# Roma Children

A Study of Barriers
to Educational
Attainment
in the Former Yugoslav
Republic of Macedonia

By Joanna Laursen Brucker

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The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has a right to a primary education (Article 28) and that this shall be guaranteed without discrimination (Article 2) based upon the child's or the parent's race, colour, ethnicity, sex, language, religion, political opinions, nationality, ethnicity, property or disabilities (UNHCR 1989). Yet today, Roma children across Europe are out of school and suffering from discriminatory exclusion.

Often derogatorily referred to as the 'Gypsies' or 'travellers', the Roma have lived as an unaccepted outsider amongst Europeans since the ninth century when they first started to emigrate from India. Today, as a direct result of Yugoslav and Soviet policies, the Roma of Eastern and Central Europe are predominately settled into communities. Living primarily in urban or very rural slums, the communities are characterized by vicious poverty, poor health, unemployment, and a lack of access to quality education. The European Union (EU), in coordination with the international community, has recently focused most of its energy upon the issue of access to quality education for all, sparked by the Millennium Development Goals. Consequently, there has been increased international pressure for access and equity in education for the Roma population in Central and Eastern Europe, since many of these former Soviet and former Yugoslav countries are seeking EU membership. Among the former Yugoslav nations, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has both the highest primary net enrolment and attendance ratio for all students of primary school age (UNICEF 2006), as well as the highest official and estimated proportion of Roma, most of whom are not enrolling, matriculating or graduating from school (OSI 2006). Thus, the country provides an interesting context within that to explore the policy challenge of Roma exclusion from education, current policy responses, and also possibilities for future action.

Through research of both the Macedonian context and studies of best practices around the world, this paper seeks to answer three main questions:

1.  What barriers and obstacles prevent Roma children in Macedonia from attending and completing school?

2.  What does research show has worked in other countries?

3.  What policies could be implemented to increase Roma attendance in and completion of a quality education?

To answer these questions, this report will first explore the identity and the history of Macedonia, followed by a separate discourse on the Roma, then a brief explanation of the Macedonian educational context that highlights some of its major successes and failures. Shifting to the Roma population, this study then defines what obstacles and barriers exist for Roma children in education. The next section provides an overview of current government, NGO, and international aid initiatives concerning the Roma that are already in place in Macedonian society. Following this is a section on international best practices for inclusive education with a focus upon access, curriculum, language, and teacher training. The report concludes with recommendations and advice for the Macedonian context.

## 1. IDENTITY: MACEDONIA AND ROMA CONTEXT

Across Europe, educational inequality for the Roma is based upon an in-group, out-group dichotomy, in which society has constructed the out-group's identity as contrary to the in-groups'. In order to fully understand the roots of discrimination, a clear definition of a Macedonian identity is necessary. A nation, explains Benedict Anderson (1983), is an imagined community in which members unite under a shared history in a specific time and place. National identity is then built upon this shared narrative of history (Billig 1995). The Macedonian narrative is a dynamic one built upon many ethnic strands. The demographics of Macedonia are surprisingly diverse. The Republic of Macedonia State Statistics Office (2008) estimated the population of Macedonia to be 2,045,177. The population is composed primarily of the three recognized ethnic groups: Macedonians, Albanians and Turks. The Roma minority are estimated to comprise between 2.69 and 6.77 per cent of the population, as further explained below (OSI 2006).

The modern narrative of Macedonia, which was under Yugoslav control until 1991, is dominated by sovereignty and how to negotiate self-rule, a concept that was challenged by an outburst of ethnic violence in 2001 (BBC 2008). The Macedonian government only avoided civil war by granting more comprehensive legal minority rights (BBC). Among these is the right to education in the recognized minority languages of Albanian, Turkish and Serbian, in addition to Macedonian (UNICEF 2008).

Despite their historic residency in Macedonia, the Roma narrative has remained separate. The Roma have no historical homeland. It is believed that they migrated in waves to Europe from India between the ninth and fourteenth centuries (Ringold et al. 2003). Though often referred to as a group, the Roma people across Europe and even within a country often share little in common with other groups of Roma. One reason is that the Roma lack a uniting language, culture, religion, occupation and even history. The Roma are, however, internationally linked by the experience of social discrimination, lack of adequate health care, low levels of employment, and high rates of poverty, illiteracy, and poor education (Ringold et al.).

Macedonia, along with Romania, Bulgaria, and the Slovak Republic, has the highest estimated percentage of Roma within its borders. Due to discrimination, lack of documentation, and illiteracy rates, many Roma go unrecognized in official polls. Officially, the Roma population residing in Macedonia is 53,879, or 2.69 per cent; however, recognized estimates place the number closer to 135,490, or 6.77 per cent of the total population (OSI 2006).

The dissolution of Yugoslavia had its own affect upon the Roma. Wars in other former Yugoslavian countries have forced the Roma to flee to camps. For Macedonia, this has translated to approximately 2,500 Kosovo Roma refugees living on the border (OSI 2007). As Roma are not a distinct group, these refugees have a different culture and background from that of the Macedonian Roma, raising new issues for inclusion.

## 2. MACEDONIAN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Macedonia is on target to complete the MDG of gender parity and maintains the highest primary net enrolment/attendance ratio of all CEE/CIS countries (UNICEF 2005). In 2006, Macedonia had a primary gross enrolment ratio of 97 per cent (UNICEF 2006). Despite Macedonia's accomplishments in the area of school access, educational quality has lagged. Macedonia's scores were below international averages and/or declined over time in the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) exams

taken in 1999 and 2003, and in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) exams taken in 2000 (REF 2007; TIMSS 2003a, 2003b). In the 2003 PISA exam, Macedonian achievement was two full school years behind the OECD average (REF 2007).

Despite the fact that primary education is free, there has been a lack of funding for many social programmes, making it impossible to provide textbook funds, scholarships, and free-meal plans. Additionally, most support services for underachieving students are not provided. Finally, state funding is currently based upon the number of eligible classes provided by a school and not a per-student financing formula (REF 2007).

Nevertheless, Macedonia has taken two large steps to increase educational opportunity. Starting in 2007, there were efforts to decentralize education (REF 2007). Additionally, starting in the academic year 2007-08, Macedonia made the final year of preschool and secondary education compulsory as part of the revised law on primary education enacted in July 2008. Thus, there are currently nine years of compulsory education. However, there is still little research on how this is affecting education and the availability of facilities such as classrooms (OSI 2007).

Although Macedonia is internationally recognized as being on track to accomplish the second Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by 2015 (UNICEF 2007), there is still a large population residing in Macedonia that is not enrolled in preschool, primary, secondary, or higher education. The Roma population, largely undocumented and unrecognized by official polls, has lived and been discriminated against within the Macedonian borders for centuries. They remain the largest barrier to Macedonia attaining universal primary education by 2015.

## 3. OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN: THE ROMA SITUATION

According to official statistics, 72.3 per cent of Roma children are enrolled in primary education; however, some figures estimate that only 28.8 per cent of school-age Roma children are enrolled in primary education (OSI 2007). Officially, about half of Roma students aged 15 and older have graduated from primary school; an estimated 4.9 per cent of age-appropriate Roma students are enrolled in secondary education, of whom 11.6 per cent graduate. An estimated 1.6 to 4 per cent of Roma enter tertiary education, and only 0.6 per cent of Roma adults have completed a tertiary education (OSI 2007).

Of the Roma attending school, many suffer from three distinct forms of physical segregation, all of which limit the quality of their education. First, Roma often live in groups and attend local schools in extreme rural settings and in urban slums. These areas have poorer facilities and lower teacher quality in comparison to other Macedonian schools (OSI 2007). Mainstreamed Roma students are often segregated to the back of the classroom or to Roma-only classes. Finally, the most extreme segregation occurs when Roma children are funnelled into 'special schools' for the mentally disabled (OSI). The Roma community in Macedonia suffers from a lack of enrolment, matriculation and completion at all levels of education.

### 3.1  The cycles of poverty, social inequality and educational exclusion

Roma people are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion that has limited all potential opportunities. It is not only poverty, but also a pattern of social inequality that is linked to educational inequality (Reimers 2000). Fernando Reimers categorizes five processes that turn social exclusion into educational exclusion:

1.  Differential access opportunities

2.  The poor and non-poor receive differential treatment in the schools

3.  Lack of peer interaction

4.  Shortage of parental involvement

5.  Policy is not aimed at changing inequality but merely reflects societal norms

Each barrier and obstacle faced by the Roma in their context falls into one of the above umbrella categories. This report will focus upon both the institutional and attitudinal barriers to accessing education, in addition to the pedagogical obstacles to getting a quality education for the Roma.

## Institutional barriers

The low levels of enrolment, matriculation and completion for Roma children are mostly attributed to a variety of institutional barriers in the Macedonian educational system. These are common in many Balkan countries.

**Direct and indirect cost barriers.** The direct and indirect costs of education are perhaps the greatest barrier to education for the Roma, given the endemic poverty in their communities. Prior to the 2007–2008 school year, preschool education was not mandatory, and it cost each student about 25€ per year (REF 2007). Many Roma parents could not afford the fee, thus their children did not attend preschool and were ill-prepared for primary school. Enrolment in primary education, while free of charge, still poses an economic challenge, as parents are expected to pay for textbooks, and other supplies. Additionally, transport to and from schools located far from Roma settlements, and boarding, if necessary, are primarily the responsibility of the Roma parents. These are fees that they cannot afford. Finally, for older children in particular, the lost opportunity cost of not working becomes too great, and many Roma children choose to work at very menial jobs in order to help their parents afford basic commodities such as food (OSI 2007).

**Legal barriers.** Many Roma families lack the proper documentation, such as personal documentation or residency permits, to enrol their children in school (REF 2007). In order to enrol in preschool, students need a birth certificate and a medical certificate, both of which are hard for Roma to obtain, given their limited access to health and social services (OSI 2007). News coverage in 2005 reported that approximately 10,000 Roma are living in Macedonia without citizenship or birth certificates. Primary education enrolment also requires proof of residency, which is documentation that many Roma families lack (OSI 2007).

Many obstacles to education, discussed below, arise as a result of discrimination, yet Macedonia has no domestic legislation directly against discrimination (REF 2007).

**Language barriers.** The primary language of both the Roma parent and child is another barrier to educational access. Many Roma in Macedonia speak Romani as their native language. Romani-speaking parents often do not understand literature sent to them about school enrolment (OSI 2007). Additionally, Romani-speaking children do not have the language skills to succeed in Macedonian classrooms, where the language of instruction is primarily Macedonian or Albanian (OSI).  Legislation that was passed following the 2001 ethnic violence guaranteed instruction in all recognized minority languages; however, Romani has yet to be recognized or taught (UNICEF 2008). There is no teacher-training programme to support Romani instruction and no emphasis on training Roma teachers.

**Administrative barriers.** Many Roma students do not achieve sufficient test scores or acquire the credentials needed to advance to higher grades (OSI 2007).

**Physical barriers.** Finally, across the Western Balkans, many Roma live in remote and rural communities and do not have ready access to schools (Ringold et al. 2003). In Macedonia in particular, 80 per cent of Roma live in poverty, including many who live in urban slums (UNICEF 2008).

## Attitudes

Negative attitudes and mistrust have influenced Roma enrolment and completion (Ringoldet al. 2003). Roma parents often distrust a system that they neither understand nor can participate in, thus they withhold their children (OSI 2007). Furthermore, due to poor economic situations, lack of time, and language constraints, few Roma parents get involved in the school governance through PTA or equivalent groups (REF 2007). Consequently, Roma parents do not advocate for their children or participate in civil society (Ringold et al.).

## 3.2  Obstacles: Access and quality

While about half of adult Roma have completed primary education in Macedonia (OSI 2006), most received an inferior education compared to their Macedonian counterparts (OSI 2007). UNESCO (EFA Global Monitoring Report Team) defines 'quality' as the ability of an educational system to teach students:

1.  Cognitive knowledge

2.  Citizenship values

3. How to grow emotionally and creatively

The shift from promoting universal access alone, to a broader notion of universal access to quality education became institutionalized and recognized as the right of every child in the Dakar Framework for Action Education for All Initiative Goal 6: Improve Quality of Education (UNESCO 2009). Thus, Roma access to quality education must be assessed.

**Language obstacles:** Language has already been discussed as a barrier to education, but it is also an obstacle. For Roma children who are not prevented from enrolling in school, little to no language support is given. For most Roma, Macedonian or Albanian language is not their native language. However, little funding is provided for Roma teaching assistants or school mediators, and there are no bilingual classes offered in Macedonia, let alone Romani-only classes (OSI 2007). There is a lack of Roma professionals trained as teachers, and no teacher-training programmes for Romani language (REF 2007). As a result, enrolled Roma cannot follow lessons, they fall behind their peers, and they receive a lower quality education.

**Teacher obstacles:** Research shows that teachers often have negative stereotypes and attitudes towards mainstreamed Roma students. Teachers will sit the Roma in the back of classrooms and have lower expectations for these students (REF 2007). Additionally, teachers are not trained to support the Roma, and thus cannot be expected to understand how to best teach this minority. Both of these teacher-related factors diminish educational quality.

**Segregation obstacles:** Within the school system, Roma students suffer from three forms of segregation, all of which factor into a lower quality education. Many Roma students in Macedonia attend schools in predominately Roma areas. These majority-Roma schools generally have unqualified teachers and poor facilities (OSI 2007). When Roma students attend a mainstream school, they are often placed into remedial classes consisting of majority-Roma students. Finally, characteristic of Roma segregation across Eastern and Central Europe, Roma children are often funnelled directly into 'special schools' for children with intellectual disabilities (OSI). As a result of language barriers,

placement is often done without parental understanding (Ringold et al. 2003).

**Curricular discrimination obstacles:** Segregation takes on more subtle forms, particularly in curriculum development. Macedonia has a national curriculum based upon mastery of facts (REF 2007). In order to succeed, students require parental engagement or private tutoring, both of which are lacking for the poor Roma students whose parents do not have the money, the command of Macedonian language, nor the knowledge to help their children. Additionally, the national curriculum does not include mention of Roma history or language, depriving students of the chance to learn their history and to receive support services in their own language (REF). Finally, by neglecting Roma history, Macedonia condones current perceptions of the Roma in society by doing nothing to change those attitudes.

## 4. CURRENT PRACTICES IN MACEDONIA PROMOTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The 2007 court case, D.H. and others v. the Czech Republic, brought international attention to the academic segregation of Roma children into special schools throughout Central and Eastern Europe (Open Society Justice Initiative 2008). This new attention, in addition to the growing pressure from the European Union, has caused new Roma initiatives to be developed. Macedonia has taken some steps towards inclusion, from the 'Dosta! Project' to the current 'Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015' (hereafter referred to as Decade). However, a lack of civil society involvement, particularly Roma civic engagement, has defused much of the attention (Ringold et al. 2003).

Macedonia's commitment to the Decade has led to the most formal Roma policy initiative in the Decade Action Plan, and some progress toward equality and inclusion. Prior policies under the 2004 National Roma Strategy were built in an information void; consequently, their implementation strategies failed (OSI 2007). The Decade of Action Plan focuses upon policy creation for access through affirmative action initiatives and language programming (REF 2007). The Plan also explores ways to make school more accessible through boarding-house options and alleviation of additional financial barriers by providing free schoolbooks and supplies. Despite the goals and indicators, little change has occurred in many areas, particularly in those dealing with language and teacher training (OSI 2007). The initiatives that have been undertaken have been poorly evaluated or have not been evaluated at all, posing a major constraint to identifying and scaling up best practices. No longitudinal studies could be found.

Civil society and local NGO activity, while not widespread or particularly strong, has been an agent of change in Macedonia. A few NGOs are creating bilingual materials for early education (OSI 2007), and some are taking steps towards other language inclusion projects (REF 2007). The Roma Education Fund has been particularly successful through their Alliance for Inclusion of Roma in Education; their scholarship and mentorship programmes help Roma secondary school students matriculate and graduate (REF). The programmes seek to alleviate the financial burdens for the overwhelmingly poor Roma population by offsetting the costs of textbooks, transportation, food, clothing and other expenditures. The mentorship component, cited as the most important, focuses on closing the knowledge gap between Roma children and their peers in secondary education. Results can be seen in the fact that 98.5 per cent of fourth-year students in the programme graduated from secondary school in 2007, and one third of those students went on to a university. Furthermore, during the academic year 2006–2007, participating students increased their school performance from 3.19 to

3.30 on a 5-point scale. Though not comprehensive, the programme is having positive results in the areas on which it focuses.

The Roma Education Fund's development of Roma Education Centres (RECs) is another best-practice example of a successful intervention underway in Macedonia. This intervention focuses on early childhood education and the transition between preschool and primary education. The RECs seek primarily to help Roma children gain the skills needed to compete in class with their peers through a more holistic approach to education. With 98.01 per cent of participants completing their matriculation in primary school, the programme has made strides toward improving the enrolment status of Roma children. In comparison, less than half of Roma students who did not participate in the programme completed primary school.

## 5. RESEARCH CONCERNING BEST PRACTICES

The Roma of Europe face barriers and obstacles to educational access and achievement similar to what the Roma of Macedonia face. In order to inform policy recommendations for future Roma legislation and action in Macedonia, this paper will explore research on general inclusion topics and case studies of specific best practices in the CEE/CIS region.

### 5.1 The importance of having Roma in school and arguments for legal inclusion

Roma inclusion is not merely a goal to be achieved for the MDG, EFA or for EU consideration. Inclusion is a human right and the right of every child.  Macedonia should strive to include the Roma both for its direct social benefits and because it aids national development (Phillips and Schweisfurth 2006). Ringold, Orenstein and Wilkens (2003) demonstrate that Roma people are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion that affects not just education, but all aspects of life. By marginalizing the Roma, Macedonia is not just harming this subgroup, but also harming greater Macedonian society by not taking full advantage of the labour and knowledge resources that this community has to offer. A more educated and less impoverished society raises economic productivity of the society as a whole (UNESCO 2007). Access to education will enable the Roma to participate in the national labour force. In order to break the cycle of poverty, Roma children must be given the opportunity to have a quality education devoid of discrimination. This requires the government to make school access legally easier for the Roma. Documentation has been shown to be a major barrier for some Roma. Other equality and access issues cannot even begin to be addressed until Roma children have legal access to schools.

### 5.2  Access, inclusion, equality and funding

Educational equality is typically based on the equitable distribution of material and financial resources to groups of every socio-economic status (SES) (Holsinger 2005). This is a goal to strive towards for many countries, where the norm is that the socially privileged gain disproportionately from educational expenditures. However, Reimers (2000) argues that the poor and socially disadvantaged in society should not just receive an equal portion of educational expenditures, but should receive a disproportionally larger share of educational resources in order to compensate for prior neglect and discrimination. Without this extra aid, both material and financial, the poor will never acquire the cultural and social capital that other children gain as a result of their environment. In the Roma context, additional material expenditures should take the form of bilingual texts and

properly trained teachers as explained further below. Additional financial resources need to be used to pay for additional academic support services, language services, and scholarships to offset lost opportunity costs. Around the world, various forms of conditional cash transfers and work-study programmes have been initiated to keep children from dropping out of school to join the workforce. Due to space constraints and the non-economic focus of this study, no further value judgement on what programming is best will be explored here.

Another form of additional resource allocation should come in the form of early childhood education. By providing students with additional help from the beginning, larger academic problems can be avoided. Research has shown that early interventions are not only more effective, but also less costly (Engle et al. 2007). Slovakia, through its Step-by-Step programme in Special Primary School education in Jarovnice, has made progress towards greater inclusion in later grades by implementing early childhood interventions (OSI and Step By Step 2006). This successful intervention shows that with the proper support, Roma children can succeed academically at the levels of their peers.

## 5.3 Eliminating segregation and increasing tolerance through curriculum and interaction

Schools are powerful: they can determine how students see the world. Curriculum is the root of a school's power, since it reflects the values of society, or the values that society wishes their youth to comprehend (Adams and Morris 2007). However, the values that policymakers intended to be taught are not those communicated by teachers (Wing-On 2007). Thus, evaluators cannot look exclusively at the curriculum, but must also look at implementation. The issue of implementation is particularly relevant for the Roma who are an under-represented and discriminated minority. While all aspects of curriculum development are pertinent for Roma education, it is the issue of inclusion that will be the focus here. Inclusion or exclusion can be taught (Buckland 2004). The ideology of social reconstruction that sees education as a vehicle for addressing social injustices will continue to be explored through best practices in peace and tolerance education.

Education is a powerful tool for fighting ethnic intolerance and cultivating social change (Davis 2008). However, the goal of tolerance education, like all aspects of Roma education, must be to change and benefit the whole community. A balance of equal representation and participation by all parties is critical to tolerance education, since all parties must cooperate in order to increase tolerance (Maoz 2002). In the case of the Roma, this would require that the Roma learn about their own culture and language. But the greater Macedonian community must also learn about Roma culture, so that there can be a move away from discrimination and misunderstanding towards inclusion, tolerance and multiculturalism.

One of the major challenges in tolerance education is to define the core values at the centre of the curriculum: peace, freedom, equality, human dignity, human rights, social justice, democracy, and citizenship (Reardon 1999; Bar-Tal 2002). Each of these terms is context-specific, evasive, and a reflection of cultural ideals (Bar-Tal 2002). Davis (2008) and Reardon (1999) propose similar ways of transforming these barriers into assets. Rather than 'teach' tolerance, Davis and Reardon suggest that a teacher's job is much more subtle. It involves providing a safe and diverse environment, to pose hard and at times taboo questions to the class. However, proximity and discussion are not enough (Nevo and Brem 2002). Intolerance does not just arise from ignorance, but more often from an in-group fear of the out-group. Therefore, tolerance education must be participatory and reflect a student's true social context in order to elicit an emotional understanding of the issues and spur action for change (McCauley 2002).

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Many CEE/CIS countries, including Macedonia, have implemented bussing programmes to increase integration within the schools. These projects do increase interaction between the in- and out-groups; however, without supporting curricular lessons, the projects have been largely ineffective, as Roma students fall victim to discrimination and hatred outside their communities and do not have the necessary support to survive the schools. Thus, curricular initiatives, such as pilot programmes in Hungary that introduced Roma language, culture and history as high school subjects, provide an example for future tolerance curriculum development (Ringoldet al. 2003). The Desegregation Project in Vidin, Bulgaria, is an example of a successful intervention that combined bussing with support for Roma inclusion in mainstream schools through additional academic support (UNICEF 2008).

## 5.4 Gaining access through language

Beyond the empowerment and tolerance issues associated with learning one's own culture and history, language adds a new thread to the discussion: one of literal access. Though there are no hard numbers, it is generally acknowledged that Romani is the mother-tongue of the vast majority of Roma in Macedonia (OSI 2007). Without proper support, Roma children cannot be expected to understand what transpires in a classroom being taught in the Macedonian or Albanian languages.

Many factors influence a student's ability to acquire a second language, including what language is spoken at home, the socio-economic level of the family, the age of the child when introduced to a second language, and fluency in the mother-tongue (Espinosa 2008). The factors having the greatest impact on the Roma-language learner are the SES level and the child's native language skills. SES levels have clear connections to the vocabulary that children learn at home, regardless of the language. Children from low-SES families have a far more limited vocabulary than their higher-SES counterparts, and thus lack the ability to transfer concepts to the second language, resulting in an even more stunted vocabulary development than their monolingual counterparts (Snow and Kim 2007). Additionally, a child's fluency in a native tongue is a clear indicator of future success and fluency in the second language. James Cummins (1979) introduced the concept of a threshold: There is a certain level of fluency (still undetermined) that a child must have obtained in their native language in order to successfully acquire a second language. By the third grade, researchers can see a clear linguistic developmental difference between a child who was allowed to acquire fluency in their native tongue before learning a second language, compared with one who was not (Espinosa 2008).

Early childhood language interventions, such as bilingual programming, are needed to ensure that Roma children can academically succeed at a level equal to their monolingual counterparts. All research indicates that some form of bilingual education is preferable for cognitive language development (Espinosa 2008).

Romania is the leading country in the CEE area in making gains in mother-tongue instruction for the Roma. In Romania, parents have the option to enrol their children in Romani language and literature classes with one of 480 teachers trained in Romani. In the 2005–2006 school year, 25,500 students (up from 50 students in 1990) were enrolled in Romani classes, and 490 Roma were active as teachers from preschool to high school (OSI 2007).

## 5.5  Teachers as implementers

None of the in-school interventions are possible without proper teacher training, both pre- and in-service, to make the changes possible. While many of the teachers of Roma students have fewer

qualifications than teachers in standard schools, the intent of this paper is not to explore the entire teacher-training process or to critique its many problems. Instead, the focus is upon teacher prejudices that carry into the classroom, and what role teacher training can play in reshaping these practices with the goal of genuine inclusion. Similar to student curricular development, teachers must learn concepts of tolerance. Expanding upon Davis's notions (2008) of collaborative participant-led tolerance discussions, it follows that teacher training and in-service training could be used for a similar purpose. Speaking of teacher training in general, Villegas-Reimers (2003) advocates for team-based, teacher-led and context-specific teacher-training programmes as the most effective way for teachers to learn new skills for the classroom. This teacher-training model reflects Davis's ideas and, if effectively combined, would result in tolerance-based teacher training. The Desegregation Project in Vidin, Bulgaria can again be looked to for best practices, as that intervention includes a teacher component. The 'Edinstvo Club', part of the Desegregation Project, is a peer-teacher group designed to allow teachers to support each other in how to deal with struggling Roma children (UNICEF 2008); however, there needs to be more focus in this project on social justice instruction for the teachers.

## 5.6  Including parents in the process

Parental involvement is key in a child's success in school. Parents, through advocacy at the school level, have the ability to influence the school facilities, improve school leadership and staff, promote higher-quality education for their children and positively impact funding for their children, all of which impact the type of education that the children receive. Additionally, through direct support at home, parents impact a child's ability to obtain higher test scores, pass classes, earn credits, attend school, adapt socially to the school setting, graduate and continue to higher levels of education (Henderson and Mapp 2002). In Bosnia, a successful pilot programme was introduced for preschool students to attend parent-school partnerships that built on community participation and parental involvement (CEI 2008). Serbia's Equal Chances is another initiative that focuses upon inclusion of the Roma community in the child's educational career. The programme sees community involvement as vital and thus works to increase communication and relations. These interventions are made possible by the training of teachers in social-justice practices. Slovakia's Roma Education Initiative project in Jarovnice-Karice likewise focuses upon combating social exclusion in the schools through parental involvement, particularly in school outreach programmes with mothers (UNICEF 2008).

## 5.7  Holistic approach to change

Each category examined above does not exist in isolation. While discussed separately here, successful initiatives must address all categories. Romania's Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups through the PHARE Programme is a best-practice example of bundling a variety of small interventions into one initiative. This inclusive project focuses upon, but is not limited to: second chance schools, summer kindergartens, anti-segregation legislative changes, hiring of school mediators, social-justice-based teacher training, parental support, school feeding, curricular inclusion, extra academic support, and infrastructure improvements (UNICEF 2008).

## 5.8  Four categories of Roma policy in CEE/CIS region

In order to make policy recommendations concerning future Roma inclusion, a clear understanding of current policy types is necessary. All current Roma policy initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe can be grouped into four main categories (Ringold et al. 2003): exclusion, assimilation, integration, and minority rights. These categories are determined by how policymakers choose to answer two main questions:

1.  Should the Roma be treated as members of a group, or individuals in a broader society?

2. Should the policy respect Roma rights, or be implemented by force?

The newest of these is the minority rights approach, which began in the 1990s to acknowledge the rights of groups of people (Ringoldet al. 2003). International NGOs currently emphasize this method, as does EU accession literature.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Problems in society do not exist in isolation, and therefore isolated solutions only offer temporary relief. What is needed is to engage the many roots of a problem and provide a long-term permanent solution. It is clear that the problem of Roma educational inclusion is intimately bound up with other problems faced by the Roma, such as poor health care, unemployment and discrimination. Therefore, issues of Roma inclusion cannot be dealt with in a vacuum, but must be addressed in a broader and holistic manner. Unemployment, health care, and housing should be further analysed as they also contribute to educational achievements of the children. This report has focused upon a holistic approach to the educational system, and the following policy recommendations reflect this.

There should be no denying the progress that Macedonia has made in the field of Roma inclusive education, but the reality still exists that children are out of school and not receiving a quality education. Therefore, policies must be re-examined, evaluated and changed.

**Recommendation 1:** Increase funding for Roma-based educational initiatives. For Roma education initiatives to succeed, the government must find a way to increase funding and alleviate the economic burden of education on poor Roma households. It is not just the cost of textbooks that Roma families are considering when sending their children to school, but the lost opportunity cost of wages that the child could be earning instead. As Reimers (2000) argues, the poor need a disproportionately larger percentage of resources and funding than the rest of society in order to make similar gains in education. This additional funding should be provided to help Roma families purchase textbooks and other school supplies, in addition to tutoring programmes, so that Roma have not only the monetary funds but also the support needed for school. Additionally, the government should explore initiatives, such as conditional cash transfers or scholarship programmes, to prevent Roma from dropping out of school to support their families. Finally, investment in early childhood education for the Roma will help them to enter school at a similar level as their peers, instead of starting behind. The goal is that it will only be necessary to invest money in the relatively short term. If done properly, Roma with higher educational attainment will find better work, and then have children who can break from the negative cycle of poverty.

**Recommendation 2:** Eliminate legal and institutional barriers. Last year, the government of Macedonia took a huge step towards tearing down Roma educational access barriers by revising the Law of Civic Registration. This has made it easier for Roma to obtain the birth certificates and documentation

that are needed to attend school, long after the child is born (N. Sabani, personal communication, 2009). However, the law also fines parents who do not register their children at birth. Thus, while Roma now have access to birth certificates needed to enrol, they receive a monetary fine for not having registered their children at birth. This provides a new barrier and should be revised in order to increase fair and equitable educational access.

**Recommendation 3:** Alleviate segregation. Current bussing programmes in Macedonia only address one type of academic segregation. Society needs to focus on all three: segregation in the classroom, segregation by location, and segregation into special schools. Children are not just in local all-Roma schools, but are often specifically placed in 'special' schools for Roma and/or the mentally challenged. These practices need to stop. Macedonia could draw lessons from the Bulgarian and Romanian initiatives for inclusion. The Macedonian government should explore why there are a disproportionate number of Roma children in 'special' schools and reassign children to 'normal' schools. Finally, the segregation within classes must stop. Mainstreamed Roma children placed in the back of the classroom and ignored is not a correct, appropriate, or fair form of inclusion. Roma children should be integrated into the classroom, have non-Roma partners on assignments, and receive equal attention from the teachers. This can be done through teacher-training programmes, as explained below.

**Recommendation 4:** Develop a multicultural curriculum. Physical barriers are always easier to overcome; however, it is the mental barriers that are hardest and that Macedonia needs to attend to the most. In continuing with a holistic approach to education, a complete curriculum redevelopment process should be undertaken. Drawing upon the UNICEF model of 'Child-Friendly Schools' already proposed and in pilot stages in Macedonia today, tolerance and multicultural education should be the focus. Roma are the victims of social discrimination, a practice that can be changed through proper educational activities such as those that Reardon (1999) and Davis (2008) advocate. Open multicultural classroom discussions, combined with a multicultural curriculum, will help dispel stereotypes on both sides. The curriculum should focus on multiculturalism and on dispelling fear of the 'other'. Research by McCauley (2002) shows that in order to have any positive impact, the contact provided through a bussing programme or other integration initiative needs to be supported through a curriculum on tolerance.

**Recommendation 5:** Tolerance training for teachers. A new curriculum can only be implemented if proper teacher training is employed as part of the initiative. Macedonia should not only develop a new curriculum for students, it should also create a similar interaction-based curriculum for teachers for pre- and in-service training on tolerance.

**Recommendation 6:** Romani language instruction. As part of the new curriculum and the teacher-training initiatives, there should be a focus on both language and culture. Roma children should receive support in their native language, whether through a combination of mentors, teacher's aides, and bilingual education, so that they understand what is transpiring in the classroom and can academically achieve at levels equal to their monolingual counterparts. Early childhood education should focus upon bilingual programmes so that students can reach their language threshold and academically achieve in later schooling years. As Macedonian and Albanian are the primary languages of commerce within the country (English is also playing a major role), mentorship and teacher-aide programmes should continue to aid Roma children in understanding the material presented in Macedonian and Albanian language classrooms through the primary and secondary grades. This can only be achieved if there is more emphasis placed upon Roma themselves becoming classroom teachers. In the pre-service training for teachers, there should be courses not just on integrating

the Roma, but also on Romani language so that teachers are prepared to provide support to the students. Macedonia should look at the Romania case study for inspiration concerning Romani language education.

**Recommendation 7:** Parental involvement. Parents are key to the academic success of their child. Whether for reasons of language, finances or fear, Roma parents are not advocating for their children nor are they involved in their educational attainment. This needs to change through advocacy campaigns and school-initiated outreach programmes such as those underway in Bosnia, Romania and Serbia.

**Recommendation 8:** Evaluations. Finally, proper and thorough documentation and evaluation should be done of all initiatives. Without evaluation, no progress can be measured. The Macedonian government should move towards results-based policymaking, learning from evaluated initiatives to develop new policies. Additionally, through better communication within Macedonia and between the government and local NGOs, better and faster progress can be made.

All of these initiatives and recommendations must be implemented simultaneously in order to get at the root of Roma exclusion from education. Alone, each is merely a bandage that will eventually come off. Together, curriculum initiatives for tolerance, language, and inclusion in a multicultural classroom with properly-trained teachers that encourages community involvement will make a difference for the Roma, and also for the greater Macedonian society of the future.

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