 63.0 per cent |
| Children with at least one disability** | 11.0 per cent | 23.0 per cent |
| Child appears mentally slow | 1.3 per cent | 4.6 per cent |
| Early childhood education 3–5 years | 44.0 per cent | 8.0 per cent |
| Percentage of families providing support for learning of children 0–5 years*** | 95 per cent | 67 per cent |
| Percentage literate women, 15–24 years | 99 per cent | 76 per cent |

Source: UNICEF MICS for Serbia, 2005, 2010.

* The figure is for 2005. Recent World Bank data provide a much improved figure of 7.1 per cent.

** As reported by mothers.

*** For whom household members engaged in four or more activities that promote learning and school readiness.

Box 5. What do we know about early child development?

Recent brain and neurological research shows that human babies are born ‘prematurely’, that is, with their brains only one quarter the size of an adult brain (Greenspan and Shanker, 2004). Their experiences in the first two years of life, while brain growth is in process, deeply affect future development. The child’s experience in the early years impacts on the architecture of the brain, its neurochemistry and the gene expression that mediate cognitive, emotional and social behaviours. It sets in place a lifelong trajectory that influences all of a child’s subsequent development from infancy to adulthood, including capacity for socialization and education. In sum, early experience shapes:

- Gene expression and neural pathways.
- Emotional response, temperament and social development.
- Perceptual and cognitive ability.
- Physical and mental health and behaviour in adult life.
- Language and cognitive capability.

Children’s capacity to learn when they enter school is strongly influenced by the neural wiring that has (or has not) taken place in the first two years of life. Positive nurturing experiences in the home are essential for this wiring and optimal early brain development. The window of opportunity is relatively narrow, lasting from conception to about 24 months. For this reason, a stressful, poverty-stricken infancy is a danger that all governments should strive to prevent. The tragedy is that thousands of Roma children are lost to education each year because governments fail to invest sufficiently in the family and community environments of children during the infancy and early childhood period.

Source: Shanker, S. (2011).

A strong implication from these research findings is that Roma mothers need support during pregnancy and during the infancy of their children. Developmental monitoring to address maternal and infant nutrition and health should begin before childbirth and continue throughout early childhood. However, the various *National Reports* indicate that the situation of Roma women is often very difficult.

Firstly, a sizeable proportion of Roma women do not receive sufficient health care and support in the pre- and postnatal period (see Table 4 above). In particular, UNICEF reports refer to the effects of malnutrition, un-spaced births, and depression that undermine the care that Roma women would wish to give each new-born child.

Secondly, the domestic situation of Roma mothers is often highly stressful: little or no income, large families, unsanitary dwellings in which to rear children, and greater tolerance of domestic violence.⁵³

Thirdly, there is a tendency for Roma girls, particularly in the more traditional settlements, to leave education early and to marry young. According to the National Report from **Romania**, childhood ends rapidly in many traditional Roma communities, as the age for marriage is significantly lower than among the majority population and in many instances, lower than the law allows.⁵⁴

Table 6. Female age of marriage in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and in Serbia

| | The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia | Serbia |
|--|---|------------|
| Average female age of marriage | 24.3 (2003) | 29 (2010)* |
| Average percentage of total women married before 18 years | 10.4% | 8.0% |
| Percentage of Roma women married before age 18 years | 48.6% | 53.7% ** |
| Percentage of Roma girls married before 15 years | 11.4% | 16.2% ** |

Sources: Macedonian and Serbian National Reports; Vital statistics; SORS and UNICEF MICS (2010) for Serbia.

* Vital statistics, 2010.

** MICS, 2010.

53 According to the UNICEF MICS 2005 survey of Serbia, over 35 per cent of Romani women believe that it is justified for a husband to beat his wife when she neglects the children or goes out without telling him or argues with him, or if she refuses to have sex with him. The corresponding figure for women at national level in Serbia is 5.8 per cent. A parallel finding was reached by a study for ESE (Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women in Macedonia), which indicated that almost half of Romani women surveyed had experienced domestic violence. (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2010). Whether the samples used in these surveys were large enough to be probative is open to question, but their finding concurs with American research using much larger research samples, viz. that domestic violence occurs significantly more often in low income families (see *Economic Determinants and Consequences of Child Maltreatment*, Lawrence M. Berger, Jane Waldfogel, OECD, 2011).

54 Voicu, M. & Popescu, R. (2007). It is important to note, as Voicu and Popescu (2007) underline, that there are significant differences across Roma communities where early marriage and patriarchal community control over individual lives are concerned. These authors distinguish between three different types of community: *traditional communities*, where community control is very powerful, the education stock is very low and the involvement of women in work outside the home is almost non-existent, *non-traditional rural communities*, where community control is less powerful, but where opportunities for women to work outside the home remain limited and do not threaten gender roles; and *non-traditional urban communities*, where community control is relaxed, the education stock is similar to that of the *non-traditional rural communities*, and opportunities exist for women to engage in paid work outside the home.

The outcome is increased risk of developmental disabilities in children born to teenage mothers. In addition, the early marriage age compromises the education of Roma girls and obliges them to cut short their schooling. Early marriages can result in early pregnancy and social isolation, and reinforces the gendered nature of Roma poverty (UNICEF, 2006). In sum, many factors can interfere with the Roma child's developmental readiness for school.⁵⁵

Under-spending on social and educational services

We have suggested in the previous section that in addition to discrimination caused by hostility and racism, part of the discrimination against Roma citizens is institutional, that is, exclusion is often a consequence of poorly functioning systems of health, social welfare, and education. The weak financing of these services affect disproportionately the health and well-being of children from low-income backgrounds. The relative weakness of social support systems in the four countries can be seen by comparing their investments in social and education programmes with the average investment in these systems across the EU-27 countries, as shown in Table 7.⁵⁶

Table 7. Public spending on social systems

| Percentage of GDP | EU-27 | Czech Republic | The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia | Romania | Serbia |
|--|---------------|----------------|---|---------------|----------------|
| Public health spending | 7.5 per cent | 6.2 per cent | 7.1 per cent | 4.8 per cent | 6.5 per cent |
| Social protection expenditure | 26.2 per cent | 18.6 per cent | 17.0 per cent | 12.8 per cent | 18.1 per cent |
| Family and child benefits | 2.1 per cent | 1.4 per cent | 1.0 per cent | 1.2 per cent | 0.45 per cent |
| Public education expenditure | 5.0 per cent | 4.2 per cent | 3.8 per cent | 4.25 per cent | 4.5 per cent |
| Annual per pupil expenditure in EUR | EUR 6,251 | EUR 4,452 | | EUR 1,438 | EUR 1,000 est. |
| Early childhood education and care | 0.5 per cent | 0.51 per cent | 0.33 per cent | 0.77 per cent | 0.43 per cent |

Sources: EUROSTAT, 2011: the year of reference for public health is 2006, (updated 2008); for social protection 2007; for education, 2007; National Report researchers, 2011.

As a footnote, it is interesting to note that social protection expenditure includes spending on old-age and survivor pensions; sickness/health care; disability; family/children; unemployment housing and social exclusion. In an ageing Europe-27, most social expenditure flows toward pensions and health care for senior citizens accounting for 46.2 per cent of total benefits or 11.9 per cent of GDP. This sum constitutes a far greater share of national budget than allowances spent on children and families. Because Roma people

55 *Developmental readiness for school* includes health and nutritional status, socio-emotional development and the communication and social skills that prepare the child for life in society and not just for school. (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001). This concept is distinguished from *school readiness* which normally refers to "preparation for school" – i.e. is limited to the knowledge and 3R skills deemed necessary to participate in primary education.

56 The disparity between countries is not just a question of political will but is also related to different levels of wealth, different levels of information, traditional differences in social protection systems, demographic trends, unemployment rates and other institutional and economic factors.

rarely enjoy pensions (life expectancy is short and/or they do not have sufficient years in salaried work), social expenditure on the Roma is considerably less per person than for the majority population.

5. National Kindergarten and Primary Education Systems Are Failing to Recruit, Include and Educate Roma Children

The 2009 EU Roma Platform meeting in Brussels provided an overview of the current state of Romani education:

- A high percentage of Roma children never access the education system.
- The participation rate of Roma children in preschool education is extremely low. Existing data sources suggest that a maximum of 20 per cent of Roma children across Europe are enrolled in preschool, though this improves to more than 50 per cent in the year before compulsory schooling (UNICEF CEE/CIS Regional Office, 2010).
- Rates of attendance and completion for Roma children in primary school remain staggeringly low with a recent estimate by UNICEF suggesting only one Roma child completes primary school to every four non-Roma children in Central and South Eastern Europe (ibid.).
- Roma children, in particular girls, have a very low transition rate into secondary education.
- The drop-out rates of Roma children, especially in lower secondary education are extremely high, reaching well over 50 per cent in most countries. Drop-out rates are even higher in segregated educational settings.
- Roma children are inordinately channelled toward special schools, remedial classes or 'Roma only' schools.
- In most educational settings attended by Roma, the quality of education received is invariably lower because of weak curricular standards, insufficient human and material resources allocated, and low expectations of teachers.
- There are perverse incentives for Roma parents to enrol children in special schools: free meals, textbooks, a safer environment for children.
- For Roma children who access and continue in education, the total years spent in the education system is, on average, about half the national average.

A survey conducted by UNDP in 2006 found that two out of three Roma do not complete primary school, as compared with one in seven in majority communities. In South East Europe, only 18 per cent of Roma youth attend secondary compared with 75 per cent of the majority community, and less than 1 per cent attends university (Ivanov, 2010). Biro et al (2009) paint the following picture of Roma education in Serbia:

Data on the education level of Serbian Roma are disheartening (Ćuk, 2009). Approximately 80 per cent of Roma living in Serbia are illiterate or functionally illiterate. Only 28 per cent of Roma in Serbia have completed elementary education, only 8 per cent have finished high school, and only 0.3 per cent has graduated from college or university. Currently, fewer than 20 per cent of Roma children aged 7–15 are enrolled in Serbian elementary schools and fewer than 10 per cent of Roma children attend kindergarten. In addition, recent data clearly indicate that Roma children are over-represented in Serbian schools for special education (Stojanović & Baucal, 2007; Kočić-Rakočević & Miljević, 2003).

In response, the Serbian Ministry of Education has recently taken important steps to remedy the situation. (see Box 6)

Box 6. Initiatives in Serbia to improve education for young children

Two innovative laws have been passed in the Serbian parliament to improve education opportunities for young children and to ensure fairness of access to disadvantaged children. *The Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System (LOFES) (2009)*⁵⁷ addresses, among other matters, the inclusion of “children and pupils with developmental problems and disabilities” and “children and pupils from socially sensitive groups”. The Law underlines that all children have equal rights to education, and condemns discrimination or segregation of children from the above groups. Outcomes and standards of education have been introduced (save for preschool instruction and education).⁵⁸ Attention is also given to the participation of children and procedures for monitoring and protecting the rights of the child and pupil have been made stricter. The role of Parent Councils in schools has also been defined more clearly. The school’s social role has likewise been strengthened through clear regulations on non-discrimination, the prohibition of violence, abuse and negligence.

LOFES also contains new regulations by which a fairer enrolment policy will be practised, with specific implications for Roma children. All children shall be enrolled and testing will be carried out only after enrolment. The aim of testing is not to decide on where a child will be placed (all children are recognised to have a right to primary education) but to ascertain what additional supports a child may need to progress through primary school. Testing will take place in the mother tongue of the child, in the presence of a translator. The school is also obliged to develop individual education plans for all children who need it and an individual programme of Serbian is introduced for children from national minorities who do not speak the language in which classes are held. A particularly important innovation is that schools may employ a pedagogical assistant temporarily, whose task is to provide help and additional support to children in accordance with their needs.⁵⁹

The *Law on Pre-school Education (LPE), 2010* outlines the principles of preschool education and in Article 4 clearly states the main goals of preschool education and upbringing in Serbia. It proposes: to expand the number of preschool institutions, to rationalize the network and improve the quality of education for all children of preschool age. The Law governs: the use of language (for minority children, it is now possible to organize classes in their first language if more than 50 per cent of parents agree (Article 3); prohibits discrimination, violence and neglect of children (Article 5);⁶⁰ regulates enrolment policy, in the sense that children who come from marginalized groups should have priority (Articles 13 and 14); and provides the right to supplementary aid and support to children from marginalized families, children with special needs, hospitalized children etc. (Article 16).⁶¹ In distant regions where the number and capacities of preschool institutions are limited or non-existent, the law proposes programmes of “travelling kindergartens” and hiring a “travelling preschool teacher” (Article 21).

continued on p. 40

57 LFEIS, 2009.

58 Quality standards and self-evaluation system are currently being prepared.

59 Information on Law on the Fundamentals, 2009.

60 Determined in detail by Rulebook; Protocol of Institutional Treatment as a Reaction to Violence, Abuse and Neglect (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 30/2010).

61 Determined by Rulebook: “Supplementary Education, Health and Social Support to Children and Pupils”, (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 63/10) – mutual document of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

The Ministry has backed up these laws with a *Common Action Plan for Roma Education* directors and principals should make projections and plans to allow for the presence of Roma children. In primary, secondary and tertiary education, there is also an affirmative action programme for Roma children. In addition, two new projects financed to the tune of 1.8 million Euros by EU-IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) funds are highly significant for the inclusion of Roma children in the Serbian public education system. The first “*Education for All – Promoting Accessibility and Quality of Education for the Children of Marginalized Groups*” was initiated in 2010 and lasts until 2012; the other “*Promotion of Preschool Education in Serbia, IMPRES*” will begin in February 2011. It is planned to further expand the number of Roma pedagogical assistants in preschool and primary schools, a project established in co-operation with OSCE.⁶² A second part of the project is dedicated to the professional improvement of teachers and educators through the organization of professional training and seminars on inclusive approaches.

Source: National Report for Serbia.

Table 8, based on a number of sources provides a comparative overview of ECEC and primary school enrolments for Roma and majority children.

Table 8. Comparative data on ECEC and primary school enrolments for Roma and majority children

| Percentage of enrolments ¹ | EU-25 (2008) | Czech Republic | | The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia | | Romania | | Serbia | |
|--|--------------|--------------------|----------------|---|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|----------|--------------------|
| | | National | Roma | National | Roma | National | Roma | National | Roma |
| Enrolments childcare ² | 26 | 6 | ≤1 | 7 | 0.7 | ≥20 ³ | 4.5 | 15 | ≤2 |
| Enrolments kindergarten | 84 | 93/67 ⁴ | 8 (final year) | 25 ⁵ | 3.5 | 70 | 23 ⁶ | 38.1 | 4–7 |
| Enrolments primary school | 98 | 98 | 70 | 97 | 67 | 93.5 | c.70 | 98 | c. 70 ⁷ |
| Completion primary school ⁸ | 97.5 | 98 | m* | 88.5 | 40 ⁹ | m | c.55 | 92.4 | 28 |
| Enrolling in sec. education | – | 95 | m | 45 ¹⁰ | 12.8 | 85.2 | 55 | 76.4 | 10.2 |

Sources: EUROSTAT (2008), OSI (2008), Roma Education Fund (2010) and the RECI National Reports.

* Missing data.

1. Enrolment figures are net enrolments; enrolment does not necessarily mean attendance. All figures for Romani enrolment are estimates due to the lack of disaggregated data.
2. Enrolment in a government licensed or formal service, that is, care and education provided by a regulated centre-based or family day-care service organised and monitored by a public or recognised private structure.

62 In 2006, the Ministry of Education introduced Roma pedagogical assistants into primary schools, in cooperation with the OSCE and with the professional aid of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP). More on the subject can be found in the publication by MoE, EU, OSCE and CIP named “Roma Pedagogical Assistants as Agents of Change”, 2010.

3. *Compulsory education begins from age 5 in Romania. Prior to this, fewer than 20 per cent of all children are enrolled in kindergarten.*
4. *EUROSTAT (2008) provides an enrolment average in the Czech Republic of 67 per cent for 3–6 years in 2006. The 93 per cent average is provided by the National Report and may refer to the final 5–6 year, which includes also a ‘zero year’ in the basic school.*
5. *3–4 years. Obligatory attendance begins at 5 years in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.*
6. *23 per cent is the Romani enrolment in the final year. 13.2 per cent is the average enrolment from age 3–6.*
7. *According to REF (2008), the percentage may be significantly lower. See also Biro et al (2009) above.*
8. *The completion rate is a percentage of those initially enrolled.*
9. *Only 7 per cent of Roma children complete secondary; 0.1 per cent complete tertiary.*
10. *This percentage refers to enrolments in upper secondary.*

These findings are a matter of serious concern, both for the Roma children and for the countries concerned. There are few roads into employment in modern service economies for young adults without literacy and certification either in vocational or academic subjects. School drop-out or attendance at low-performance special schools simply reproduces the cycle of poverty and unemployment, deprives economies of the work and taxation of young Roma adults, and places a heavy burden on welfare and health systems.

The *National Reports* and the valuable OSI REI monitoring reports (OSI, 2007) shed light on the barriers that hinder the improvement of educational outcomes for Roma children and youth.

Poverty: The economic situation of Roma families is such that the incidental costs of education – materials, textbooks, food and outings – are too much for many Roma parents to assume. Children may also have to contribute to the family’s income, which may interfere with their education; for example, children’s seasonal labour in **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania** and in **Serbia** (picking fruit and vegetables) occurs in early autumn at the beginning of the school year. For girls, the expectation that they will help care for younger siblings is a serious barrier to their education.

Teachers’ low expectations in dealing with Roma children and families from excluded and minority backgrounds. National kindergarten systems tend to be highly mono-cultural. Few Roma staff are employed and frequently, according to the focus groups that were organised by the authors of the National Reports, open prejudice is shown toward Roma children by teachers and majority parents.

- *“I never saw the teacher showing him something in the books, not a letter in his books by his teacher, not in notebooks, nor did he help him in anything.”* Focus group mother, Barajevo, Serbia.
- *If she had good grades, the teacher uses to say: “You see, she gets good grades even if she is a gypsy.”* Focus group parent, Craiova, Romania.
- *We love them (the Roma children), we help them but at school their colour starts to matter; the children start to separate, to marginalise Roma, to be unwilling to sit in the same bench with them.* Focus group, teacher, Bucharest, Romania.
- *Children start going to (regular) school, attend it for a while, then become less and less successful and they start to feel neglected, unwanted. They don’t have things that other kids have. Everyone avoids them. So the child doesn’t want to go anymore, simply refuses to go, so his parents transfer him to a special school, where they also get benefits”* Health mediator, Novi Sad.

Limited opportunities for diversity teacher training: In general, very limited in-service and pre-service training opportunities exist for kindergarten teachers in CSEE countries.

What does exist focuses for the most part on pedagogy, with far less attention paid to areas such as minority cultures, diversity and anti-bias training, second language teaching methodology, parental involvement, whole school improvement, and education for social justice. As a result, many teachers are still in the mind-set of behaviour management or as instructors and experts in a particular subject matter, whereas in teaching Roma children, it is equally necessary to function as facilitators and mediators for children and parents. According to the *National Reports*, parenting outreach and education are organised only to a very limited extent from the kindergartens, and generally by externally supported initiatives and projects.

The tendency of teachers and education systems to treat all children as if they were the same and to assume that what works for children from stable majority backgrounds will also work for children from excluded families.⁶³ Equality of opportunity is often considered as treating all children in the same way, e.g. the remark is often heard: “The kindergarten is open to everyone, including Roma children. They just need to come!” This mind-set overlooks the fact that *equal is not enough!* Frequently, children from deprived, second-language backgrounds arrive at kindergarten with significant delays in language and general knowledge. They need patient reception, outreach to their parents, smaller groups, and experienced empathetic educators. Treating everyone the same also overlooks the fact that Roma children, like all children, have particular talents and needs, and may differ very much from each other.

The attitudes of majority parents: Despite national policies that support integrated schools, resistance exists among majority parents to having their children attend classes with Roma children. Schools and kindergartens face not only the challenges of educational change, but also the challenges found in the social fabric of their communities.

The attitudes of Roma parents: There is a widely held belief that many Roma parents do not wish to send their children to school. This may be true for some parents as their own experience of education may have been negative. Certainly, the link between education and employment cannot be clear to a population so deprived of jobs and inclusion.

Vandenbroeck (2007) has commented extensively in recent years on a similar belief about immigrant parents in Belgium. He points to the tendency in the majority population to culturalise the ‘deviant’ behaviour of minority groups, e.g. “Immigrant parents don’t like to send their children to services before the age of four” or “Such or such ethnic group does not really value education.” Vandenbroeck recommends less culturalisation of *motive* but more culturalisation of the *programmes* in which immigrant and ethnic children are enrolled.

Part of the difficulty for Roma families is that kindergarten services are organised in such a way as to virtually exclude parents and their manner of rearing children. As a result, mono-cultural services and organisation predominate, that is, only the values and norms of mainstream society are reflected in the available services. A further difficulty is added for Roma parents in that they fear (often rightly) that their children will be bullied and suffer discrimination in majority institutions. Research also suggests that attitudes to education are much influenced by the level of education reached by mothers. See Box 7.

63 In one sense, bureaucracies have the duty to treat all children and families in the same way, but to educate children from deprived backgrounds, teachers must be aware also of both the permanent and unforeseeable obstacles that these children face, even to attend a services regularly.

Box 7. Attitudes to education are linked to education levels

UNICEF MICS data 2005/2006 for **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** showed that the higher the educational level of mothers, the more likely they were to enrol their children in preschool. For example, for mothers with no education only 0.7 per cent enrolled their children in preschool, whereas for mothers with secondary education the percentage was 28 per cent. This indicates that women who have attained some level of education are more likely to see the benefits of their children's early learning.⁶⁴

Other research suggests that when Roma parents receive regular and friendly support to send their children to kindergarten and school, they generally respond positively. For example, the REI (the OSI Roma Education Initiative 2002–5) national evaluation of Bulgaria (2004), which documented parent attitudes among Roma and non-Roma parents, showed that, “regardless of their ethnic affiliation, they (parents) think that school is an extremely important educational institution in the life of their children.” Interviews with Roma children confirmed that children liked to be at school with their friends, playing with their classmates, talking with their teachers, and participating in language and mathematics lessons. In fact, the evaluator reports: “Results show that they want to do more at school – reading, writing, and mathematics.”

Ineffective governance of early childhood systems: Because of the traditional low prestige of early care and education in male-dominated ministries, early childhood administration is often assigned to junior administrators, who are few in number and have little budget. Yet, this is an area of responsibility which is far more complex and multi-dimensional than centre-based schooling. The early childhood administrator needs to be expert not only in early education, but in liaising with health and the social sector, local government, and in outreach to families and parental education. Sufficient mass and expertise in ministries is all the more necessary today as increasingly early childhood services are recognized as a critical policy measure for social inclusion, and thus the recipient of significant funds and programmes from large donors.

The split nature of country responsibility for young children. With the exception of Romania, a number of ministries are involved in the early childhood field in the countries under review. These ministries have different goals, different personnel, different ways of intervention, different offices and services – all working for the same children. This manner of working has more to do with a traditional division of ministerial competences than with an adequate response to the needs of young children and families. It creates at the same time both duplication and large service gaps. Romania is the only country of the four that has attempted to integrate programming for children under and over 3 years of age within one ministry.

6. The Lack of Disaggregated Data on Roma Children and Their Progress Prevents Evidence-Based Planning

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This is a major concern of the international and national organisations working for Roma children. If there is little data, it is difficult to understand how countries can reasonably hope to make relevant policy and monitor progress for these children. Of course – as

64 Rational choice theory is never simple. The use of kindergarten by mothers with secondary education might also indicate that they are more likely to be employed and thus use preschools because it provides day care.

several governments hasten to point out – there are constraints linked to human rights issues, the fragmentation of the early childhood field (public and private; central and local, different definitions, different competences...) and conflicting definitions of exclusion and disability. Yet, as indicated in the Open Society Foundations' report by McDonald and Negrin (2010) *No data – No Progress*, the listing of constraints and difficulties is often an excuse; other European countries with strong human rights records, e.g. the Nordic countries and United Kingdom, gather such data on a regular basis, without contravening the rights of individuals or minorities.

Data approaches to Roma populations seem to be ostrich-like, that is, burying one's head so as not to see the extent of the challenge, as Table 9 illustrates. The table was published by the Open Society Foundations office in Hungary in 2008. The alternative data provided are informed estimates, based on calculations by Roma NGOs and the international organisations working in these countries.

Table 9. Size of the Roma population in selected countries: official figures and alternative estimates

| Official Roma population in 000s | | Official percentage of population | Official number of Roma children aged 0–18, in 000s | Alternative Roma population in 000s | Alternative percentage | Alternative number of Roma children aged 0–18, in 000s |
|----------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--|
| Bulgaria | 371 | 4.8 | 152.8 | 700–800 | 9.7 | 309 |
| Czech Republic | 11.7 | 0.1 | 5.6 | 160–300 | 2.3 | 110 |
| Hungary | 190 | 1.9 | 81.1 | 550–600 | 5.7 | 246 |
| Macedonia | 53.9 | 2.7 | 22.4 | 80–130 | 5.2 | 44 |
| Moldova | 12.9 | 0.4 | ... | 100–200 | 4.2 | ... |
| Montenegro | 2.6 | 0.4 | 1.3 | 20 | 3.3 | 10 |
| Romania | 535.1 | 2.5 | 230.9 | 1,800–2,500 | 9.9 | 926 |
| Serbia | 108.2 | 1.4 | 44.4 | 350 | 4.7 | 144 |
| Slovakia | 89.9 | 1.7 | 39.1 | 350–370 | 6.7 | 157 |

Source: Open Society Foundations, 2008.

The lack of accurate figures about the Roma population prevents realistic planning, monitoring and evaluation. Ministries and organisations working for social inclusion – or indeed in more focussed fields such as health and education – cannot really know how many children need to be targeted, what measures are successful, whether they were implemented in the right way, or used in a way that actually improves the situation. The various *National Reports* raised the following issues:

- Since 1990, the Czech Republic no longer collects disaggregated data on minorities, which has made it very difficult to develop policy for Roma children. However, strong progress was achieved by the Ministry of Education from 2008–2010. Several serious studies were commissioned in an attempt to have better data on socially excluded and Roma children. From October to December 2008, the early education unit in the Ministry collected data on the educational pathways of 8,462 pupils, both males and females, selected from a representative group of 100 schools (out of 396 schools) situated in socially excluded neighbourhoods (GAC, 2009). One fifth of all children were of Roma origin. The aim of the project was to provide an image of educational

trajectories of Roma and other socially disadvantaged children and to compare it with the trajectories and outcome of their non-Roma peers attending the same schools. Based on a number of such studies, the Ministry drew up in 2010 a national plan for severely socially disadvantaged children. The policy proposals (as listed below) were both comprehensive and feasible, but with the most recent change in government, they have not been attempted to date.

Box 8. Czech draft policy proposal for more effective inclusion of Roma children

- Carry out proper research and collect evidence on the representation of Roma children in special schools and determine the level of support needed by these children in mainstream schools.
- Develop a National Action Plan for Inclusive Education to attend to the upbringing and education of Roma children from socially excluded localities and the creation of inclusive mechanisms for children with special needs.
- Create suitable conditions for educating students with slight mental handicaps at regular schools.
- Create a system of early care for children at risk of social disadvantage and their families, in co-operation with the Ministries of Health, Labour and Social Affairs, and for Regional Development.
- Continue the system of early care into kindergarten and primary and expand services provided in this area by non-profit organisations.
- Create Centres for Support of Inclusive Education in each of the Czech regions, which would provide methodological care for educational workers, students and their families at all levels of the education system.
- Develop teacher skills for working in an inclusive environment through pre-graduate and further education.
- Expand the spectrum and availability of compensatory measures that schools can take advantage of in order to improve the success rate of socially disadvantaged children.
- Emphasise the principle of respect for diversity in all educational programmes.
- Provide subsidies to expand individual education.
- Create a platform for society-wide discussions and sharing examples of good practice.

Apart from this initiative, our knowledge of numbers, enrolments, completion rates, etc. is derived basically from external studies, carried out by Roma or international organisations, such as UNICEF, Open Society Foundations and the World Bank. Many sources – including the Committee on the Rights of the Child – contend that successive Czech governments have not made sufficient efforts to collect disaggregated data on Roma children and their families.

In **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, governmental weaknesses in data collection and monitoring are frequently identified in the European accession *Progress Report*. For example, data on employment and unemployment; on enrolments in special schools and classes; on children with special needs and disabilities; on children deprived of parental care, on children in orphanages, on inclusion in health insurance, on various direct and indirect forms of discrimination are not disaggregated and, as a result, fail to show the real situation of the Roma and other excluded groups. Without data on children, disaggregated by age, ethnic background and other social features (housing, employment, health and education), it is not possible to design informed policies. Disaggregated data collection is also weak in **Romania**: the last analytic study of the whole pre-school education system was carried out in 2003, funded by the UNICEF

Office, but no specific data related to Roma children were available. As the McDonald and Negrin (2010) OSI study, *No Data, No Progress* underlines the fact that a start must be made in the CSEE countries to collecting disaggregated data on Roma children, if the progress of these children through the education system is to be monitored effectively.

In **Serbia**, harmonized and standardized procedures for data collection are still lacking. Ministries and other official bodies each collect data in their own way, which means that existing data are generally not comparable. Although some agencies have developed lists of indicators to measure, for example, health conditions among vulnerable groups, lack of harmonization and sample size undermine reliability and comparability. In addition, where young children are concerned, aggregated data are usually given (again from different sources), which cannot be used to monitor the inclusion of Roma children or compare their status to the general population. Data exchange between local and national levels is also rare. For example, centres for social care, which collect data on children who are not included in the education system, rarely share these data with schools.⁶⁵ Neither do local institutions promptly submit data on the inclusion of the Roma population to the services and ministries in charge.⁶⁶ In order to address the challenge, the Ministry of Education has adopted a *Rulebook on Education Records* (2010), and has issued regulations on the obligation to collect data and ensure their input into a new information system.⁶⁷ These regulations will cover research and data on the Pre-Primary Preparation (PPP) year and on school age children. Data collection on the younger children from 0–6 years is still not a priority, although their inclusion would allow ministries to establish base line data (recording the initial condition of Roma children), and thereby, to monitor the outcomes of kindergartens and schools.

65 Baucal and Stojanović, 2010, pp. 20–25.

66 As early as in 2002 the Ministry of Education started establishing the EIS system which was to cover all education levels and secure a data base on finances, working conditions, number of children, etc. EIS has never started operating in full, now there has been a transfer to the Central Education Information System which is to fully start operating in the year 2011/12.

67 Baucal and Stojanović, 2010.

CHAPTER 3

Conclusions and Principles of Action

Key Messages of Chapter 3

- Roma children are valuable: Europe and its member states can no longer afford to neglect their future. The barriers to their access must be torn down.
- In addition to legislation, governments need to invest in communication and education to renew majority notions of citizenship and democracy.
- Early childhood policies for Roma children will be more effective if linked closely with EU Roma initiatives. These policies also benefit from inclusion within national policies for all children, but with a strong Romani input.
- In contexts of extreme poverty and exclusion, developmental readiness for school requires a multi-dimensional concept of early childhood programming that places a strong emphasis on early intervention and women's education.
- For successful policy implementation, effective governance of the kindergarten sector is critical.
- Effective kindergartens and schools for excluded children need expanded services and appropriate pedagogies. A free place in kindergarten should be provided for at least two years to every child coming from an 'absolute poverty' background.
- Evidence-based policy in favour of Roma children will not be achieved without research, consultation and data collection.

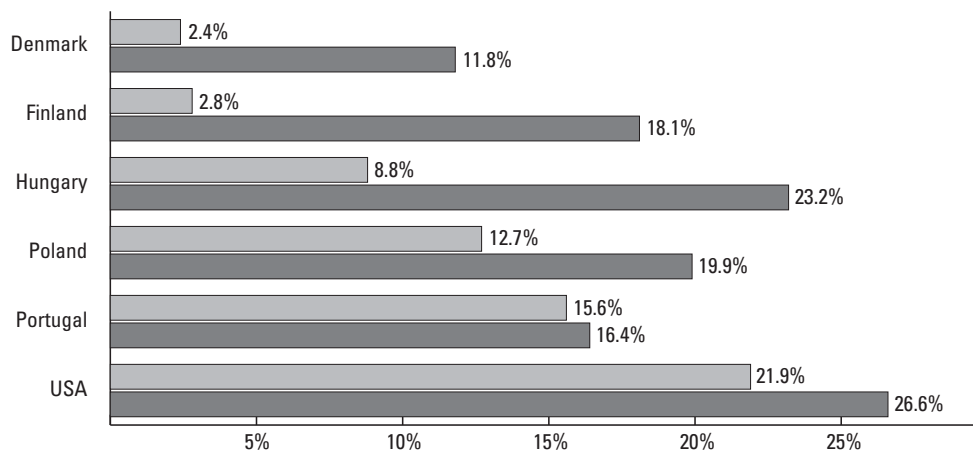
1. Roma Children Are Valuable: Europe Cannot Afford to Neglect Their Future

Roma children need far more attention, protection and investment from the European Union and its member states. Like all children, they are subjects of basic human rights, as expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and in much European and national legislation. Like all citizens, their parents have rights to education, health care, housing and employment, and eventually to social welfare if employment fails. These rights imply a duty on governments and societies to provide protection and, in a more intelligent way, to prevent poverty and exclusion from taking place. In its child poverty work, UNICEF shows clearly the huge impact of government action on outcomes for young children, as Figure 1 illustrates.

Commenting on the figures on which the table is based, UNICEF (2007) underlined that higher government spending on family and social benefits is generally associated with

lower child poverty rates.⁶⁸ No OECD country devoting 10 per cent or more of GDP to social transfers has a child poverty rate higher than 10 per cent. No country devoting less than 5 per cent of GDP to social transfers has a child poverty rate of less than 15 per cent. *In sum, variation in government policy appears to account for most of the variation in child poverty levels between OECD countries.*

Figure 1. Percentage of children remaining in poverty before and after governmental social transfers



Source: UNICEF, 2007.

Note: The dark grey bars in the chart show the percentage of children born into poor families, before government has made available grants for parenthood, birth grants, child benefits, entitlements to services, etc.; the other bars show the reduced percentage of children in poverty after government grants have become available.

Readers in 2011 may ask if governments can afford to spend more than 10 per cent of GDP on social transfers in the present economic crisis? Where Roma children are concerned, the real question is: Can Europe afford not to invest generously in these children? The commonly accepted number of Roma in Europe is about 12 million people. The current high fertility rate and low overall life expectancy of Roma people (estimated at around 63 years) means that the number of Roma children under 6 years of age is probably around 1.5 million. This number is significantly more than the number of like children in Spain and roughly equal to the sum total of young children in the five Nordic countries combined.

In a rapidly ageing Europe (projections for several European countries suggest that by 2050, there will be three retired persons for every four working adults), Roma children will be an extremely valuable asset if they can be protected, educated and brought into the skilled work force at increasingly higher levels (Kézdi, G. and Kertesi, G., 2006). As emphasised in the recent document: *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020* (Europe Commission, 2011), the Roma represent a growing share of the European working age population, with an average age of 25 compared to the EU average of 40. Some 35.7 per cent of Roma are under 15, compared to 15.7 per cent of the EU population. In Bulgaria and Romania, Roma already form one in five of the new labour market entrants. According to calculations by the World Bank (2010),

68 UNICEF uses the OECD definition of child poverty, that is, children living in households whose total equivalised incomes is below 50 per cent of the median national equivalised household income. The EU definition is 60 per cent of the median equivalised household income. The percentage of households at risk of poverty is therefore significantly higher when the EU measure is used.

if the employment rate of Roma could be raised to that of the majority, the overall rate of employment would be increased by 5 per cent to 10 per cent depending on the proportion of the Roma population. This would trigger a substantial improvement in all the indicators contributing to the growth of GDP per capita. Although they may be a small percentage of all Europeans, Roma children in the future can make a significant difference to European well-being and prosperity.

Box 9. The costs of not taking action on behalf of Roma children

The costs of not taking action are clearly indicated by the European Parliament in its Explanatory Note on the EU strategy on Roma inclusion (2010/2276 (INI)). By not prioritizing Roma inclusion, Member States incur significant losses that include:

- The indirect cost of lost GDP: As a result of social exclusion, unemployed Roma fail to produce any domestic product.
- Social assistance and welfare benefits as well as the social and health care insurance provided by the state to those in poverty.
- Higher health costs due to substandard living conditions.
- Wasted education expenditure: The cost of segregated and/or low standard schools that fail to provide quality education is wasted money.
- Extra safety costs, due to higher crime rates caused by socio-economic deprivation;
- Administrative costs of supervising the flow of welfare expenditure.

In brief, it is important to realise that the inclusion of Roma is not merely an obligation in terms of human rights, but also an economic necessity for Europe. This being said, we wish to underline that though demographers, economic ministries, business leaders, etc. all have a place in the discussion, the rights and needs of young children – no matter what their origin – can provide a common focus for competing considerations concerning the inclusion of the Roma. To integrate these children in an equitable way, democracy needs to become a fundamental value in all countries and a central aim in European policies and education (Moss, 2011).

Barriers to the Roma child's appropriate access to education

What can be done to ensure better inclusion of Roma children in national care and education systems? Inter alia (the recommendations in the following chapters will fill out the picture), it would help greatly if countries were *to remove the major barriers to the access of Roma children to child health and kindergarten services*. These barriers are well outlined in the various national reports. On the supply side, there exists a narrow conception of early childhood services that sees early development services as beginning only at the kindergarten stage. This leads in turn to a lack of effective outreach to Roma settlements by the health and education services. In sum, the true foundation stage – the child's early years in the family environment – is neglected. Many Roma families and mothers do not receive sufficient support from the public services in their child-rearing tasks. As mentioned many times in this text, this is the critical stage in human development when young children need health and proper nutrition, and a stress-reduced family environment where they can grow and develop. Support to Roma families and mothers during this critical stage will also lead to less defensive attitudes toward public services and a better appreciation of child development and early education. Where access to kindergarten services is concerned, the National Reports list the following barriers: insufficient numbers of kindergarten services, especially in rural areas;

the distance of services from the Roma settlements; the extreme poverty of many Roma families that prevents them from sending their children outside the settlement or to pay for the incidental costs of education (proper clothes, shoes, transport etc.) even when places are free; their lack of identity and other necessary papers; enrolment criteria that give preference to majority working parents rather than to social inclusion; the mono-cultural nature of national kindergartens and schools which assume that Roma children must always adapt to majority norms rather than promoting diversity and recognition of Roma language and culture; the hostility of majority parents and teachers toward the presence of Roma children.

Box 10. Why Roma parents in Romania do not enrol children in early education services

According to several focus groups organised in the context of the *RECI National Report for Romania*, the most frequent reason given by Roma parents is distance from services, invoked most often by rural parents. A second reason cited was the lack of financial resources and thirdly, the preference of Roma mothers to stay at home and look after their children. Other reasons for non-enrolment are: that it is preferable for children to stay at home when they are very young; that the services provided by kindergarten are not stimulating enough; that the staff are not friendly to Roma families and their children. Among the reasons for which Roma parents withdraw their children from kindergarten or allow them to drop out are: financial reasons (44.7 per cent), the low quality level of the education offered (34 per cent), emigration (12.8 per cent); the child's immaturity or state of health (8.5 per cent). The perception by Roma parents that discriminatory enrolment practices exist and that teachers lack interest in their children are also reasons for a delay in enrolling their children.

By contrast, teachers say that Roma children do not attend kindergarten regularly because they have to look after younger siblings, or because their parents cannot afford to dress them on a daily basis or provide them with a snack. Teachers also say that children do not come because parents do not wake up in the morning to bring them to the kindergarten (Focus group, June 2010). In sum, a wide variety of reasons can be advanced for the low enrolment and attendance rates of Roma children.

However, the reasons advanced by Roma parents have much in common with comments by parents from other vulnerable or isolated groups, regardless of ethnicity. Distance from the local kindergarten, lack of public transport, and various socio-economic reasons are common to all poor, under-served communities. The situation is made worse for Roma families, because of discrimination, illiteracy (not being able to read, they lack information about enrolment times and procedures), and the lack of identity papers. Many Roma children do not have a birth certificate or a residential address. In turn, kindergartens will not enrol them because of the specific norms that apply to all children when entering kindergarten.

Source: National Report for Romania.

Most of these barriers can be addressed only from the national level, e.g. the lack of identity papers; the extreme poverty of Roma families; or the intolerable housing in which so many Roma children live. A solution to these upstream problems could do much to integrate Roma families and provide them with the possibility of sending their children to early childhood services and schools. Education initiatives need also to be

taken, e.g. to introduce weighted capitation financing linked to socio-economic and second language status. Such funding would make it in the interest of kindergartens and local governments to pursue inclusion in their enrolment policies and, at the same time, provide kindergartens or at least, community services in Roma areas.

The question of distance from services is particularly important when dealing with young children. Because of the inappropriateness and difficulties of transporting very young children to outside services, it would greatly help if policies to create simple community services for children in disadvantaged communities were developed and financed (see Conclusion 4 below). If new kindergartens cannot be built, then simple health and stimulation programmes for the youngest children can be extended upward to include children of kindergarten age.

Addressing barriers at local level

Local authorities, in consultation with Roma leaders and families, must also address barriers to access at local level more precisely and take the necessary steps to address them. Here, the link with central government is critical and the willingness of central government to enforce its own regulations. Mechanisms must be developed to enhance co-operation with local government. Experiences from other countries suggest that incentives are important: local governments can develop successful early childhood services if they have central financial and technical support for pre- and in-service training, supervision, standards, monitoring, evaluation and tracking systems.

The National Reports suggest that local government needs to serve excluded children better through more equitable service mapping and enrolment practices. In Hungary – a country with a relatively high kindergarten enrolment of Roma children from the age of three years – there is, according to statistical data for 2009/2010, no kindergarten service available in 29 per cent of local governments. These local governments are situated, for the most part, in areas where there are Roma majorities. Although such precise figures are unavailable in the countries under review, the situation seems very similar: health posts and kindergartens have not yet been created in most Roma rural settlements. The situation is improving through the employment of Roma health mediators and education assistants, but there is still a great lack of equity for rural and marginalised urban populations with regard to their access to public services.

Roma children in kindergartens

According to the National Reports, once Roma children are enrolled, more supervision of administration and teacher attitudes towards Roma children and parents is needed. In sum, to avoid discrimination, there is a need to monitor school processes and the personal attitudes of school staff. The issue of teacher interaction with Roma children and families is treated in Conclusion 6 below on *Effective kindergartens and schools for excluded children need mainstreaming, expanded services and appropriate pedagogies*.⁶⁹ As can be seen from the focus groups organised with Roma parents and other stakeholders in the four countries, neglectful or hostile attitudes by teachers and other public services personnel have become over time an important barrier to the use of public services by Roma parent (see Box 10).

In addition, both national inspectorates and local monitoring may wish to consider current work methodologies. The RECI focus groups often testify that neither Roma parents nor children feel comfortable in current kindergarten settings: Roma parents may not be

69 Pedagogical issues will be treated in far greater detail in a forthcoming Council of Europe/UNESCO publication.

welcomed or involved, and Roma children may find the activities have little connection with what they know or need. It is rare also that they can participate in after-school activities or in the choice of such activities. There is also the question of the quality of satellite kindergartens and schools. In these satellite centres – offshoots of the larger district school – quality is generally low and missed classes are frequent because of lack of backups for ill teachers. Young inexperienced teachers, fewer materials, decrepit buildings, abridged curricula, and low expectations can be the rule rather than the exception.

Attention also needs to be given at local level to the question of absenteeism, to explore whether this is due to the distance of Roma families from services, an unwelcoming kindergarten climate, inappropriate pedagogy, or from a failure to respond to the particular needs of Roma children.⁷⁰ Absenteeism needs also to be followed up and an obligation placed on schools to find out the reasons for repeated absences.

Toward equitable enrolment practice

With good will and better planning, enrolment practices that favour majority, dual earner families, can be changed. The following is an example of what can be done, taken from Ghent, a city of the Flemish Community in Belgium.

Box 11. Toward equitable enrolments

Ghent was the first city in Flanders to create a special enrolment procedure – known as ‘the Tinkelbel procedure’ – to ensure the equitable enrolment of children from vulnerable groups in public child care centres. Today, all parents wishing to enrol their child in child care now have to contact a central office, which assigns a place to children according to set social criteria. In so doing, the Tinkelbel procedure has ended the traditional “first in, first served” criterion that favoured higher educated two income families. Tinkelbel takes into account specific priority criteria that favour single mothers, parents who speak another language, parents with low incomes, parents in crisis situations. As a result, the population of the municipal child care centres is a reflection of the actual Ghent population in regard to income, working situation, origins, family composition etc.

The latest internal report of Tinkelbel (2009) shows that in the city:

- 20 per cent of the parent with a child in a public centre are in training.
- 16.6 per cent of the children live in single-parent families.
- 8.6 per cent are enrolled due to crisis situations in the family.
- 19 per cent of the parents have a low education.
- 19 per cent of children come from low-income families.
- 32 per cent of the families speak a home language other than Flemish.

The Ghent Childcare Service closely monitors this project and provides statistical data on access and on the (un)equal distribution of child care places within the city. These detailed figures are considered when planning new provision. The Pedagogical Centre has also set up a policy for the integration of children with disabilities in the day care centres.

Source: Peters, J. and Vandenbroeck, M. (2009).

70 There is some evidence from both Romania and Serbia that the provision of food to Roma children and conditional cash grants to parents can ensure the regular attendance of Roma children.

Partly underlying the exclusion of Roma families is the difficulty for local authorities in financing the current full-day organisation of the kindergarten service. Such services can be justified in the richer European countries in which high percentages of women work. The same need is not present in the CSEE countries where, in the countryside, employment for women is almost non-existent and in the cities, the percentage of employed women is relatively low. A more equitable and fit-for-purpose solution – at least until there is some approach to full employment in the CEE countries – may be to provide a daily three or four hour early education service in all communities, focused on the poorest children (see Conclusion 6 below).

2. In Addition to Legislation, Governments Need to Invest in Communication and Education to Renew Majority Notions of Citizenship and Democracy

In a sense majority attitudes and exclusionary behaviours are the problem. It is clear from the European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS) and the EU Gallup Poll conducted for the European Fundamental Rights Agency in 2009 that racist and discriminatory attitudes among the majority reinforce the social exclusion of Roma populations (see Chapter 2 part 3 above). As expressed by Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights:

The necessary legal and institutional frameworks are in place, but anti-Roma sentiment in political discourse and in the media is still a major problem. Prejudice among the majority population remains strong and has negative repercussions on the lives of many Roma.

The situation is a serious blot on Europe's human rights record. The question is raised: what can be done to change negative majority attitudes toward the Roma and particularly – within the scope of the RECI project – negative attitudes toward Roma among young children and their parents?

Already much is being done at European Union level through, for example:

- The PROGRESS programme, including the 'For Diversity: Against Discrimination' information campaign.
- The European Agenda for Culture which promotes cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue as a process contributing to European identity, citizenship and social cohesion, including the development of the intercultural competences of citizens.
- Awareness and media campaigns that are aimed at changing mainstream mind-sets through communication and education also exist. For example, the European Union has supported fairer news coverage about the Roma and financed media programmes, such as Dosta! Go beyond the prejudice, discover the Roma!⁷¹

These actions need to be supported at national level by establishing anti-discrimination bodies and/or procedures that can be invoked when rights and obligations are disregarded, for example:

- Equality bodies or monitoring committees, working closely with Romani NGOs and legal practitioners, which have the capacity to draw attention to non-compliance, when it occurs at central or local government levels.

71 The series aims to inform the majority about how Roma families live, and to build bridges between Roma and the rest of the society.

- Research and other educational bodies dedicated to raising public awareness about existing rights, not least in the education field.
- Financial disincentives to combat inaction in implementing equality and inclusion policies, e.g. withdrawal of European and national funding if agreed policies are not implemented, such as, involving and supporting Roma civil society in both the design and implementation of policies and projects that concern them.

Discrimination against young Roma children

In regard to the education of young children, many excellent anti-discrimination projects and guidelines already exist, for example:

The Council of Europe's *Recommendation (2000,4) on the education of Roma/ Gypsy children in Europe*. The main chapters of this recommendation refer to: the recognition of Roma as a minority; training for teachers and other Roma education staff; development and distribution of teaching material; language teaching; studies and dissemination of information on Romani history and culture; the highlighting of positive experiences; etc.

National ministries of education and international organisation have also taken initiatives to develop inter-cultural curricula and retrain teachers in anti-bias attitudes. In this respect, the social justice training in Step by Step programmes is well known;⁷² as is the bilingual-intercultural work of UNICEF, including its insistence on respect for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in all children's services.

However, the experience of many Roma children in kindergartens and schools can be extremely negative, even at kindergarten level. The Focus Groups for Roma mothers and other stakeholders, organised by the authors of the *National Report*, unanimously refer to neglect by teachers and hostility and bullying by other children.

Segregated schools and classes

Surprisingly, Roma parents referred much less often to the segregation of their children into special schools classes, with devalued curricula and often (especially in the majority Roma schools) weakly qualified staff and poorly endowed learning environments. But, as mentioned in Chapter 2 part 5, perverse incentives are offered to Roma parents to enrol children in special schools, for example, free meals, textbooks, and a safer environment for children. In order to offer Roma parents a real choice, these incentives should also be made available in the mainstream schools.

To turn this situation around will require the long-term engagement of education ministries and local governments, as not only has an unhelpful tradition of segregation been built up but also majority parents find an interest in the arrangement and defend it strongly. This is a serious obstacle to overcome in any country and may need to be tackled both directly through pressure on local governments and by media and other information campaigns. In the long-term, such prejudice has to be tackled by the national education system through the teaching and practice of democracy in kindergartens and schools. The general modernisation and improvement of national education systems can also be a means of breaking down exclusionary attitudes, e.g. through promoting inquiry-based learning, and the ability to work cooperatively with

72 The Step by Step Program was launched by the Open Society Foundations in Central Eastern Europe/Eurasia in 1994. It has grown into a network of national NGOs and the regional International Step by Step Association (ISSA).

others; encouraging team-based project work; valuing social and civic competences, and respect for diversity.

Toward democratic values and practice in kindergartens and schools

From the RECI perspective, a major aim of anti-discrimination policy should be to emphasise the practice of democracy in all school and educational programmes. *Starting Strong II*, the final report of the international review of early childhood policies conducted by the OECD (2006), concludes with a call “to aspire toward ECEC systems that support broad learning, participation and democracy”. This means an early childhood system that encourages inclusive attitudes among young children, and recognises the democratic dimension in parental involvement (OECD, 2006: 218–219). The approach differs greatly from simply teaching about human rights and democracy which, in general, may not affect the structure and operation of the education system itself.

A first priority is to understand the goals and purposes of education. Because of PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS, etc. it is easy for ministries and the general public to believe that education is about individual and national performance in easily measurable subject areas. The UNESCO *Delors Report* (1996) proposes broader goals for education: *Learning to be; learning to do; learning to learn; and learning to live together*. Learning is fundamentally a social activity and its goals should include – in addition to its utility for individuals – the protection and development of society. This basic philosophy is shared by the great educators of the 20th century, such as, John Dewey, Paolo Freire or Loris Malaguzzi.

Writing about the Reggio Emilia experience, the Italian authors, Cagliari, Barozzi and Giudici, (2004) note:

The educational project of Reggio Emilia is by definition a participation-based project: its true educational meaning is to be found in the participation of all concerned. This means that everyone – children, teachers and parents – is involved in sharing ideas, in discussion, in a sense of common purpose and with communication as a value... In the Reggio Emilia experience, participation, is a value, an identifying feature of the entire experience, a way of viewing those involved in the educational process and the role of the school... This idea of participation, therefore, defines the early childhood centre as a social and political place and thus as an educational place in the fullest sense. However, this is not a given, so to speak, it is not a natural, intrinsic part of being a school. It is a philosophical choice, a choice based on values.

Source: Cited in Moss (2010).

Applied to kindergartens, this implies a conscious effort to involve parents and communities – including Roma communities – in the education of their children. A first task would be to ensure that early childhood centres and schools are child- and family-friendly and that basic principles of living together are guaranteed. According to UNICEF (2008), the five pillars of the child-friendly kindergarten are: inclusiveness, a healthy, protective and gender-sensitive environment; the engagement of families and communities; effective pedagogy (based on play and other child-centred methods); and the achievement of a smooth transition into the formal primary school environment (UNICEF, 2008). This position is well supported by researchers such as Irvine (2002) and Ogbu (1978) in the USA or Vandenbroeck in Europe (2007), who have all underlined the importance of school climate. According to DECET⁷³ (2008) – a European association

73 The Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training (DECET) network represents NGOs and institutions focused on diversity in Europe. See their website: <http://www.decet.org>.

working for diversity in early childhood education and training – a high quality early childhood service is one where:

- Every child, parent and staff member should feel that s/he belongs. This implies an active policy to take into account family cultures when constructing the curriculum and daily routines.
- Every child, parent and staff member is empowered to develop the diverse aspects of his/her different identities. This implies that the curriculum fosters multiple identity building and multilingualism by building bridges between the home and the institutional environment as well as with the local community.
- Everyone can learn from each other across cultural and other boundaries.
- Everyone can participate as active citizens. This implies that staff develop an explicit anti-bias approach and takes appropriate action to involve all parents.

The mixing of children in services

Another democratic goal will be to ensure the mixing of children in services and to end the practice of segregated education. This issue needs to be seen not only from a human rights perspective but also from one of education effectiveness. The present channelling of low-income and second language children into separate schools holds back these children and pulls down the general performance of national education systems. Despite strong pressure from parents with 'bright' children – and sometimes from teachers who lack the creativity needed to teach children with learning difficulties – education research shows that, on the whole, streaming or tracking before upper secondary level does not greatly enhance the learning of the more advanced children, but affects very negatively the learning of children assigned to streamed, lower grade classrooms. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds and children with learning needs of various sorts – who together often make up a third of the school population – learn more effectively in mixed, non-streamed classrooms (for an overview of the research, see Harlen and Malcolm (1999) from the Scottish Council for Research in Education. See also, studies by Slavin (1990), PISA (2004), Hanushek and Wossmann (2005), the National Middle School Association *Research Summary*, (2007).

Children with additional learning needs

With regard to students with special or additional learning needs, the research is strongly on the side of mixed grouping. Although differentiated teaching methods are also needed within the mixed-ability classroom, the clear conclusion from the research is that:

- Mixed grouping results in positive effects on academic achievement, self-esteem and interpersonal relationships of lower achieving students.
- Children with special need require for their development interactions with peers, opportunities to develop higher-level thinking, recognition of their contributions, and equal access to quality instruction.

According to UNICEF (2010), the practice of streaming or 'ability-grouping' helps to reproduce the status quo and can be detrimental to education and social justice goals. Research on young children shows with considerable certainty that children 3 to 8 years of age display both positive and negative attitudes towards other children with differentiating features and/or developmental delays. Connolly's (2009) research in Northern Ireland finds that even by the age of 3 years, children have already begun to absorb discriminatory attitudes from their parents and that by the age of 5 years can show hostile reactions to other young children outside their group.

By contrast, inclusive education helps to foster a cohesive social culture. Children in mixed classrooms led by inclusive teachers show:

1. Reduced fear of human difference accompanied by an increased comfort and awareness.
2. Growth in social cognition.
3. Improvements in self-concepts.
4. Development of personal principles, and
5. Warm and caring friendship relationships with children from the 'out-group' (UNICEF, 2010).

Children exposed to a more diverse peer group from an early age show far more positive attitudes towards 'the others' than their parents' generation. In sum, the most effective way to influence thinking about difference and/or disability is personal contact. This further demonstrates the importance of starting inclusive education as early as possible.

3. The Major Responsibility for Early Childhood Policies Remains with National and Local Governments. Their Efforts Will Be More Effective if Linked Closely with EU Roma Initiatives

Member States are primarily responsible for Roma integration, including for Romani access to key areas such as employment, health care, housing and education. This competence – including competence for early childhood policies – is written into all the major EU treaties. The inclusion of Roma children will not happen unless countries themselves take the lead in setting priorities and coordinating activities.

For several reasons, Roma inclusion policy must seek to avoid labelling and, in so far as possible, programmes for Roma children should be part of mainstream national policy for all children. In parallel, community programmes, specific to the disadvantage, should also be initiated because:

- Separate programming risks constructing Roma children as a separate group which, in the long term, may further inhibit their inclusion in society.
- Specific programmes for the Roma tend to become poor programmes as, in many instances, they are at present.
- When social programmes are presented as focussed on minorities only, they run the risk of losing majority support. Disadvantage is also present among the majority – not least in the CEE countries – and disadvantaged children among the majority generally far outnumber Roma children.
- Mainstreaming Roma inclusion issues, rather than treating them as separate issues falls into line with Principles No. 2 and No. 4 of the Common Basic Principles on Roma inclusion, '*explicit but not exclusive targeting*' and '*aiming for the mainstream*'.

From a policy development perspective, all *preventive* social policies (that is, reducing the inflow of citizens into poverty) can be national policies. Such policies could include a minimum income and equitable access to health care, social welfare, early development and education systems (Frazer et al. 2010). As Conclusion 7 of this report recommends, what is needed within national systems is disaggregated data and research so that universal policies can be more responsive to the needs of certain groups and localities. In parallel, for those children that actually do attend kindergarten, proactive policies are needed to focus resources on specific neighbourhoods and to provide early diagnosis and appropriate programmes for children with learning difficulties. Likewise, the inclusion of

Romani cultural artefacts and language into curricula can be achieved as a right open to all language groups, once a viable proportion of children speaking that language exists.

The urgent creation of community programmes is needed

At the same time, community-level programmes for mothers and young children are also critically needed, even if it means leaving aside – until the age of 3 or 4 or 5 years – the mixing of Roma and majority children, as advocated in the previous section. When territorial segregation has already occurred and while children are very young, the mixing of young children can be achieved only at great cost. Health and education personnel cannot change existing housing segregation or reasonably expect parents to bring very young children to municipal services that are far from their homes, especially when winter climates are rude and no public transport exists.⁷⁴ In these cases, services need to be brought to where people are, with the support and input of the local community.⁷⁵ This manner of programming keeps the child within the family circle and has the advantage of raising community knowledge and, if properly organised, of providing local employment (see also the following Section 4).

In this regard, it may be useful to recall that the early childhood field has been a leading creator of employment in North America in the last two decades (Bartik, 2011) or that in **Romania**, most of the approximately 500 health mediators are Roma women. This is not only significant employment but also makes an indispensable contribution to the health and education of Roma children.⁷⁶ The health mediators' role is to identify health problems and associated social problems, prepare registration with family doctors, prepare vaccination campaigns and disseminate information regarding the health system, hygiene, contraception and family planning. They also deal with issues related to the lack of birth certificates or identity papers and signal social problems to the local authorities.

Trained Roma education assistants play a similar role in education. The small evaluations of the initiative suggest that Roma assistants have the expertise – if not yet the mandate and financing – to show Roma mothers how to support the development and language of young children and to establish simple community-based play groups and school holiday activities. In a situation characterised by lack of services, community-based programming for very young children is a viable alternative and protects – as early childhood services should – local democratic choice and the family role in the upbringing of children. The RECI reports encourage the CSEE countries to expand and finance such positions for Roma women and to ensure that high performance and years of experience will be counted toward further training and credits.

Linking national programmes to EU initiatives

Despite the malaise caused by the recent communication: *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*, there are strong advantages to be had from linking national policy to European Union initiatives. In particular, the EU offers:

74 In any case, the bussing of very young children is not appropriate.

75 By local community is meant a grouping smaller than the local municipality; in many instances, the latter may not be at all sensitive to the concerns of Roma parents.

76 Care must be exercised to ensure that this good solution should not become the cause of a new problem, further distancing the Roma population from the majority. For example, the employment of pedagogical and health-care assistants and health-care could lead to the belief that only Romani workers can work effectively with the Roma population, which conveniently absolves administrative services from their responsibility to all citizens.

- *A protective human rights and treaty framework:* The EU rights and treaty framework is extremely comprehensive regarding excluded minorities.
- *A collection of legal and policy texts on the situation and inclusion of Roma:* Many important texts treating Romani issues have been voted-in by the Council or by the European Parliament, which provide common objectives for EU countries regarding Roma and constitute an accumulated store of knowledge and experience in Roma policy-making.
- *A dynamic social inclusion policy framework:* The EU stimulates and provides financing for policies in a broad range of governmental fields. One of the key fields is social inclusion, highlighted in the Lisbon Treaty and reinforced by the new *EU 2020 Strategy*. Through its *Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process*, the EU coordinates and supports Member State actions to combat poverty and focuses attention increasingly on Roma populations.
- *Active policy initiatives on behalf of Roma:* Among the key initiatives in which the EU has been involved have been the 2005–2015 *Decade of Roma Inclusion* and the *Integrated Platform for Roma Inclusion*. Within the former, an international conference on the “Right to Education for Every Child: Removing Barriers and Fostering Inclusion for Roma children” was held in Belgrade in June 2009. Within the latter, there has emerged, for example, the *10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion* (Prague, 2009), a *Roadmap for Roma Inclusion* (Cordóba, 2010) and a strong focus on early childhood initiatives at the request of the Belgian Presidency (December, 2010).⁷⁷ EU stimulation measures to assist the Roma policies of Member States are also important. For example, *Enlargement and Pre-Accession* funding is used by the EU to raise awareness and focus attention on the discrimination and social exclusion faced by Roma communities in candidate countries. The overview of the Commission is also critical for the wealthier EU states, as shown, for example, by its intervention in 2010 vis-à-vis France.
- *Substantial financing for national Roma initiatives:* Roma issues are now mainstreamed within all EU activities. For this reason, Roma inclusion may be supported through activities financed by various European Union funding mechanisms⁷⁸ and by using national funding in a more effective way.⁷⁹ The following is a citation from the recent EC Communication: *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*:

There are significant amounts of EU technical assistance at Member States’ disposal (4 per cent of all Structural Funds), out of which Member States on average had only used 31 per cent of their planned allocations until late 2009. These amounts would be lost if not used. When designing their national Roma integration strategies, Member States should therefore make greater use of EU technical assistance to improve their management, monitoring and evaluation capacities also with regard to Roma-targeted projects. This instrument could also

77 The Belgian Presidency discussion paper, in which UNICEF played a strong role, is entitled: *Preventing Social Exclusion through the Europe 2020 Strategy: Early Childhood Development and the Inclusion of Roma families*.

78 Among the funds that can be accessed are: the European Social Fund (ESF), which supports the improvement of living and working conditions of Roma, and invests in education and skills development; the European Regional Development Funds (ERDF), whose principal objective is to promote economic and social cohesion within the European Union through the reduction of imbalances between regions or social groups; Enlargement and Pre-Accession Funds; other funding mechanisms related to EC activities such as: the Lifelong Learning Programme; the Youth in Action Programme; the Culture Programme (2007–2013); the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development; the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance; the Public health programme (2008–2013), the PROGRESS programme (including the ‘For Diversity: Against Discrimination’ information campaign). Other measures – supported by EU Structural Funds – focus on preparatory pre-school classes, after-school support, the appointment of Romani teaching assistants or mediators, targeted scholarship programmes, and the development of equity indicators.

79 See van Ravens (2011).

potentially be used by Member States to obtain the expertise of regional, national and international organisations in preparing, implementing and monitoring interventions...Member States should also consider using the European Progress Microfinance Facility, for which a total of €100 million of EU funding is available for the period 2010–2013. The Commission estimates that this amount can be leveraged to more than €500 million in microcredit over the coming eight years. Roma communities are one of the target groups of the instrument. Giving Roma communities the opportunity to start autonomous productive activities could motivate people to actively participate in regular work, reduce benefit dependency and inspire future generations.

The 'A Good Start' (AGS) pilot initiative is an example of EU funding of national programming. See Box 12.

Box 12. A Good Start (AGS) pilot initiative

'A Good Start' (AGS) was developed to address major disparities in Roma access to ECEC services. The pilot aims to increase access to early childhood education and care services for more than 4000 children between 0–6 years of age in 16 locations across Hungary, Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia. Activities are tailored to the specific contexts and needs of the target populations in each country.

Led by the Roma Education Fund, the core approach is to support selected partners who are already working with Roma children. AGS focuses on enhancing children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development, through early education, outreach to communities, parent education and health services. In particular, AGS aims to empower families, particularly female care-givers, to create effective home learning environments. The programme provides material support; prepares children for transition to compulsory education; trains staff; conducts rigorous monitoring and evaluation; promotes relationships with government partners and builds professional networks.

Results: An evaluation of the Hungarian Meséd Project, one of the AGS pilot sites, suggests that AGS has been an effective strategy for engaging and supporting Roma mothers, most of whom have not gone beyond primary education. The data shows that the mothers used the learning materials provided by the project and applied effectively the skills learned in their groups to promote their children's learning. In addition, they employed improved parenting practices and developed supportive relationships with other members of their group.

Source: Kavanagh, M. (2011), Case Study of the Meséd Project, Budapest, Roma Education Fund.

A strong research and evaluation framework: The EU is a leading sponsor of policy research, especially through the Social Inclusion and Education and Training OMCs (Open Method of Coordination). It seeks to develop knowledge, data collection and reform on the basis of policy exchanges and mutual learning between Member States. The effectiveness of the method can be seen in the enormous growth of European research in the last decade on social inclusion/exclusion mechanisms. Currently, this research is turning increasingly toward the study of Roma exclusion. For example, the recent *Evaluation of European Social Fund Support for Enhancing Access to the Labour Market and the Social Inclusion of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities* (DG Employment, 2011) shows that the most effective means of using the ESF to promote Roma inclusion was found to be a combination of specific Roma actions with mainstreaming. This implies an

'integrated approach' to Roma inclusion which requires a cross-cutting, holistic approach that links education with training and employment, while at the same time addressing Roma housing and health. The *Evaluation* also notes, less positively, that educational infrastructure has sometimes been developed through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which has, in fact, exacerbated Roma segregation. The example cited refers to building 'Roma' schools, rather than including Roma pupils in mainstream schools through the provision of additional appropriate support services e.g. through the use of social workers and classroom assistants.

In sum, despite the criticisms of the *European 2020 Framework*, the European Union can support national policies for Roma children with powerful policy and financial tools. The Framework has developed a more effective response to Roma exclusion by setting EU-wide goals for integrating Roma, in education, employment, health and housing. It requires Member States to submit national Roma strategies to the Commission by the end of 2011, specifying how they will contribute to achieving the overall EU integration goals, including setting national targets and allowing for sufficient funding to deliver them. Finally, it proposes solutions for using EU funds more effectively and has laid the foundations for a robust mechanism to monitor results. See Box 13.

Box 13. How will the European Commission check on progress?

The Commission will report annually to the European Parliament and to the Council on progress on the integration of the Roma population in Member States and on the achievement of Roma integration goals.

It will base its monitoring notably on:

- The results of the Roma household survey regularly carried out by the Fundamental Rights Agency, the United Nations Development Programme in cooperation with the World Bank.
- National reform programmes in the frame of the EU 2020 Strategy, in particular for those countries with a high share of Roma population.
- On-going work within the Open Method of Coordination in the field of social policies.
- Member States contributions based on their own monitoring systems which national authorities are requested to include in their national Roma integration strategies.
- It will also take into account the work of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion.

Source: An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020.

4. In Contexts of Extreme Poverty and Exclusion, Developmental Readiness for School Requires a Multi-Dimensional Concept of Early Childhood Programming That Places a Strong Emphasis on Early Intervention and Women's Education

European Union policies in favour of Roma populations underline that issues of social inclusion, poverty, employment, health, housing and education need to be tackled simultaneously. The approach recognises that social exclusion is multi-dimensional in its causes and requires for its solution a multi-dimensional concept of social planning, which calls in turn for careful coordination of ministry policies at national level.

In parallel, a multi-dimensional concept of early childhood services is needed. Before getting Roma children into kindergarten and school, early intervention programmes

are urgently needed to ensure their developmental readiness. The situation of Roma families is such that a 'bums-on-seats' policy – whether for kindergarten or schools – is entirely inadequate.

- Because of their poverty, their isolation, their lack of education, and the stressful nature of their lives, Roma mothers are often unable to care for themselves during pregnancy or to have the time or knowledge to stimulate their babies sufficiently during the first critical years of life.
- The experience of infants in the first two years of life, while brain growth is in process, deeply affects future development. The child's experiences in these years impact on the architecture of the brain, its neurochemistry and the gene expression that mediates cognitive, emotional and social behaviours. Nutritional, care and interactional experiences set in place a lifelong trajectory that influences all of a child's subsequent development from infancy to adulthood, including her capacity for socialization and education (Mustard, 2008).
- The early childhood period is therefore a potentially vulnerable stage in life where extreme poverty and malnutrition have lasting negative effects on subsequent health and development.
- Research shows that infants with low birth-weight and stunting in the first two years of life have lower cognitive test scores, delayed development and higher rates of absenteeism compared with non-stunted children.

These findings suggest that interventions to address the lack of proper nutrition and other health hazards of expectant Roma mothers and their children, should begin before childbirth and continue through the early childhood period. In sum, what is needed in many settlements is a multi-dimensional intervention model, that is acceptable to the community, economical to run (so staffed to a great extent by Roma mothers, with some professional assistance) and self-sustaining. Because of the poverty and isolation of many Roma communities, external means of funding local services must be found, for example, through the appropriate use of European funds or through direct financial transfers from government, larger municipalities or regions.

A holistic, multi-dimensional intervention model

A diagram for multi-dimensional intervention is presented on the following page. The aim in this type of intervention is to bring integrated health, care and education to where the mothers and children are, that is, into their communities. This can be achieved in a sensitive way by the local health and paediatric services, for example, in consultation with Roma communities and NGOs, and with the help of Roma health and education assistants. Only Roma participation can ensure the legitimacy, accountability and success of such services.

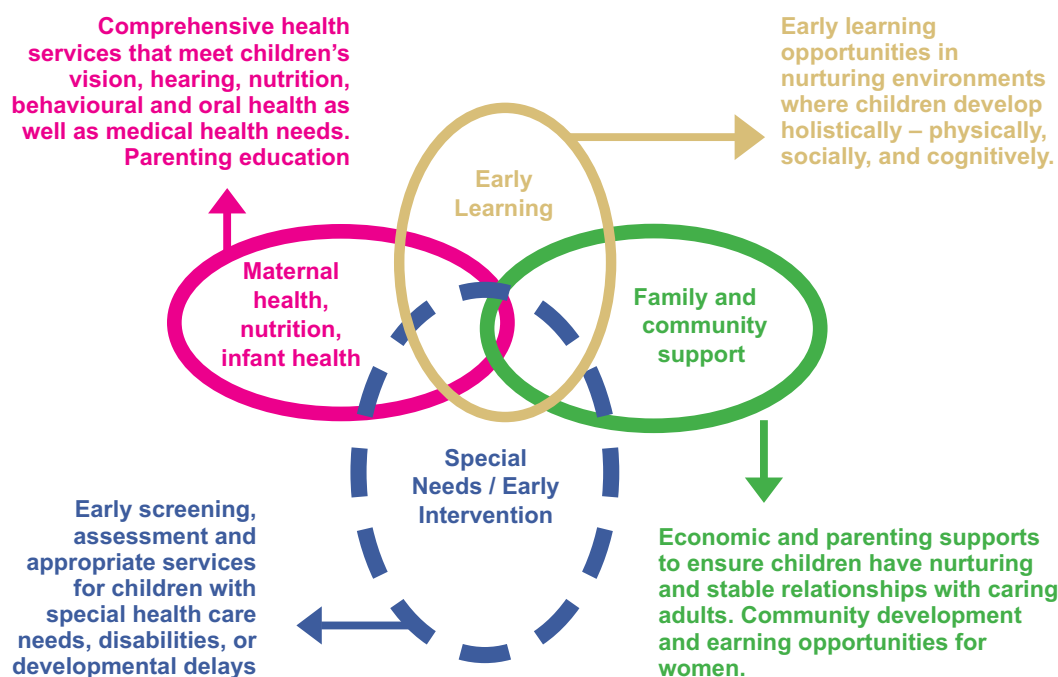
The model proposed protects the primary role of families in rearing children. As the Preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child states:

The family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community...

Not only are parents the first caregivers and educators of children, they are also the most important. State and municipal services are there to support parents, not to replace them. In consequence, early childhood interventions should be designed primarily to support parental efforts to rear their children decently.

An effective intervention model will build on parents' unique interest in and knowledge about their children. It will promote positive attitudes toward children's learning; provide parents with parenting information and support. According to the focus groups, many Roma mothers are prevented from supporting their children by extreme poverty, lack of time, or by not knowing how they can support their children's development and learning. Men too can be involved in this model of community action for young children. They can play a more active role vis-à-vis their young children and participate in community building and entrepreneurship in order to overcome family poverty and the lack of basic community resources.

Figure 2. A holistic model of early intervention



Source: Adapted by UNICEF from the ECD Systems Working Group, Minnesota, 2007.

All four dimensions should be addressed simultaneously and actively. As mentioned in the **Macedonian National Report**, early intervention should be regular, respectful and address education issues as well as infant health. Interventions should include pre- and postnatal health, parenting and adult education, play and stimulation programmes for toddlers, conducted in the relevant Romani dialect.⁸⁰ Interventions should also pay special attention to the education of girls.

In all countries, the educational level of mothers is a significant indicator of informed child-rearing, early language interactions and children's success (or lack of it) in school. More education is needed to open new pathways for Roma girls, to overcome dependence and reliance on traditional role models. For the moment, however, a wide gap exists between the expectations of Roma mothers for their daughters and what schools offer. One mother remarked that the school does not provide the skills Roma women need for life: "they don't learn the things known to be of use to a housewife:

80 At present there are some 80 different varieties of Rromani-chib, or Romanës, spoken by differing Romani groups – see <http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/whatis/language/origins.shtml>.

cooking, doing the laundry, taking care of the children". Such views must be taken into account by the education authorities and kindergarten teachers when planning activities. Children in advanced kindergartens in many countries – boys as well as girls – play at 'house' and learn many useful things, such as cooking, tidying up after activities and looking after the young children. In fact, in many countries looking after a younger child is a central feature of kindergarten practice.

Box 14. Gender equality in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The equality of women is an important indicator for the early childhood field as it indicates not only the place of women in society (employment, education levels, wages, etc.) but also public attitudes toward women, toward child-rearing and toward the education of girls. The 2010 Global Gender Gap Index⁸¹ ranks the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as 49th in the world, the Czech Republic 65th, Romania 67th and Serbia (not classified⁸²). Gender inequality is generated especially by low political representation of women, unequal employment opportunities, unequal pay for equal work, and by highly gendered child-rearing.

Like the other countries in the RECI review, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has followed the orthodox transition period compromise: long parental leave assuming that women will care for young children at home; weak public childcare services; and long-day public kindergarten (favouring the relatively few dual-income families).

In the country, the employment rate of Roma women is not known but reports suggest that they are mostly unemployed except for unstable temporary jobs in the grey market. Roma women are not prioritized in any employment programme, despite evidence indicating that they have fewer opportunities to access employment than men.

Roma society is highly patriarchal and women are expected to marry, be obedient to their husbands, have children and rear them. Traditions related to the virginity of young women limit education during adolescence, which later can affect family size and parenting skills. Less educated mothers in all societies have fewer opportunities to plan and space births, to support their children's education or to create an environment in which children will fully use their potential.

Child marriage also occurs with some frequency in the Roma community (less frequently in the ethnic Albanian community). It is difficult to estimate the extent of under-age marriage as families rarely register such marriages. In general, early parenthood deepens poverty, limits the education of the young parents, may endanger young mothers and be detrimental to the development of their children.

Some of these traditional practices are perceived as Romani culture by both Roma and non-Roma. However, Roma human rights activists demand that these practices, harmful to young women, should be eliminated, pointing out that they are not 'Roma practices' but exist in every patriarchal society. They point out also that the Roma community does not have the sole responsibility in overcoming these practices. The responsible authorities should apply the laws of the country; culture should not be used as an excuse

81 The Gender Gap Index assesses countries on how well they divide resources and opportunities among their male and female populations, based on 14 variables across four dimensions: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; political empowerment; health and survival.

82 The higher the number, the greater is the gender gap.

to tolerate such practices. The country has no institutional mechanism to discourage child marriages and no defined policies to address the issue.

The EU Commission writes in its 2009 Progress Report on equal rights for women in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:

Only limited progress has been made towards implementing the Law on Equal Opportunities. Also the capacity of the section for equal opportunities remains insufficient to fulfil its role, as well as administrative capacity to promote the human rights of women in rural areas. Support for activities and initiatives aimed at combating discriminatory customs, traditions and stereotypes remain insufficient. Participation of women in decision-making at both national and local levels is low. Female participation in the labour force remains very low. Preparations in this area are on-going.

5. In the Early Childhood Sector, Effective Governance and Consolidated Policies Are Critical

As outlined in Chapter 2A, the RECI *National Reports* testify to weaknesses in the governance of existing early childhood programming for Roma children. Notably, they refer to:

- *Weak statutory obligations.* Constitutions may be strong on inclusion and non-discrimination but, in fact, there may be few enforceable statutory obligations requiring public authorities to avoid institutional discrimination, to take specific actions or to achieve measurable results.
- *Reluctance to use European initiatives* to improve the situation of Roma children, e.g. to engage with the EU *Social Inclusion Process*, which has put into place a regular monitoring and reporting process to measure progress towards achieving common European objectives, not least in regard to Roma.
- *The inability of responsible ministries to coordinate assistance coming from outside the country*, whether from the European Union or the major international organizations. Because of lack of expertise or of critical mass, early childhood departments can fail to integrate external initiatives into the national plan for children (when it exists) or to utilize effectively the different funding sources placed at their disposition.
- *A lack of capacity to develop and coordinate national policy.* This can be seen in failure to develop and mainstream a national inclusion plan for children across ministries (horizontal planning) or to implement such a plan at ground level due to weaknesses in vertical coordination, especially in regard to local government. The *National Reports* and *Roundtables* suggest that ministries continue to pursue their traditional aims without reference to each other or to the Romani NGOs working in the field. In sum, initiatives and activities for young children may be numerous but remain extremely fragmented.
- *Overall poor quality in kindergarten services.* Some excellent kindergartens exist in all the countries reviewed, but alongside, there can be large pockets of poor quality: unsanitary buildings and poor learning environments for young children; the use of unqualified staff, particularly in satellite schools, and insufficient in-service training; over-crowding and high child:staff ratios; lack of appropriate educational materials for young children. These weaknesses are often due to inadequate financing. In particular, poor, sparsely populated municipalities (of which there are many) find

their allocations totally inadequate: children in these municipalities, from deprived, second-language backgrounds need infrastructure and equipment adjusted to their age, experienced teachers, small groups, appropriate didactic methods and additional educational programmes.

- *Insufficient involvement of education ministries in programming for children under 3 years.* It seems evident that many children from very deprived backgrounds are coming into kindergarten either totally unprepared or too late. Action is needed from education ministries to engage with other ministries (health, social welfare, regional development, etc.) in strengthening early health care and stimulation systems for the younger children in the most deprived and isolated settlements. The developmental readiness of young children for kindergarten should be a concern of the ministry of education.

Governance of an early childhood system

What then is effective governance of an early childhood system? In summary, the governance of a national early childhood system could include the following elements, as outlined in Box 15.

Box 15. Elements of a well-governed early childhood system

A well-governed national early childhood system should include, as a minimum, the following elements:

- Legislation and a national curriculum framework as the basis for the system;
- An on-going and funded National Plan for young children with system-wide targets and timetables;
- Policy, planning and programme delivery organised from one lead early childhood department which has sufficient mass and expertise;
- Clear definitions of the roles and responsibilities of other departments, which are supervised annually by an effective inter-ministerial council established to coordinate policies and implementation;
- Regulations to define minimum standards and monitoring to ensure that standards are met;
- Effective public management of the system at local level and, in so far as possible, not-for-profit provision of services;
- Appropriate involvement of community, parents, teachers and children in the provision and organisation of children's services;
- Funded strategies for on-going quality improvement, including strong support for documentation and teacher in-service training;
- An evidence-based system founded on thorough data collection and the mandated involvement of researchers and stakeholders in policy processes at all levels.

Source. Adapted from CRRU, 2007, Quality by design.

The development of national legislation, a curriculum framework and an on-going *National Plan for Early Childhood Development and Education* are critical elements in the governance of an effective system. These elements also provide an opportunity to go beyond technical solutions and to launch a public consultation on early childhood policy in answer to the question: *what are our national goals for young children?* As mentioned in Recommendation 2 in the present chapter, a major purpose of kindergarten education is to provide children with developmental readiness for school.

Another important aim is to enable children to understand what it means to live in a democratic society and to educate them in democratic reflexes, such as, participation, respect for diversity, learning to live together. This aspect is critically important in societies in which divisive tendencies have appeared. A leading European framework in this respect is the Swedish *Preschool Curriculum* (Lpfö, 1998) which states in its first chapter:

Democracy forms the foundation of the pre-school system. For this reason, all pre-school activity should be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values. Each and everyone working in the preschool should promote respect for the intrinsic value of each person, as well as respect for our shared environment.... An important task of the preschool is to establish and help children acquire the values on which our society is based. The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between the genders as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the preschool should actively promote in its work with children."

Developing an on-going National Plan for Early Childhood Development and Education, with measurable targets, indicators and timelines, is also critical for the momentum and progress of the system. Such a plan would: establish entitlements to services (with a special focus on excluded children); allow for management decentralization to local governments with proper financing, support and monitoring; develop a broad curriculum framework and national learning standards that allow for local inputs and flexibility; set criteria for a well-educated and well-paid workforce, who would have the benefit of continuous in-service training; provide for the sub-systems that contribute to the quality of the system, such as, data collection and research; tertiary-level teacher-training colleges; a network for regular professional development; a support and inspection corps; a national ECEC evaluation body to carry out regular and objective evaluations of national policies and practice, etc. The development of a *National Plan* could be the responsibility of the central coordinating ministry – in consultation with other stakeholders, including local governments, civil society, parents and Roma bodies. If various ministerial plans were consolidated within the framework of a *National Plan*, some sense of purposeful organisation could be achieved.

Strategy inputs from the *National Reports*

The *National Reports* and recent European Commission documents, in particular, *Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow*, COM (2011) also outline useful strategies to improve governance. These include:

- Overcoming lack of ministerial capacity: The recent EC Communication: An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, page 10, brings a partial response to this issue:

To surmount capacity issues, such as lack of know-how and administrative capacity of managing authorities and the difficulties of combining funds to support integrated projects, the Commission invites Member States to consider entrusting the management and implementation of some parts of their programmes to intermediary bodies such as international organisations, regional development bodies, churches and religious organisations or communities as well as non-governmental organisations with proven experience in Roma integration and knowledge of actors on the ground. In this respect, the network of the European Economic and Social Committee could be a useful tool.

- *Integrating the National Plan for Early Childhood Development and Education as a central component into the National Plan for Social Inclusion.* This linking with European Commission requirements imposes a focus on the holistic development of excluded children as a cross-cutting goal for all the social ministries, including education. The association of national early childhood policy with the *National Plan for Social Inclusion* could be very beneficial for Roma children.
- *Ensuring integrated services:* Perhaps, the surest way of integrating programmes is bring full responsibility for child health, care and education under one dedicated ministry or, at least, to ensure that ministries of education engage more actively with policy and programming for children under 3 years.
- *Improving multi-sectoral coordination:* The issue of multi-sectoral coordination was also raised frequently in the National Reports (see, for example, the profile of **Serbia**). Lack of coordination occurs at two levels: horizontally across ministries and vertically toward local governments.⁸³ For the former, it was suggested that an Inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee should be created, presided over by the lead ministry for children, which would meet bi-annually to coordinate policies and implementation.

For a variety of reasons, vertical coordination from the centre toward the field is more difficult to achieve. First it is necessary to find the optimum subsidiary level of operation at which to coordinate ministerial policies. This will differ from country to country, but local government – if it has sufficient mass and expertise – can achieve the necessary coordination when it is properly resourced and supported. To promote more expert attention to children’s issues, we recommend for consideration the creation of an *Early Childhood Council* in every local government, with responsibility for social inclusion, child health and education from infancy to school age. This Council should involve a wide range of stakeholders, including Roma NGOs and Roma parents and community representatives in municipalities where Roma communities exist. The local *Early Childhood Council* would also establish and support at local level, participative and transparent evaluation processes, taking into account the views of minority parents concerning the quality of services and their appropriateness to meet the needs of Roma families and their children.

- *Organise a system for continuous ECD monitoring and evaluation:* Most countries have regulatory systems but they suffer from two weaknesses. Firstly, the regulations largely concern building issues (fire, sanitation and health) and more rarely set standards for the rights of children, management and teacher behaviour, pedagogy or important extra-curricular matters, such as the reception and involvement of parents. A second weakness is that the regulations are rarely enforced, especially those regarding parents, children and minority groups who often remain without a voice or means of redress. Hence, the need for ministries to reform the regulations, ensure that they are respected and provide a means of redress to parents whenever regulations are constantly or seriously breached.

83 There is also lack of coordination with the NGO and civil society sector.

6. Effective Kindergartens and Schools for Excluded Children Need Clear Goals, High Quality, Expanded Services, and Outreach to Parents and Communities

Where goals for young children are concerned, the following chart from UNICEF (2008) suggests that a national government approach to young children could embrace the following goals at different ages:

Table 10. An early childhood development agenda for Roma children

| Developmental stage | Issues to address |
|-------------------------------|---|
| A. Conception – birth | Ensuring quality pre- and post-natal health care for mothers and infants within the communities, through visiting health services and the use of Roma bridging personnel. Reasonable family living standards. Counselling for self-care, preparing for delivery, parenting and family planning. Parent education. |
| B. Birth – age 3 years | Birth registration. Communication and counselling for health care, nutrition and feeding, with an emphasis on infant-caregiver interaction; attention to the play, social development and language development of toddlers through providing a responsive, rich and stimulating learning environment. |
| C. 3–6 years | Access to quality early learning opportunities in public kindergartens: a safe, hygienic and stimulating environment; qualified providers; a quality curriculum; developmentally appropriate and inter-active; culturally and linguistically sensitive; gender sensitive; active parental participation; continuous assessment of programme quality and child development outcomes. |
| D. 6–8 years | Focus on developmental school readiness; getting schools ready for children, eliminating all forms of segregation, special schools and classrooms, etc.; getting families ready for children's schooling. |

Source: adapted from UNICEF, 2008.

Research suggests that steps A and B above are critical, viz. to secure reasonable living standards for Roma families with which to ensure health, social care and stimulation for young children in the first three years. Without progress in this domain, Roma and other deprived children will continue to be denied a positive start in life, with subsequent negative effects on their future health status and schooling.

Attention to quality in kindergarten services⁸⁴

Following support to the family environment, it is important to improve kindergarten quality, especially regarding excluded children. Research is clear that without high quality in early childhood services, more harm than good may be the result for children and a very significant public investment is wasted (NICHD, 2000; 2004; EPPE, 2004, 2008, 2010). A *National Quality Framework* can be a useful tool to guide and support professional staff in their practice, to promote an even level of quality across age groups and to facilitate communication between staff, parents and children. A quality framework could include: a statement of the values and goals which should guide early childhood centres; pedagogical guidelines outlining the processes through which young children learn; a summary of programme standards, that is, how programmes will be structured in terms of child/staff ratios, teacher qualifications, etc.; a general description of the knowledge and skills that children should strive for at different ages (see, for example,

84 A far more detailed account of pedagogical quality in kindergartens catering for disadvantaged Roma children is provided in a forthcoming pedagogical guideline to be published by the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

the UNICEF early learning development standards in **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**); and an outline of the knowledge, skills, dispositions and values that teachers should have, as outlined, for example, in the *ISSA Pedagogical Standards: Competent Teachers of the 21st Century* (ISSA, 2010).

Challenges to quality raised in the *National Reports*

According to the *National Reports* and *Roundtables*, two major challenges to quality arise regarding excluded children:

Firstly, to ensure that kindergartens and other early childhood programmes are of acceptable quality, especially in neighbourhoods and settlements where excluded children are in a majority. From the National Reports, it seems that structural quality is often lacking, that is, appropriate buildings and learning environments; properly qualified staff; staff to child ratios; and group sizes (smaller for children with second-language and special educational needs).

To raise quality in these areas will require substantial investment, but savings can perhaps be made through a more equitable sharing of finances. According to analyses conducted by van Ravens (2010, 2011), the present long-day kindergarten seems to favour the better-off families as it provides not only education but highly subsidised afternoon care for working parents – a relatively fortunate and affluent group in these countries. At the same time, for lack of funding, sufficient kindergarten places do not exist for children from low-income backgrounds – and particularly for Roma children in rural settlements, precisely the children who benefit most from early childhood services. A fairer and more effective organisation of services would aim to provide a morning early education service *for every child*, with afternoon child care being available to parents who wish to pay the full or partial costs. This would allow local governments to provide a morning education service for all children, with improved investment in infrastructure and staffing requirements. The funding saved could also allow local governments to support simple community services in remote settlements.

*A second challenge is to ensure that kindergarten pedagogy is appropriate and effective.*⁸⁵ During the RECI focus groups, Roma mothers spoke of their children being made to feel inferior. In kindergarten, they are placed in the back of the class and are ignored and neglected by teachers.⁸⁶ By contrast, the research is clear that the quality of interaction between teacher and child is critical (see, for example, Pramling, 2011). Young children learn and develop within warm and positive relationships.

In the kindergarten, particular attention should be given to children's daily experience and to helping them make sense of the objects and events presented to them. A central feature is the teacher's ability to understand the child's own perspectives and to incorporate them into her communication and interplay with the child. It is a question of

85 In terms of pedagogy, some ministries toy with the idea of remedial pedagogies for Roma children, for example, with the Reuven Feuerstein method or the American *Lovaas Model of Applied Behavior Analysis*. These pedagogies are effective with certain kinds of cognitive disability, but they are labour intensive and could become extremely expensive if extended to scale. However, the real issue is elsewhere. If Roma children were ensured basic health and stimulation in the early years, remedial pedagogies would be quite unnecessary for the great majority. The challenge is not the intellectual capacity of Roma children but rather one of social and political choices: do European countries wish to provide a fair start in life to Roma children? If they do, they need to invest in the four priorities of the Roma Platform, viz. employment, health, housing and education, thus ensuring positive family backgrounds for most children.

86 Obviously, this is not the full story: in years of work in the region, the author has seen many dedicated teachers at work.

being part of the child's learning processes and of combining the child's interests with the goals of the preschool curriculum. To be successful, early education will focus on the world of the child and respect the natural learning strategies of children: learning through play, interaction with others, active learning and exploration. In all this, the role of the teacher is central, in particular, the warmth and quality of her interactions with the children; her knowledge of the child's background, her respect for the learning strategies of the young child; and her mastery of specific pedagogical approaches that recognize diversity and learning difficulties.

Expanded services

Kindergartens are more effective when they practise toward children pedagogy of care, upbringing and education. They are not just junior schools intent on inculcating the national language or teaching different knowledge items. Children coming from deprived backgrounds need continuous care and for them, the kindergarten will provide *comprehensive or expanded services*. Expanded services would include some of the following:

1. Snacks and at least one meal provided on site.
2. An extended day on the same site.
3. Health screening and medical referrals.
4. Regular liaison with social and/or family services for children considered to be at risk.
5. Outreach to parents (Barnett, 2003).

Again, funds need to be found to provide such services free to children from deprived backgrounds. In fact, there are strong reasons to suggest that: *every disadvantaged Roma child should be given an entitlement to a free place in kindergarten for at least two years before compulsory schooling and disadvantaged Roma parents provided with the necessary supports to enable their children to take up such an entitlement.*

Box 16. The provision of education expenses and food coupons improves attendance

The ***Fiecare Copil in Gradinita*** ('Every Child in Preschool') initiative was launched in Romania in July 2010 and is currently assisting 1,300 children and their families in 19 communities. So far, results are very positive. The percentage of perfect attendance was almost double compared to attendance in the previous year and grew constantly every month, rising to 84 per cent in March. In all the communities, attendance over this period was the highest in the last three years – and many local coordinators noted that this is by far the highest attendance rate EVER in their communities.

The NGO, Ovidiu Rom, is involved in the initiative. It has allocated approximately 150 euro for each child 3–6 whose family qualifies for social benefits or meets other poverty criteria. These funds cover educational costs as well as monthly food coupons to the families whose children have perfect attendance. Ovidiu Rom also provides teacher training in modern methods and strategies for working with disadvantaged children.

In order to identify all eligible children, the project is based on door-to-door recruitment. Daily attendance is carefully recorded by teachers and monitored by local coordinators. A member of the Ovidiu Rom team visits each school at least once a month and spot checks attendance records. The local coordinator distributes monthly food coupons to parents of children with perfect attendance at the end of each month.

Outreach to parents

According to the *National Reports and Roundtables*, many kindergarten teachers in all countries need training in providing care to young children and, not least, in professional outreach to parents. The continuity of children's experience across environments is greatly enhanced when parents and staff-members exchange information regularly and adopt consistent approaches to socialisation, daily routines, child development and learning (OECD, 2006). Early childhood staff should be trained to interact with and listen to parents. They will encourage parents to support the learning of young children, and will share with families the values on which early childhood services are based, including participation and respect for diversity. Staff will also engage parents in centre activities. Parent engagement will build on parents' unique interest in and knowledge about their children. It will promote positive attitudes toward children's learning, provide parents with information and referrals to other services, and include parents in the centre's committees and management. Particular attention will be given to ensuring equitable representation and participation of families from diverse backgrounds.

Community involvement

Community involvement in the pre-school is growing in importance, not only for providing expanded services but also as a space for partnership and the democratic participation of parents. When opportune, communities and education authorities will also provide adult education, information, services and social activities for parents, if possible from the early childhood centre. Research by the OSI REI project (2005) finds that:

- The work of Romani NGOs with children, and their close cooperation with the local school generally, has a strong positive influence on children's learning achievement and attendance.
- Likewise, comprehensive, community approaches appear to be a positive factor in supporting educational success for Roma children. For example, in Slovakia where the approach has been well implemented, improved educational outcomes are in evidence.
- An important element of diversity training and for inclusive education, is to employ teachers and teaching assistants from minority groups. Roma teaching assistants, for example, can help young children with differences in the language spoken in homes and schools, be a link between the home culture and the culture of the education system, and cultivate parents' support for their children's schooling process. In this way, the teaching assistant can become a role model for the children on how to be a successful person, both in their own and majority culture.⁸⁷ Whenever possible, the creation of bi-lingual kindergartens should be further explored as a means to overcome the language barriers of Roma children, while remaining aware that Roma children will need to speak and master the majority language in school.

87 According to Tankersly (2002), "if the purpose of the teaching assistant is to help students succeed academically, then they must be seen as equal partners in the classroom". If they are pushed into a subservient role, then they may serve to reinforce in the minds of children their own low standing as a marginalized group. A re-definition of the assistant's role as co-teacher and agent of change in their community leads to an increase in Roma students' self-esteem and academic performance, as well as parent and community participation in school activities (Wide Open School Foundation, 2011).

Box 17. A Romanian initiative to enhance bilingual education

In Romania, since 2005 a bi-lingual experiment has been run by a Roma NGO, Amare Romentza in partnership with the school inspectorate. Roma children and their teachers use a bi-lingual (Roma and Romanian) curriculum. Nine groups from different counties now use the curriculum. According to Ministry of Education figures, the number of children attending Romanes language classes at kindergarten has risen steadily in recent years.⁸⁸ Within the IECE project, co-funded by the World Bank and the Romanian Government, a strong emphasis is placed on teacher training responsive to the needs of Roma children. The approach is opening the door to a more inter-cultural approach sensitive to Roma culture and language. These bi-lingual kindergartens call attention to Roma history, traditions, language and literature and are generally accompanied by books and resource materials in Romanes to be used by children and teachers.

Where there are no kindergartens

A special challenge arises *where there are no kindergartens available* – an absence experienced by many Roma settlements in the countries reviewed. For example, an analysis of Ministry of Education figures from Hungary show that that kindergarten services are not available in 29 per cent of the settlements in Hungary (927 settlements) and that half of these settlements (without kindergartens) are Roma settlements or Roma majority townships (Havas, 2004). It would seem logical that in such cases, the community services proposed in Recommendation 4 above should be extended upwards to include children of kindergarten age and that trained Roma assistants should be employed to organise and supervise a simple community service. Visits from mobile preschools could also be envisaged. Excellent work on this issue – *Where there are no Preschools* – has been achieved in Poland by the Comenius Foundation: <http://www.frd.org.pl/en>.

7. Evidence-Based Policy in Favour of Roma Children Is Urgently Needed

The case for collecting disaggregated data has been made many times – notably in the Open Society Foundations publication *No Data, No Progress* (McDonald and Negrin, 2010). This publication shows that European countries with strong records of protecting citizen privacy and human rights do collect disaggregated data in their health and education systems. It concludes that the lack of reliable data about Roma communities remains a major obstacle to reducing inequality and eliminating discrimination. For example, in the early childhood field, it is difficult to respond with a sufficient degree of accuracy to the challenges encountered by young Roma children and their families, because of the lack of disaggregated data. One does not know how many children one is talking about, what services might they need, whether they have particular difficulties in education and why. Some teachers say that Roma children are often ahead of others in gross motor skills; others say that they are developmentally behind in other developmental areas, but there is little real information available on such issues. Effective, tailored programmes require baseline data, if the progress of children is to be measured and monitored.

88 M. Sarău, Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports, 2010.

Why such a weak supply of data on Roma?

The situation of data collection and research in the early childhood field has been briefly outlined in Chapter 2 part 6. All four countries have difficulties in supplying reliable data on Roma populations. The *National Reports* confirm that the lack of data is sometimes due to the reluctance of Roma households to supply information about themselves or even to declare themselves as Roma. Generations of exclusion and oppression – as well as finding protection in anonymity – has made many Roma fearful about revealing information. This concern needs to be treated with empathy and Roma households reassured that volunteered information will remain anonymous and will not be used against them. As has been found in the health and education fields, it will be crucial to employ Roma data collectors to carry out enumeration for the census or other data collection exercises. In consultation with Romani NGOs, legal experts can also take up the issue to ensure that strong data protection protocols are in place.

Another reason advanced by the National Reports for the paucity of data is the reluctance of government to engage with this field. It is difficult to understand why. Is it a reluctance to recognise the size of the Roma population, the extent of their poverty or a wish not to be held accountable? Whatever the reason, it is clear that evidence-based public policy cannot be made without the continuous and consistent collection of statistical data, baseline research and evaluation studies. In France, a country that does not allow the collection of ethnic data, strong statistical information exists on all aspects of health and education, based for the most part on age, gender and economic situation.

The situation may improve as a result of EU Framework

The situation, however, is improving due to pressure from the European Union and its flagship projects for Roma. In its recent Communication: *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*, the European Commission has commented on the difficulty of obtaining accurate, detailed and complete data on the situation of Roma in the Member States. It goes on to say that:

It is necessary to put in place a robust monitoring mechanism with clear benchmarks which will ensure that tangible results are measured, that money directed to Roma integration has reached its final beneficiaries, that there is progress towards the achievement of the EU Roma integration goals and that national Roma integration strategies have been implemented.

The Commission also engages to report annually both to the European Parliament and the Council on progress on the integration of the Roma population in Member States and on the achievement of the goals. More specifically regarding data collection:

It will also build on the Roma household survey pilot project carried out by the United Nations Development Programme in cooperation with the World Bank and the Fundamental Rights Agency. The Commission requests the Fundamental Rights Agency to expand this survey on Roma to all Member States and to run it regularly to measure progress on the ground. The Fundamental Rights Agency, working together with other relevant bodies, such as the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, will collect data on the situation of Roma with respect to access to employment, education, healthcare and housing.

In order to get useful data in the long term, the Commission will also foster cooperation between national statistical offices and EUROSTAT so as to be able to identify methods to map the EU's least developed micro-regions, where the most marginalised groups live, and in particular Roma, as a first step. This territorial

approach to data collection has a direct relevance to tackling Roma poverty and exclusion. In addition, the Fundamental Rights Agency should work with Member States to develop monitoring methods which can provide a comparative analysis of the situation of Roma across Europe.

In addition, the Commission requests the Fundamental Rights Agency to work with Member States to develop monitoring methods which can provide a comparative analysis of the situation of Roma across the EU.

In November 2010, the Open Society Foundations' Roma Initiatives also made a detailed plea about organising data collection within the framework of the Roma Decade:

- The Decade governments should take up the UNDP's work to establish guidelines and set clear indicators for monitoring the effects and impact of the Decade action plans and planning policies.
- The Decade governments should strengthen national statistical agencies; a research centre or NGO with solid expertise in data collection, monitoring, and evaluation should be assigned to work closely with these agencies to develop methodologies that increase Romani participation in data collection processes.
- The Decade governments should adjust their statistical systems to collect data disaggregated by ethnicity. Governments can incorporate ethnic data components into regular statistical surveys of the labour force and household budgets. They can also obtain data by conducting specialized sample surveys in marginalized Roma communities. Most of the indicators for monitoring living conditions can be constructed in manifold ways and data gleaned with diverse methodologies.
- National statistical agencies should gather and process data not only on the national level, but also ad hoc within local and regional initiatives, to confirm whether the mainstream policies are reaching Romani beneficiaries.
- National statistical agencies should explore various census methodologies, such as allowing respondents to choose both primary and secondary identification as a national or ethnic group, providing multiple identity categories to help improve the chances of Romani self-identifying, and using ethnically neutral markers such as traditions, language, etc., as proxies to help determine ethnicity.
- National statistical agencies should include Roma in census activities as data collectors, as they have much greater access and credibility in Roma communities, which can result in more Romani self-identifying and responding to the census. Data collectors should also inform the Romani community about basic terminology when filling in the census forms, e.g., understanding the difference between "nationality" and "ethnicity" to help improve the accuracy of data collected during censuses, and encourage members of the Romani community to declare their Romani identity.
- Different statistical and data collection institutions within and between countries should coordinate their efforts, using similar definitions and methodologies for collecting data. The primary goal should be to ensure more standardized national data collection to facilitate the compilation of reliable, cross-sectoral data that would also allow for international comparability.

Source: Rorke, 2010.

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Research

Although good figures on the health of Roma children were available in Macedonia, the *National Reports* of both **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** and **Romania** observed that the level of early childhood research in these countries needs to be much strengthened. One suspects that research on Roma communities in the Czech Republic

and Serbia also needs attention, although again, the UNICEF MICS for Serbia provide good data on which to base research. Overall, across the four countries, there were few documents or arguments to show that long-term intensive early education intervention programmes are having strong effects, either economically and/or socially, even on majority children. The relevance of early education programmes for Roma or other disadvantaged children receives even less attention.

In order to begin to construct country profiles of Roma children, researchers would need to have the following minimum information:

- The actual Roma population in each country, broken down by age, occupation, employment status, socio-economic deciles, etc.
- The actual number of Roma children below 6 years in each country by geographical distribution, child mortality rate, immunisation, developmental status (including the number of children with special needs).
- The supply and distribution (mapping) of public early childhood services across the country.
- Enrolments and profiles of children enrolled in both community and kindergarten early development programmes, by age, gender, ethnicity, disability, class, and other indicators that can provide administrators and parents with an accurate idea of access.
- Care arrangements for children aged 0–12 (i.e. who cares for them during the day, including out-of-school care).
- The early childhood workforce – numbers, qualifications, pay and profile (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity).
- The number of Roma health and education assistants, their profiles and work achieved.
- The programme quality standards both aspired to and actually in place, e.g. child:staff ratios; group sizes; environmental standards; teacher qualifications and training; time for in-service training and documentation.
- Disaggregated outcomes for children across broad developmental domains. How are children progressing within the services? How do they measure-up on developmental readiness for school? Is there evidence to prove that the investment in early childhood services is justified on educational grounds?
- Data on school entry and school performance collected and disaggregated by school; type of school; class; grade; gender home language; ethnicity and other indicators.
- The progression of Roma children through kindergarten and school in order to identify the sensitive moments.

Although such research was not always available to the authors of the National Reports, they searched out and provided much useful information, which will provide a sound basis for further research. In addition, the future for research on Roma children has become more promising. The European Commission now requires Member States to report their on-going work for Roma inclusion in the national reports which they are expected to present in the context of the Social Inclusion OMC. This is a positive directive that one hopes will in the future provide the necessary data and information that governments need in order to make informed policy decisions for Roma children and families.

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Annex 1. Summary of the RECI National Reports

The Czech Republic

1. Country Information

The Czech Republic is situated in Central Europe, bordering on Germany, Poland, Slovakia, and Austria. It has been a member of the European Union since 2004.

Traditionally, the country falls into two parts, Bohemia to the west and Moravia to the east. Today, the country is administered into 13 regions plus the capital Prague. The population is almost 10.5 million, of which more than 90 per cent are of Czech origin, 4 per cent Moravian, 2 per cent Slovak and some smaller ethnic groups, including the Roma. The official 2011 census records

that only 12,444 people, less than 0.1 per cent of the population, declared themselves to be Roma. Experts regard the figure as far too low, estimating the real size of the Romani minority to be 150–300 thousand people, that is, about 2.5 per cent of the total population.⁸⁹ The national fertility rate in the Czech Republic is 1.44, but estimates suggest that the fertility rate per married Roma female is 3.43. Up to the moment, governments have not developed reliable measures to determine the real number of Roma people living in the Czech Republic.



2. The Status of Roma in the Czech Republic

The Gross National Income (GNI) *per capita* of the Czech Republic is \$24,144, about 80 per cent of the mean value for the EU-27 and significantly greater than that of the other three countries in the RECI review. Levels of inequality are less than the EU average: the Gini coefficient is .25 (EU average is 0.30), with 18.1 per cent of households living in poverty (EU average is 22.6 per cent). By contrast, the Gender Gap Index⁹⁰ ranks the Czech Republic as 65th in the world – a low ranking for a European country. Employment rates for women with a child aged 0–3 years are particularly low at 22 per cent (only Hungary has a lower rate). Government expenditures on education and social protection are relatively low: at 4 per cent for education compared to a EU-27 average of 5 per cent, and social expenditure at 18.7 per cent of GDP compared to the EU-27 averages of 27.2 per cent.

All the usual freedoms and civil rights are granted by law to citizens of Romani origin through the Czech Charter of Basic Rights and Freedoms (*Listina základních práv a svobod*, 1992) and the Minority Act of 2001. These texts guarantee freedom of assembly, a right to education, a right to receive and distribute information in the minority languages, a right to participate in issues concerning one's minority. A commitment to supporting the economic, social, political and cultural life of the minorities is also included. There is also a Government

89 250,000 would be about 2.5 per cent of the population.

90 The Gender Gap Index assesses countries on how well they divide resources and opportunities among their male and female populations, based on 14 variables across four dimensions: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; political empowerment; health and survival.

Council for National Minorities (Rada vlády pro národnostní menšiny); a Government Council for Roma Community Affairs; a Ministry for Human Rights and National Minorities, and the Ombudsperson; and since 2008, a Social Inclusion Agency. The Czech government finances community social work which is provided by the NGO People in Need. Field social workers operate in socially excluded localities. Social workers offer social counselling and assistance services free of charge, inter alia, in the area of education or employment. The services include help with administrative tasks, negotiations with public institutions, escort to meetings, free legal advice, help with securing regular income, housing, regular school attendance of their children, etc.

Despite the social achievement of the Czech Republic and not least, its excellent record for infant survival, current legal provisions do not give adequate protection to the Roma population against discrimination. As in other countries in the region, the Roma in the Czech Republic suffer from *racial prejudice* (through negative stereotyping and denial of their situation, identity and language – blaming the victim); *social exclusion* (through spatial segregation and high poverty levels); and *widespread discrimination* in access to housing, employment and essential services, such as social welfare, health and education. In 2003, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed its concern at “the negative attitudes and prejudices among the general public, media representations, incidents of police brutality, and discriminatory behaviour on the part of some persons working with and for (Roma) children, including teachers and doctors.” Similar examples of discrimination exist in the access of Roma families to maternal health and nursery schools (see below).

The socio-economic status of the Roma population remains very low compared with the majority, in other words, Roma families are disproportionately poor and dependent. While the overall unemployment rate in the Czech Republic is about 10 per cent, the unemployment rate among Roma is estimated at around 60 per cent, with 70–90 per cent without work in some communities. Contrary to popular opinion, this is not because Roma adults do not want to work (see World Bank, 2009).⁹¹ Unemployment in the Czech Republic is much influenced by *gendered child-rearing responsibilities* (women with children are far more likely than men not to be in the labour market); region (the rural areas of the Czech Republic to the south and east are particularly affected by lack of jobs); *long duration* (chronic unemployment is higher in the Czech Republic than in other EU countries) and *education level* (those with primary school education or less are likely to be un- or under-employed). Such features affect disproportionately the Roma population. In addition, social benefits and social welfare programmes in the Czech Republic are relatively under-financed (18.7 per cent of GDP) compared to other European countries such as France (31.1 per cent of GDP in 2006 – Eurostat 2009). In addition, Romani education levels are low, which excludes many from formal employment. It is reported also that the casual approach of state authorities to the grey-market (cash economy) makes it more profitable for Roma and other workers to combine illicit work with registration at the unemployment office than to work legally.

3. The Status of Young Children in General

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Child health and well-being in the Czech Republic are generally of a high standard. The *infant mortality rate* is 2.8 infants per 1,000 live born children – an excellent achievement (EU-25 average = 5.72 per thousand). In terms of child well-being, the Czech Republic ranks 16th

91 World Bank (2009), *Roma inclusion in Central and Eastern Europe: Policy Note focusing on Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania, and Serbia*, an analysis presented at the International Steering Committee of the Decade of Roma inclusion, 2009.

in Europe.⁹² The proportion of all households with a child under 6 years 'at-risk-of-poverty' was 18.1 per cent in 2005, compared to 17.2 per cent on the EU-27 ('at-risk-of-poverty' is defined as 60 per cent of the median value of equivalized disposable income). Early care services for children under 3 are provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs but coverage has fallen radically since 1989 and now reaches only about 6 per cent of the child population. Three main forms exist (municipal and private nurseries and family day-care/baby-sitting services) but for financial and other reasons (all three types are paid services), Roma families do not attend. Pre-school education is under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and enrolls 79.2 per cent of all 3-year-olds, 92.6 per cent of all 4-year-olds and 94.2 per cent of all 5-year-olds, and around 20 per cent of 6 year olds who have had compulsory schooling deferred and follow a preparatory class in the basic school. Education in the preparatory class is expected to be in line with the Framework Educational Programme for Pre-school Education. Fees for early education are moderated (almost all kindergartens are run by the municipalities) and an entitlement exists for the final year, which is free.

4. The Status of Roma Children and Their Families

Official statistics covering birth rates, infant mortality and general health levels in Roma communities are not available in the CR. Some researchers (Langhamrová and Fiala, 2003) estimate that Romani infant mortality rates and health levels are similar to these of the majority population *some 28 years ago*. Despite the lack of data, it is probable that health risks for young children from socially excluded Roma families are much higher than in the mainstream population. It is reasonable to assume that persistent poverty over generations, weak access to pre- and post-natal care, intolerable housing and unsafe environments, poor nutrition and unhealthy lifestyles seriously influence the general health levels of young Roma children. In addition to the environmental risks linked to living in poor neighbourhoods, access to health and social services is generally lower in such localities. "The whole situation is moreover complicated by the mistrust of many socially excluded Roma families toward public institutions, which they connect with restrictions and forced authority rather than help." (Nikolai, 2010).

The *Czech National Report* notes that disaggregated figures for early childhood education and care are not available, but reasonable estimates suggest that Roma children rarely access childcare services (less than 1 per cent) and are weakly represented in early education. Efforts are made, however, to address the needs of socially disadvantaged children and since 2005, schools have been able to employ a teaching assistant for these children and open up preparatory classes. About 8 per cent of Roma children attend nursery school before the final year, but a higher percentage attends the preparatory school class. More than 70 per cent of Roma children are enrolled in normal primary school but Ministry of Education figures confirm that 26.7 per cent of Roma children attend practical schools (former special schools).⁹³ The actual attendance and completion rates of Roma children at primary school are not published, although it is estimated that absences by Roma children are at nearly three times the rate of their peers. According to official statistical data from 2001, 17.2 per cent of Roma children at post-primary level gained access to some form of vocational training, while 3.3 per cent accede to full secondary vocational education with a school-leaving exam.

Although the Ostrava judgment by the European Court of Human Rights condemned the abusive placing of Roma children in special schools, the practice still persists. The reasons

92 The European child well-being index measures member states (+ Norway and Iceland) on six dimensions of child well-being: health; subjective well-being; children's relationships; material resources; behaviour and risk; education; housing and environment.

93 The *National Report*, Czech NGOs and independent research insist that a much higher proportion of Roma children are in special schools or classes.

why have already been described in numerous reports: the discriminatory attitudes of municipal councils, parents and teachers; and the high-stakes⁹⁴ interpretation of diagnostic tests used to assess the school maturity of young children. Segregated, special education has a long tradition in the Czech Republic and inclusive education is still refused by many pedagogical workers and education psychologists as being unrealistic and inappropriate. Czech parents have also initiated mass de-registration of their children when the proportion of Roma children in a 'majority' school goes beyond 30 per cent. These schools then function as segregated practical schools, usually under the label "multicultural school". Curriculum, teaching practice and pupil composition then reproduce the pattern of practical schools.

There is also the question of the preference of some Roma parents for special schools where Roma children are a majority and feel safe. In addition, these schools are often better financed, offer parents certain advantages and employ teachers with some experience of Roma children, etc. However, a survey by *Člověk v tísni*, based on over 500 hours of interviews at 104 schools in eight districts of the Czech Republic concluded that rather than struggling with young Roma children, teachers in mainstream schools prefer to have them transferred to a special school. They are often reluctant to work in classes with problem children, no matter whether handicapped children or children from Roma families. Anecdotal evidence suggests that classes are still covertly split into "healthy white pupils" and "the other ones" (*Czech National Report*).⁹⁵

5. Issues and Challenges

The issues and challenges emphasised by the *Czech National Report* are as follows:

- The many barriers to Romani access and the particularly weak access of Roma children to services for 0–3 year-olds.
- The quality of the early childhood education system as a whole and, in particular, its capacity to attract and retain Roma children.
- Special schools and other transition difficulties for Roma children.
- The lack of parental involvement in early development and education and the need for far more interaction with Roma parents by kindergarten personnel.

6. Recommendations for Consideration by Czech Policymakers

After the Ostrava case, the then government responded by convening an expert working group, which after an intensive study of the education system, proposed twelve action points for consideration. Among the recommendations were:

- To emphasise respect for diversity in all educational programmes.
- To carry out proper research and collect evidence on the representation of Roma children in special schools and to determine the level of support needed by these children in mainstream schools.
- To transform the system of pedagogical psychological counselling in the Czech Republic.

94 A 'high stakes' test is one which has high importance for the child's future education or life chances. Because of the high unpredictability of children's test scores, most education systems avoid high stakes testing until well into the secondary school years. To use a high stakes test on minority children, that has been standardized for majority children and delivered in the majority language is ill-considered.

95 It seems that the schools and pedagogical workers are poorly informed about the aims of the current education system reforms, which are often perceived mainly as burdensome and inefficient. On the other hand, there are schools that take pro-inclusion steps of their own accord.

- To develop a National Action Plan for Inclusive Education that would attend both to the education of Roma children and the creation of inclusive mechanisms for children with special needs.
- To create a system of early care for children at risk of social disadvantage and their families, in co-operation with the Ministries of Health, Labour and Social Affairs, and for Regional Development, and to continue a system of care into kindergarten and primary school through non-profit organisations.
- To create Centres for Support of Inclusive Education in each of the Czech regions, which would provide methodological care for educational workers, students and their families at all levels of the education system.
- To develop teacher skills for working in an inclusive environment through pre-graduate and further education.

Following the judgement, staff at the Ministry of Education focussed their efforts on the two recommendations italicised above. Plans were developed and passed by the government but, according to commentators, lacked sufficient funding and time-constrained targets. Since the election of a new government in 2010, the recommendations have not been implemented.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

1. Country Information

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is situated in the southern Balkans and is bordered by Kosovo, Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Albania. The country is divided into 84 municipalities, ten of which are in Skopje, the capital (pop. 550,000). The population of over 2 million people is composed of 64.2 per cent Macedonian, 25.2 per cent Albanian and 3.9 per cent Turkish. Some smaller minorities make up the rest of the population, including Roma who, according to official figures, make up 2.66 per cent of the population. More realistic estimates put their number at around 6 per cent. 44 per cent of Macedonian Roma live in Skopje, largely concentrated in the municipality of Šuto Orizari. Some 80 per cent of Macedonian Roma speak the Romani language as their first language. The total fertility rate for Macedonia is 1.58.

2. The Status of Roma in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Before the EU interest in the Romani question, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – through the Ohrid Framework Agreement, signed in August 2001, which ended ethnic conflict between the Macedonian and Albanian populations – had already established a set of new laws in its Constitution to enhance the rights of minorities. The Preamble of the Agreement explicitly recognizes Roma as an ethnic community on the same level as the Albanian, Turkish, Vlach, Serbian, and Bosniac communities. It recognises that the multi-ethnic character of Macedonian society should be reflected in public life and assures non-discrimination and equitable representation in respect of employment in public administration and public enterprises and of access to public finances for business



development. Judging from the *National Report*, it would seem that Macedonian Roma have greater representation in politics, the media, society, and education than in the other review countries. The country has also ratified a number of international legal instruments protecting minorities, e.g. the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression.

In April 2010 (*Official Gazette* No. 50), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia adopted an anti-discrimination law – real progress as, in principle, it provides redress for citizens, including Roma, deprived of their rights. Many Roma people find themselves without personal identity papers and other critical documents. The most frequent reasons cited by parents for not registering their children at birth were parents' lack of personal documents (106 cases), lack of finances (92 cases) and unregistered marriage of parents (35 cases). A possible partial explanation to the problem is the complexity of legislation related to civil registration, which poses a challenge not only for Roma parents but also for many civil servants.

The UNDP *Human Development Index*⁹⁶ (UNDP, 2009) ranks the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as 72nd in the world, just behind Russia. It has a GDP per capita of \$9,400, that is, about one-third of the mean GDP value for the EU-27. Social expenditure amounts to 17 per cent, health expenditure to 7.1 per cent and education expenditure to 3.8 per cent of GDP, compared to the EU-27 averages of 26.2 per cent, 7.5 per cent and 5 per cent. In sum, the essential services, on which low-income populations depend, are under-funded.

The status of the Roma population in Macedonia is rather low. For the most part, they have few years of effective education: only 60 per cent of young Romani adults (15–24 years) are literate, compared to about 99 per cent of Macedonians and Albanians. A survey of 17,740 people in June 2008 revealed that 33 per cent of unemployed Roma had not completed primary education, only 7 per cent had completed some form of secondary education and only 0.1 per cent had completed higher education.⁹⁷ Although majority perceptions of the Roma seem far more positive than in the Czech Republic and Serbia (the Macedonian Roma are often considered to be a good, peaceful, hospitable, happy, musically talented and communicative people), more negative views are also expressed. The weakness of Romani integration is often attributed, by Macedonians, to the Roma tendency "to separate their habitats, even when they have the choice to live in Macedonian settlements." A 2009 research report: "How inclusive is Macedonian society?" asked Macedonians the question whether they would accept Roma as their neighbours: 53 per cent of interviewees answered they find it acceptable; 27 per cent provided negative answers, while 20 per cent do not know.

Whereas 27 per cent of Macedonian households and 29 per cent of Albanian households live on less than 60 per cent of the median monthly income of approximately Euro 94,⁹⁸ the corresponding figure for Romani households in Macedonia is 63 per cent. Unemployment rates among the Roma population are also unacceptably high.

96 The Human Development Index is a composite measure of life expectancy at birth (as an index of population health and longevity), knowledge and education (as measured by the adult literacy rate and the combined primary, secondary, and tertiary gross enrolment ratio) and standard of living (as measured by the gross domestic product per capita at PPs).

97 Ministry of Labour and Social policy, Action Plan for employment under the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

98 The poverty rate is generally attributed to a high unemployment rate of 31.7 per cent (3rd quarter, 2010 est.).

Table 11. Roma in comparison to Macedonians and Albanians in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

| Percentage | Roma | Albanian | Macedonian |
|--|------|----------|------------|
| Literacy rate (15–24) | 60 | 99 | 99 |
| Unemployment rate (15–64) | 73 | 27 | 31 |
| Households living under poverty line | 63 | 29 | 27 |
| Incomplete child immunization | 34 | 33 | 12 |
| Antenatal care for women (15–49) | 78.5 | 99 | 98 |
| Information about HIV/AIDS among women | 30 | 28 | 66 |
| Toleration of domestic violence by women | 47 | 36 | 13 |

3. The Status of Young Children in General

Gender equality: The gender equality index is an important indicator for the early childhood field as it indicates not only the place of women in society (employment, education levels, wages, etc.) but also public attitudes toward women, toward child-rearing and toward the education of girls. Moreover, if mothers do not enjoy good health and well-being in the pre- and post-natal periods, their babies are put at risk. The Global Gender Gap Index⁹⁹ ranks the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as 49th in the world – well before the Czech Republic and Romania. Gender inequality is generated in the country through low political representation of women, unequal employment opportunities, unequal pay for equal work, and by highly gendered child-rearing.

Child health: Infant and child health trends in the country are positive: the *infant mortality rate* (IMR) has been steadily reduced in the past decade, but at 10.9 remains well above the EU-27 average of 4.3 per thousand. Likewise, immunisation rates are improving. As outlined below, the situation of Roma families is less satisfactory but similarly, their health status is improving.

Early childhood services are in good supply only in the cities. Children in rural communities often do not have access to a reasonably close service. In consequence, enrolments in services are low: around 7–8 per cent in nurseries and around 25 per cent in services for 3–5 year-olds (the actual attendance rate was 13.64 per cent). Traditional attitudes are also at work. Unless two parents are working, demand is weak as mothers are expected to rear their children at home. This has led to a situation where government is providing – and heavily subsidizing – services for the most affluent section of the population, viz, dual-earner families.

4. The Status of Roma Children and Their Families

Gender equality: In terms of gender equality, the situation of Roma women is clearly a concern. Traditional, even patriarchal ideas about female roles remain strong in Romani society: women are expected to serve and obey their husband's family, to have and rear the children at home, and to participate little in wider society. Romani women accept a significant level of domestic violence without complaint. Female illiteracy is rife and even today, as they approach puberty, many Roma girls are pulled out of school. A high

99 The Gender Gap Index assesses countries on how well they divide resources and opportunities among their male and female populations, based on 14 variables across four dimensions: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; political empowerment; health and survival.

number of teenage marriages and births is recorded. At the public level, Romani women are not prioritized in any employment programme, despite evidence that they have fewer opportunities to access employment than men.

Family poverty: Roma families are desperately poor, live in debt and face a continual struggle to survive. The majority of both men and women are unemployed except for temporary jobs in the grey market. Access to basic services is also a difficulty. The table above shows that less than 80 per cent of Romani women received professional anti-natal care during their last pregnancy, as compared with 98 per cent of Macedonian women and 99 per cent of Albanian women.¹⁰⁰ Closely related to this is the fact that the level of information about HIV/AIDS among Romani women is much lower than the 66 per cent share of knowledge, claimed by Macedonian women.¹⁰¹

Infant and child health: The IMR for Roma children is around 12, compared to a rate of 10.9 for the whole population in 2009, but it is falling more rapidly than the national rate. Signs of stunting of children under 5 years are 7.8 per cent for Macedonian children and 16.6 per cent for Roma children. The measures for infants at risk of health problems are: 6.7 per cent for Macedonian children and 12.9 per cent for Roma children. The risk of child poverty is also great: 68 per cent for Roma children and 31 per cent for the total population. Roma children are more likely to beg in the street and Roma children account for 90 per cent of all street children in the country.

5. Issues and Challenges

The authors of the *Macedonian National Report* have selected the following issues for analysis and commentary:

- Discrimination against Roma and insufficient attention given to Romani language and culture.
- Economic and social challenges faced by Roma parents with young children.
- Challenges to the health and well-being of young children, aged 0–3 years.
- The broader education challenge, and in particular, the early education challenge.
- Monitoring and data collection.
- Transition and segregation of Roma children.

6. Recommendations for Consideration by Macedonian Policymakers

The following recommendations are proposed by the RECI *National Report* for the consideration of Macedonian policymakers:

- *Address actively lack of access:* There is a shortage of affordable and accessible ECE service options for all preschool children as the registered public institutions that provide care and education of preschool children are not equally distributed. In this policy, there should be a strong focus on communities where participation is low, in particular, in Romani, low income and rural communities. Issues of affordability for parents should also be taken into account.
- *Provide adequate funding from public funds:* Public funding must be substantial enough to finance capital costs; to ensure adequate infrastructure and training at all levels; to cover all or most of the cost of programme operation so that if there are parent fees, they are affordable for all families across the income spectrum.

100 UNICEF MICS, 2006.

101 UNICEF MICS, 2006.

- *Improve quality:* There is little specific evidence about the quality of kindergartens. The main policy approaches of quality improvement should be focused on ensuring children have stimulation, positive experiences and interactions that nurture all aspects of their development.
- *Conduct research:* An important strategy will be to generate evidence-based policy and to bridge the research-to-practice gap in early childhood intervention, early childhood education, parent and family support, and family-centred practices.
- *Collect more disaggregated data:* At the moment, with the exception of kindergarten enrolment where data has been collected on ethnicity since 2007/2008, aggregated data (on all children without distinction) is collected, which fails to show the real situation of excluded groups. Without more specific data on children, disaggregated by age, ethnic background and other social features (housing, employment, health and education), it is not possible to design informed policies. This concerns not only the Roma population but also, for example, policies for women.

Romania

1. Country Information

Romania is situated in Eastern Europe and is bordered by Hungary, Ukraine, Moldova, Bulgaria and Serbia. Its (declining) population is 22 million people: Romanian 89.5 per cent, Hungarian 6.6 per cent, Roma 2.5 per cent and some smaller groups. According to the *Research Institute for Quality of Life*, the number of Roma both self-identified and hetero-identified is 1.5 million, that is, 6.7 per cent of the total population. This is the most used unofficial estimate and is considered the closest to reality (2010, Open Society Foundations Budapest, *No data, No Progress*).¹⁰²



As a country, Romania has a large population of rural dwellers, 46 per cent of the total population. Administratively, the country is divided into 41 counties, 263 cities and 2,685 communes. Bucharest, the capital city, has a population of almost 2 million people. The total fertility rate is 1.35, one of the lowest in Europe.

2. The Status of Roma in Romania

The Roma in Romania encounter many barriers to social inclusion and a life with dignity:

Discrimination: Access to employment, decent housing, health and other critical services is made more difficult for Roma by the negative attitudes of the majority. More than 70 per cent of the Romanians believe that the Roma do not respect the law and 56 per cent do not feel comfortable living near Roma. 53.3 per cent would not agree to a family member marrying a Roma and 38 per cent would not agree to having a Roma friend. In the early childhood services, surveys conducted for the *Romanian National Report* illustrate discriminatory attitudes, both among mainstream teachers and parents:

¹⁰² Amnesty International quotes a Roma population figure of 2.2 million people or almost 10 per cent of the population.

We love them (the Roma children), we help them but at school their colour starts to matter; the children start to separate, to marginalise Roma, to be unwilling to sit on the same bench with them. (Focus group, teacher, Bucharest, June 2010).

Most Romanians agree with the following statement: "If I were an employer, I wouldn't hire Roma because most of them are lazy and they steal."

If she had good grades, the teacher used to say: "You see, she gets good grades even if she is a gypsy" (Focus group parents, Craiova, June 2010).

Poverty: From 2006–8, the Romanian national poverty rate was 23 per cent; the Romani poverty rate was 67 per cent (World Bank, 2010). More than 50 per cent of the Roma population¹⁰³ and 60 per cent of Roma communities live on less than \$4.30 per day. 21 per cent live on less than \$2.15 per day. 74 per cent of Roma communities have severe income problems: 67 per cent of them have difficult access and 23 per cent lack electricity and/or potable water. A 2007 evaluation shows that 72 per cent of roads in Roma communities are simple dirt roads compared to 48 per cent in localities inhabited by other groups.¹⁰⁴

Employment: Romania is among the poorer countries of the EU. Its GNI per capita of \$14,460 remains at about 40 per cent of the EU-27 average. Income inequality is high and households at risk of poverty are numerous, reaching 23 per cent of all households compared to the EU-27 average of 17 per cent. Public expenditure on social protection, health and education are all below European averages. Official unemployment rates are relatively low at 8.2 per cent, but Romani unemployment is estimated to be 26 percentage points above the average. Low employment may be attributed to the few opportunities available to unqualified labour and sometimes, as the result of discriminatory hiring practices.

Education: The overall literacy rate in Romania is reported to be 97.3 per cent. However, reliable sources estimate that 28 per cent of the Roma population are functionally illiterate.¹⁰⁵ According to a World Bank survey in 2010, only one out of eight Romani adults, capable of work, has a secondary education qualification. The low level of education is also reflected in the low incomes received by Romani employees (55 per cent less than the majority).¹⁰⁶

Health: The health of the Roma population is particularly poor. This is related to poverty, poor sanitary conditions and lack of basic infrastructure in Roma communities, lack of health insurance, lack of identity papers and marginalization and discrimination in access to health care services. The life expectancy of Roma is about 64 years¹⁰⁷ compared with the overall Romanian life expectancy of almost 74 years. The health of Romani women and maternal mortality are of particular concern, as is also the prevalence of early marriage and teenage pregnancy.

103 Sandu, Dumitru (2005), *Comunitatile de Romi din România – O harta a saraciei comunitare prin sondajul PROROMI*, Banca Mondiala, Bucuresti.

104 Badescu, G., V. Grigoras, C. Rughinis, M. Voicu, O. Voicu (2007), *Barometrul Incluziunii Romilor*, Fundatia pentru o Societate Deschisa, Bucuresti.

105 *Romania of education, Romania of research – Presidential Commission's report for analysis and elaboration of policies in the field of education and research*, Bucharest, 2007.

106 *Costurile aferente excluziunii romilor* (Aprilie 2010), Banca Mondiala.

107 UNDP Report (2004), *Avoiding the Dependency Trap: The Roma in Central and Eastern Europe*, p. 17.

3. The Status of Young Children in General

From a comparative perspective, the health and education status of Romanian children merits more attention from the authorities. Child poverty is rife, reaching a level of 33 per cent for the whole population, the highest child poverty rate in the EU. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) reports, Romania lags behind in terms of public health and the efficiency of the medical system. Total health expenditure at 4.8 per cent of GDP is also among the lowest in Europe. Despite a falling rate since 1989, the infant mortality rate is also exceptionally high for a European country, reaching a level of 11.2 deaths per thousand, that is, the Romanian infant mortality rate is still among the highest in Europe, six times higher than the rate in Sweden.¹⁰⁸ Immunization rates at 97 per cent, are satisfactory among the majority population.

Education expenditure in Romania is relatively weak at 4.25 per cent of GCP (the EU-27 average is about 5 per cent). By contrast, the figure given by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency EACEA (2009) for early education expenditure is high: 0.77 per cent of GDP compared to an EU-27 average of about 0.5 per cent. Yet, early childhood services are relatively few in number in Romania; they cover less than 20 per cent of children in the 0–3 age range, and around 56 per cent of children from 3–6 years of age (which makes the expenditure figure of 0.7 per cent of GDP questionable). 86.4 per cent of Romanian children access a kindergarten service from the age of 5 years (EACEA, 2009). The profile of the families who do enrol their children indicates: a higher frequency of mothers or parents who have a job; a higher level of education (at least 8 grades); a higher family income (over 100 euros weekly) with children having books at home and, sometimes, the family having a car; less traditional, non-speakers of the Romani language.

4. The Status of Roma Children and Their Families

The infant mortality rate among Roma families is three or four times higher than the IMR national average.¹⁰⁹ The main causes are related to prenatal conditions and malformations (57 per cent), and to diseases of the respiratory system (37 per cent). Across the country, relatively few physicians, pharmacists or nurses are available to serve the population, particularly in rural areas,¹¹⁰ where, according to UNICEF reports, the risk of infant mortality is four times greater than in urban areas.

According to UNDP/ILO data, more than 40 per cent of children in Romani households experience severe undernourishment, bordering on starvation. Another cause of concern is the fact that 45.7 per cent of the Roma children do not receive all the vaccines required by the National Immunization Programme although they are mandatory and free of charge. Roma children living in urban ghettos or in rural settlements are most exposed, with about 50 per cent of these children not receiving any vaccination.

Education: Reliable disaggregated figures on the access of Roma children are not available, basically because official figures for the overall Romanian population are under-estimated. What is certain is that the participation of Roma children in early development and education continues to be significantly lower than the national average. According to 2008 OSI figures,

108 A system focused on the needs of the citizen, Report of the Presidential Commission for analysis and elaboration of policies in the field of public health care in Romania, 2008.

109 Fleck Gabor, C. Rughinis (2008), *Come closer: Exclusion and Inclusion of Roma in Present-Day Romania*, Guvernul României.

110 A system focused on the needs of the citizen, Report of the Presidential Commission for analysis and elaboration of policies in the field of public health care in Romania, 2008.

just over 50 per cent of majority children between 0–6 years of age attend an early childhood service compared to about 20 per cent of Roma children.¹¹¹ (UNICEF and Romani CRISS figures give a 24 per cent Romani attendance rate, with participation being higher in rural than in urban areas. Over 40 per cent of these children are in special education or special classes). Other sources suggest that the attendance rates of Roma children are twelve times lower at age 3; seven times lower at age 4; and five times lower at age 5.

- Less than 3 per cent of Roma children are registered at day nurseries.
- The access of Roma children to pre-school education is very limited: 61 per cent were registered for preschool education in 2000/2001, but only 20 per cent actually enrolled in kindergarten.¹¹²
- As a result of segregation, the primary schools in which Romani and/or needy children form a majority, are mostly of poor quality: the professional qualifications of the teachers and operating conditions of these schools are generally inadequate.
- At secondary level, 79 per cent of all 15–18 year old Romanians attend schools but only 36 per cent of the Romani peer group do so.¹¹³

Segregation in education

In 2001, research indicated that up to 70 per cent of the students in special schools were Roma children.¹¹⁴, ¹¹⁵ EUMAP (2007) claims that there are many cases of intentionally placing Roma children in separated classes or guiding them to special schools for mentally disabled children.¹¹⁶

According to Ministry of Education statistics from 2006, there were 606 segregated education units at the national level (162 kindergarten, 315 primary schools, 112 low-secondary schools, and 17 upper-secondary and vocational schools).¹¹⁷ The table below presents the percentages of Roma children at each level of education at that particular moment.¹¹⁸

Table 12. Enrolment of Roma children in segregated preschools and schools as a percentage of all Romanian children enrolled (estimation)

| Kindergarten | Primary school (grade 1–4) | Low secondary school (grade 5–8) | Secondary education (academic, vocational) |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| 42.91 per cent ¹¹⁹ | 52.73 per cent | 39.51 per cent | 42.26 per cent |

The quality of early childhood programmes

Public kindergarten programmes cover children from 3–6 years, but they are insufficient in numbers and quality, especially in urban and remote areas. Although Romani and

111 The same source notes that 98 per cent of mainstream children between age 7–11 attend primary school compared to 81 per cent of Roma children. In regard to children over 11 years of age, 91 per cent of mainstream children attend school compared to 61 per cent of Roma children.

112 *Equal access to quality education for Roma*, Romania (2007). EUMAP, OSI.

113 <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/22/60/35282166.pdf>.

114 European Roma Rights Center (2001). *State of Impunity: Human Rights Abuse of Roma in Romania*.

115 In Dumbraveni, Sibiu County, over 90 per cent of the children attending the special school were Roma, by reason of failing to graduate from a class and not because they were students with special needs (p. 22, RECI Report).

116 EUMAP (2007), *Equal access to quality education for Roma*, Bucharest.

117 *Acces egal la educație de calitate pentru romi*, Raport de monitorizare 2007, OSI, EUMAP, ESP, RPP http://www.soros.org/initiatives/roma/articles_publications/publications/equal_20070329/rom32,2ania2_20070329.pdf.

118 Percentage calculated by the authors based on existent data.

119 It is not clear if the situation refers to the rate of attendance of Roma children within the whole education system rate attendance or only to those segregated units.

non-Romani NGOs, as well as Step-by-Step, REF and UNICEF programmes have significantly improved quality wherever they have intervened, both national and local authorities have been slow to recognize early child development as a critical condition for successful primary education and particularly for school achievement and success of Roma children.¹²⁰ Where programmes for the younger children (0–3 years) are concerned, they are few in number and limited to small scale NGO projects, financed by various international donors. For some of these smaller programmes, the question of sustainability and stable funding is acute. It seems that the government envisages issuing a regulation to exempt investors and for-profit bodies from VAT and other taxes for building crèches.

The *Common Memorandum on Social Inclusion* was elaborated in 2005 by the Romanian Government and the European Commission General Directorate for Employment and Social Affairs, in accordance with the Partnership for Accession. The role of the Memorandum was to prepare Romania's participation after accession to the open method of coordination (OMC) in the field of social inclusion. The document approaches issues of poverty and social exclusion, presents the major political measures taken by Romania to begin transposing the European Union common objectives into national policies and identifies the main methods for future monitoring and policy review. The Memorandum recommends that the quality of education in Roma communities should be improved and mentions that "*besides the high rate of non-participation in school, an important polarization of the quality of education provided is recorded*".

5. Issues and Challenges

The priority challenges identified by the Romanian authors of the National Report are as follows:

- The extent of poverty – and particularly of child poverty – among Roma families in Romania.
- Weak implementation of the 2001 *National Strategy for Improving the Situation of Roma*.
- Lack of a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to Romani issues.
- Negative majority attitudes towards Roma.
- Low access to early education services: in the early childhood services, the surveys conducted for this *National Report* show clearly Romani vulnerabilities and fears regarding discriminatory attitudes, both among mainstream teachers and parents.
- The lack of disaggregated data.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations were proposed and briefly discussed during the final Roundtable on the *National RECI Report*, held in Bucharest, 10 May 2011 (summarised from the meeting report by Dr. Emily Vargas-Barón):

Governance recommendations

1. Establish a *Multi-sectoral Early Child Development (ECD) Planning Committee* to meet regularly and develop a comprehensive programme of health, education, social inclusion and protection for Romanian children:

¹²⁰ National progress report – Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion, Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family, 2006.

- A multi-sectoral programme of health, social inclusion and child protection should coordinate ECD services with family support, preventive health, employment and social welfare services to promote the full inclusion of Roma and other low-income families.
 - A multi-sectoral programme of health, social inclusion and child protection should build on child protection approaches that are in line with current European norms.
2. Develop a Romanian *National ECD Plan*, with a focus on Roma inclusion. The Plan should identify all major objectives, strategies, responsible entities, targets for children and monitoring indicators, with budgets and timelines per task:
- The *National ECD Plan* should emphasise child development, parent education and child caregiver training throughout. Mandatory pre- and in-service training should be provided for Romanian professionals and para-professionals engaged in ECI services.
 - The *National ECD Plan* should include an *Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)* component to meet the needs of young children with developmental delays, malnutrition or disabilities. Children who need intensive and individualised services from birth should be identified early, and priority given to serving infants and children from birth to 3 years of age and their parents.
 - The *National ECD Plan* should provide for *culturally and linguistically appropriate ECD services in Roma communities*. Minority groups have the right, and their children the need, to receive culturally appropriate early childhood services. Families should be informed about the value of mother tongue use in attaining good educational outcomes for their children and achieving positive personal and cultural identity. Educational materials in the Roma language, and consistent with positive Roma values, should be used as much as possible. These materials should be field-tested and produced prior to the development of pre- and in-service training programmes.
 - The *National ECD Plan* should plan for community-based services in *every* community for parents and children up to the age of 3 years, which are designed to meet local needs. No child should be left behind.
 - The *National ECD Plan* should promote the inclusion of Roma children in mainstream preschool and primary school activities, with attention to their special needs for mother tongue-based education and multilingual education, as determined by community and familial circumstances.
3. Develop a strong *National Parenting Programme (NPP)* that would include child development skills for parents and other key child caregivers:
- Legislation should be passed to ensure that parenting classes are available to all and are mandatory for parents who have lost their parenting rights and for parents who are in family therapy for domestic violence or other severe forms of family dysfunction.
 - The *National Parenting Programme* should focus on serving pregnant adolescents and women. Pre- and post-natal health services should include a strong educational component, provided by health professionals and trained para-professionals. Community mediators and volunteers should also be trained to provide education and support services, using culturally appropriate models.
 - The *National Parenting Programme* should advocate greater home outreach to pregnant and post-partum mothers to ensure their access to health and nutritional care services in a timely and continued manner. Home visits should be reinforced for parents of vulnerable children in order to improve parenting skills and to ensure that children receive the individualised and intensive services they require.

4. Develop *monitoring and evaluation systems* for ECD services:

- To ensure the ECD services maintain the quality requirements and standards set by the curriculum and *National ECD Plan*, internal monitoring and evaluation systems should be built into each type of service. Adequate funding should be devoted to developing these systems which, when necessary, would include external evaluations.
- Research results should be disseminated and used for the purpose of future programme planning, improvement and expansion over time.

Field level orientations

1. Work with local communities and their authorities to *plan and implement community-based ECD services*:

- Community-based services in Roma and other communities have demonstrated that local ECD Committees or Boards help to ensure comprehensive and continuous ECD services are well planned and implemented with Roma parents. They can also provide community oversight and help with continuous programme planning.
- In Roma communities, locally selected Roma leaders, including respected mothers, should manage and participate actively in ECD Committees or Boards.
- Examples of good practice and lessons learned in community-based ECD programmes with Roma families, including those for children from prenatal to 3 years of age, should be evaluated and considered for nation-wide replication, with special attention given to flexible programming to ensure services meet local needs, fill gaps in local services, fit cultural values and fulfil community expectations.

2. Alongside other professionals, use Roma personnel to serve Roma families, and ensure they receive pre- and in-service training.

- Roma families will participate more and better in ECD services if Roma professionals, para-professionals and volunteers participate equally in providing those services.
- Roma personnel can include: *professionals* (supervisors; teachers; social workers; therapists; psychologists; health workers and others), *paid para-professionals* (secondary school graduates trained to conduct selected professional tasks under the direction and supervision of professionals), and *unpaid volunteers* (part-time community outreach workers, local mothers and others).
- The present system of Roma community mediators should be expanded as much as possible. Trained but currently unemployed community mediators should be identified and provided with further training.
- Community mediators should receive additional pre- and in-service training in specific types of ECD services (e.g., pre-conception and prenatal education; services for children from 0 to 3 years of age; parent education and support services; pre-school play groups and centres; and other core ECD services).

Serbia

1. Country Information

The Republic of Serbia is situated in South-Eastern Europe, in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula, bordered to the west by the former Yugoslav countries and to the north and east by Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. Its capital is Belgrade (pop. 1.6 million) and the official language is Serbian. Administratively, the country is divided into 174 municipalities (under the jurisdiction of local governments) and 29 districts. According to the Statistics Office, the (declining) population of Serbia in January 2010 was 7.3 million people, of which there are 509,559 children aged 0–6 years, that is, 7 per cent of the total population.¹²¹ The population consists of different ethnic groups: 82.8 per cent Serbs, 3.91 per cent Hungarians; 1.81 per cent Bosnians; 1.08 per cent Yugoslavs, and officially of 1.44 per cent Roma (108,000 people).¹²² A more realistic estimation puts the Roma population at some 450–500 thousand (6 per cent+), making the Roma the largest and youngest minority in Serbia: 40.7 per cent of Roma are children younger than 14, while 31 per cent are youth aged 15–24.



2. The Status of Roma in Serbia

As in other countries of the region, the Roma in Serbia suffer from *racial prejudice* (through negative stereotyping and denial of their situation, identity and language – blaming the victim); *social exclusion* (through spatial segregation and high poverty levels); and *widespread discrimination* in access to housing, employment and essential services, such as social welfare, health and education. Since 2000, the country has made progress in terms of improving minority rights. In 2001, the state union of Serbia and Montenegro acceded to the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* of the Council of Europe and ratified the *European Charter for the Regional and Minority Languages* in 2005.¹²³ A *National Council for the Roma Minority* was established in 2003, which participates in national decision-making regarding issues of language, education, information and culture. An institutional framework for the integration of Roma was created within the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, that is called the *Office for Implementation of the National Strategy for the Promotion of Roma in Serbia*. In late 2006, the new Serbian Constitution was adopted, which prohibits discrimination and forced assimilation.¹²⁴

In 2005, Serbia signed the *Declaration on Participation in the Decade of Roma inclusion* (DRI), and in January of the same year, adopted a *National Action Plan (NAP)*¹²⁵ aimed at

121 The estimate of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia for 2009.

122 Census, 2002.

123 Among other documents, Serbia ratified the UN Charter on Human and Political Rights, the Charter on Children's Rights, the International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education.

124 Even though the Constitution promotes democratic values, it also encourages ethnocentrism. It defines Serbia as the country of Serbian people, either those living in the nation-state or as part of diaspora communities. The position could weaken the determination to develop multiculturalism, which in turn could affect the situation of minority citizens and the realization of their rights.

125 The NAP was later revised and improved.

improving the prospects of Roma in the fields of education, employment, housing and health. It plays an active part in the EU Platform for Roma inclusion and, in 2009¹²⁶ organised a successful Platform meeting on *The Right to Education for Every Child: Removing Barriers and Fostering Inclusion for Roma children*. In December 2009, Serbia officially applied for EU membership, agreeing to EU requirements concerning, among other issues, progress on the implementation of legal reforms and the active social inclusion of Romani citizens.

In practice, however, Roma are by far the poorest and most endangered social group in Serbia, living on the margins of the society. The estimations of the World Bank (2010) suggest that 60.5 per cent of the Roma population falls within the category of “very poor”, compared with 6.1 per cent of the total population. More than 80 per cent of Romani adults, in particular women, are functionally illiterate. Within the poor Roma population, women and children are especially at risk.¹²⁶

3. The Status of Young Children in General

Direct comparisons of how children fare across the European countries is complex and not without risk, as many different parameters need to be taken into account and the data available may come from different sources and time series.¹²⁷ It is clear, however, that although the situation of young children has improved considerably in Serbia since peace has returned, expenditure in several critical fields, such as health, education, child and social protection remains low, relative to the average expenditure of EU countries. The following are some indicators of child well-being.

Total social expenditure: Serbia has a well-developed social protection system but expenditure at 18.1 per cent of GDP is well below the EU-27 average of 26.2 per cent. Poor families and individuals in Serbia have the right to two basic financial benefits: child allowances and family financial support (FFS). Family financial support (FFS) is provided to individuals and families whose total monthly income is below a certain threshold, regulated according to the number of household members. Again, annual expenditure on the measure is low (0.15 per cent GDP). Contrary to popular belief, relatively little social welfare reaches Roma families (see next section), e.g. only 5.6 per cent of Romani adults receive an old age pension.

- *Public expenditure on health:* Again, Serbian investment in health is low by EU standards. In 2005, health expenditure was 6.5 per cent of GDP.
- *Infant mortality rate:* In the context of improving rates across the EU-27,¹²⁸ the IMR has improved significantly and is now 6.75 per thousand (EU average, 2010 = 5.6).
- *Share of underweight new-borns:* 5 per cent in 2004 (constant since 2000).
- *Public expenditure on education:* In 2007, the share of education expenditure was 4.5 per cent, again below the EU average.
- *Enrolment in preschool education:* 39.2 per cent of children in 2005 and with little increase since 1991.

4. The Status of Young Romany Children and Their Families

Compared to the deprivation rate of the national population (6.1 per cent), more than 60 per cent of the Roma population can be classified as extremely poor – the figure reaching 67 per cent for Roma children in poverty.

126 Kovac Cerovic, 2007, p. 15.

127 This profile relies on three source: the *RECI National Report for Serbia* (2011); World Bank Data, 2009, and the UNICEF MICS 4 study: *Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2010, Preliminary Findings, (April, 2011)*.

128 See http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Mortality_and_life_expectancy_statistics.

- *Child mortality:* The IMR (2007) in Serbia was 7.1 per cent per thousand, far above the EU-25 average of 4.5 per thousand. Infant mortality rates among Roma children are still twice as high as the national rate. The Roma infant mortality rate is estimated at 14 per thousand, while the probability of dying before the fifth birthday is around 15 per thousand. Figures for Roma boys, in particular, are extremely worrisome. Infant mortality rate among Roma boys is 18, and among Roma girls 9 per thousand. The situation is similar for the under – five mortality rate: 19 boys compared to 10 girls per thousand. (UNICEF MICS 4)
- *Maternal health:* According to MICS 4, almost all women (99 per cent) both in the general population and Roma settlements deliver their babies in health facilities with support of skilled personnel (doctor, nurse, or a midwife). Likewise, almost all women (98 per cent) received a full antenatal diagnostic procedures package. Nevertheless, Roma women are exposed to greater health risks. Factors that influence their poor health include early marriage; young age for the first delivery; multiple pregnancies; living in poverty; and living in extremely unhygienic environments.
- *Infant and child health:* At national level, 4.8 per cent of infants are estimated to be low birth weight (weighing less than 2,500 grams at birth). In the Roma population, 10.2 per cent of infants are low birth weight, more than twice as high as in the general population. According to UNICEF MICS 4, 14 per cent of children under five years of age in Roma settlements had had diarrhoea in the two weeks preceding the survey (compared to 7 per cent in the general population) and 59 per cent of all children received equally adequate health treatment for diarrhea; 18 per cent of children aged 0 to 59 months in Roma settlements were reported to have had symptoms of pneumonia (compared to 5 per cent in the general population).
- *Nutritional status:* Malnutrition among Roma children is several times higher than the national average, with 6.6 per cent of Roma children underweight (compared to 1.6 per cent in the general population), and 23.6 per cent stunted (compared to 6.6 in the general population).
- *Pre-school education:* Only 44 per cent of Serbia’s children attend pre-school institutions. The percentage of children from Roma settlements attending preschool is the lowest in rural areas (4 per cent) and among children whose mothers have no education (6 per cent) while it grows up to 25 per cent among children whose mothers have secondary education. Overall, the Roma attendance rate is about 8 per cent.
- *The PPP class (preparatory preschool programme):* Results from MICS 4 survey indicate that 97 per cent of children in the general population who began primary school in 2009 had attended PPP in the previous year. Attendance of Roma children was lower with 78 per cent of children attending PPP in the previous year. Differences in attendance are visible among rural and urban areas (65 and 83 per cent respectively).
- *Primary and secondary education:* As in most countries in the region, primary education is almost universal, with Serbia having a majority enrolment rate of 99 per cent. One of the indicators in the MICS 4 survey, called Survival rate to last grade of primary school, that is the proportion of children entering the first grade of primary school who eventually reach last grade. The percentage of children who reach grade 8 from those entering grade one in Serbia is 99 per cent (98 per cent for boys and 100 per cent for girls), while survival rate for children from Roma settlements is 90 per cent (95 per cent for boys and 85 per cent for girls). The rate is higher among urban than rural children from Roma settlements (94 and 81 per cent accordingly). For children from Roma settlements, net primary school completion rate is only 35 per cent (42 per cent for girls and 28 per cent for boys). Transition rate to secondary school for children from Roma settlements is 68 per cent (69 per cent for boys and 67 per cent for girls). (UNICEF MICS 4)

5. Issues and Challenges

The issues and challenges formulated in the RECI National Report for Serbia are the following:

- A general lack of understanding of the critical importance of the early childhood period.
- Insufficient attention in the Romani community to factors holding back progress.
- The gap between legislative aspirations and implementation on the ground:.
- Widespread discriminatory attitudes and practices toward Roma by the majority group.
- An under-estimation of the potential of the pre-school system.

6. Recommendations for the Consideration of Serbian Policymakers

The following recommendations were proposed during the final Roundtable, held in Belgrade, 13 May 2011 (summarised from the meeting report by Dr. Emily Vargas-Barón).

Governance recommendations

1. Greater attention to young children is needed, especially to vulnerable children:
 - A nationwide campaign is required to ensure that all young Serbian and Roma children become more visible and have access to services.
 - In particular, strategies are needed to reach out to young children living in slums and poverty-stricken communities. To develop realistic strategies, policymakers and specialists should engage more with low-income families and learn about their needs.
 - Early childhood intervention (ECI) services should be developed nationally. These services are required by children who are at high-risk or who suffer from developmental delays, malnutrition, disabilities or atypical behaviours.
 - Care should be taken not to overly burden minority communities and to expect them to take charge of their own integration into Serbian society. It is essential that supportive members of the majority population should also advocate and work for the inclusion of Roma children and parents.

2. Multi-sectoral coordination must be improved:
 - To achieve good multi-sectoral coordination, a structure is needed that will ensure coordination and an integrated approach to ECD services. A National Multi-sectoral ECD Council is proposed, that will collaborate closely with the Council on the Rights of the Child.
 - All the child ministries (health, education, child protection, etc.), the Ministry of Finance, private sector businesses, academic institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should be involved in this Council and included in all discussions about ECD policy planning and services for children and Roma families.
 - A common management information system is needed to ensure all children are identified, served and tracked over time to avoid having any child “fall through the cracks.”
 - Multi-sectoral coordination should be included in all future policy documents concerning children:
 - The draft Ministry of Health concept paper for IPA funds should be reviewed to strengthen ECD policy and strategy. The full involvement of the health, nutrition and sanitation sectors should be sought especially in services for prospective parents, pregnant women and children from birth to 3 years of age.
 - The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy should continue to focus on including services for Roma families in their Centres for Social Work.
 - Within the Multi-sectoral ECD Council, a Technical Committee should also be established to work with ECD services at all levels and ensure full multi-sectoral coordination and accountability.
 - Roma non-governmental organisations should be incentivised to participate in multi-sectoral coordination and service delivery.

3. The role of the Ministry of Education:

- The Ministry of Education and Science, and specifically its sections for EFA and the preparation of the Education Action Plan, should give renewed attention to the early childhood field.
- As a follow-up to the ground-breaking Belgrade Conference in June, 2009, the Ministry should consider new strategies, and identify resources for early childhood development from birth onward and for parent education, in addition to preschool education.
- In addition to teachers and professional medical personnel, many workers in the early childhood field – health mediators; home visitors; Roma outreach workers; pedagogical assistants; and volunteers – are critical to the success of ECD services, aimed at assisting Roma children and their families. These professionals and para-professionals help ensure that Roma parents feel comfortable about enrolling their children in kindergartens and primary school. They urgently need pre-service and in-service training.
- The use of IPA funds should be maximised, along with other preschool funds, to ensure comprehensive, continuous and culturally appropriate early childhood education services for Roma communities. Good models of practice, for example ECD services in Northern Serbia, should be described and used throughout Serbia.
- At the moment, the National Education Council and its six teams are focussing on the development of a national early child development and education policy, with the goal of producing a draft by autumn for nationwide consultation and review. Comments were made about the importance of including all sectors and ensuring widespread ownership of the process and its results. This Policy should include:
 - Making kindergartens far more inclusive, especially of Roma children.
 - More training for teachers and others to work productively with minority children and children with developmental delays, malnutrition, disabilities and atypical behaviours.
 - Providing additional supportive services for Roma families.
 - Linking early childhood and family services with needed economic development services at regional levels.

4. Monitoring and evaluation systems need to be created:

- A monitoring and evaluation system needs to be developed that will enforce basic standards, rules and regulations.
- Indicators must be selected and targets established to ensure results are captured if the future ECD system is become fully accountable.
- Proper surveys are required to identify the number of (Roma) children in each municipality and their needs.

5. Partnerships with parents and Roma communities:

- Partnerships with Roma parents should be developed and then those parents would be encouraged to help enrol more Roma children in needed services for health, nutrition and education.
- To develop effective services within Roma communities, home visits should be conducted to Roma homes to ensure the early identification and the provision of adequate services for high-risk, vulnerable children.
- Services should be developed for parent education and support, and psychologists; teachers; paediatricians; nurses; and other paediatric services must be trained to collaborate in order to help families.
- Special communication and educational services should be developed to ensure that functionally illiterate parents are fully included in parent education and other child development services.

Annex 2. Notes on the National Report Authors

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Martin Kaleja works as an assistant professor at University of Ostrava (Department of Special Education, Faculty of Education). In 2010, he successfully completed his doctoral study programme (PhD.) in special pedagogy which, among other themes, analyses the attitudes of Roma people to education.

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Enisa Eminovska has managed a day centre for street children at the First Children's Embassy in Skopje and has held a wide range of consultancy positions with the Government of Kosovo, OSCE/ODIHR, and other international organizations. She has been involved over the years in research on Roma issues and has co-authored a number of publications for OSI, the Roma Education Fund, UNDP, and UNICEF.

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Margareta Matache is a Romanian Roma activist for human rights. Margareta is best known for her contribution as a member but also, since 2005, as an Executive Director of Romani CRISS (www.romanicriss.org), an NGO which defends and promotes the rights of Roma. Her work persevered in promoting Roma people as European Union citizens with full-rights as, for example, Romani CRISS stood out by initiating the process of the Ministry of Education's issuing an Order that bans school segregation of Roma students.

Margareta is a PHD student, studying policies related to early childhood development and has a Master's degree in European Social Policies from the University of Bucharest. She holds a BA in Social Sciences from the same University.

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