

Roma Early Childhood Inclusion

Serbian Report



RECI Roma
Early
Childhood
Inclusion

A joint initiative of the Open Society Foundations
the Roma Education Fund and UNICEF

Roma Early Childhood Inclusion

Serbian Report

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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 Decade of Roma Inclusion (Roma Decade). The Open Society Foundations have considerable experience of working in partnership with, and strengthening, Roma civil society organisations, and also of collecting and analysing data and of evaluating projects and programmes. The Early Childhood Program (ECP) promotes the 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 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.

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A Note on Terminology

The text of this report 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 other groups that accept the term, albeit capitalised, are English Gypsies or Romany people in the UK; see Hancock (2002), *We Are The Romany 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 successfully 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 is 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 (FGDs) 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 (CSOs), 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.

A final RECI *Overview Report*, based on the country reports, 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: <http://www.romachildren.com>.

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List of Abbreviations

ATRS	Association of Teachers of the Republic of Serbia
CEP	Centre for Education Policies
CIP Center	CIP – Centre for Interactive Pedagogy
CS	Central Serbia
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DILS	Delivery of Improved Local Services Project
DRI	Decade of Roma Inclusion
ECDI	Early Childhood Development Index
ECR	Education Centre for Roma
EFA	Education for All
EU	European Union
FFS	Family financial support
FOSS	Fund for an Open Society Serbia
IEP	Individual Education Plan
INSET	In-service training
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance i.e. the financial instrument for the EU pre-accession process for the period 2007–2013
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LOFES	Law on Fundamentals of Education System
LPE	Law on Preschool Education
LSMS	Life Standard Measurement Survey
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NAP	National Action Plan
NAPE	National Action Plan for Employment
NEC	National Education Council
NES	National Employment Service
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PE	Preschool Education
PI	Preschool Institution
PIE	Preschool Instruction and Education
PISA	Programme for International Students Achievements
PPP	Preparatory Preschool Programme

PS	Primary School
REC	Roma Education Centre
REF	Roma Education Fund
RIC	Roma Informative Centre
RIHI	Republic Institute for Health Insurance
RS	Republic of Serbia
RSD	Serbian Dinars
RSO	Republic Statistics Office
SAA	Stabilization and Association Agreement
SEN	Special Education Needs
SILC	Survey on Income and Living Conditions
SIPRU	Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UNDP	The United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report concerns young Roma children and their families in the Republic of Serbia.

Serbia is a country in transition, burdened by the conflicts of the recent past, with a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) and a high rate of unemployment, as well as major poverty issues. According to the assessments made for the first half of 2010, some 650,000 people are unable to meet their basic living needs.

Serbia is determined to join the EU. The Republic of Serbia has signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement and applied for EU membership, thus making social inclusion and poverty reduction mandatory components of its integration policy. As one of the essential requirements of the EU accession process, Serbia has undertaken a process of social inclusion which implies the development and improvement of policies, institutional frameworks and methodologies for enabling social inclusion of individuals and social groups in the Republic of Serbia.

In Chapter 1, the authors describe how reliable data on the Roma populations do not exist. According to the national census data,² there are 108,000 Roma, Egyptians (and some Ashkali) in Serbia. Other estimates place the number of Roma living in Serbia two to four times higher³ than this figure (approximately 5.5 per cent of the total population). The Roma are Serbia's largest and most vulnerable national minority. According to the 2002 census, Romani (*Romanës or Rromani-chib*) was cited as the mother tongue of 76 per cent of Roma citizens; it should be noted however, that the number of Roma people that participated in the census and declared themselves as Roma was considerably lower than the actual number of Roma living in Serbia. The Roma are the youngest population in Serbia. Children under 14 years of age make-up 40.7 per cent of the Roma population, while 31 per cent are in the age group 15–24 years. This relatively low average age of the Roma population clearly contrasts with the increasingly older general population in Serbia.

Demographic data is complicated by a significant rate of migration, mainly related to the movement of refugees during the 1990's. Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali refugees arriving in Serbia were rarely registered officially. After the year 2000, according to a number of agreements regarding repatriation, tens of thousands of Roma were sent back to Serbia from Western countries. Thus, the Roma population of today comprises: Roma born in

2 2011 Census.

3 Economic Costs of Roma Exclusion, World Bank, April 2010.

Serbia, speaking Romani, Serbian or, in some cases, Hungarian; refugees and internally displaced persons speaking Romani, Serbian or Albanian; and returnees, speaking Romani or another European language, usually German.

During the era of Slobodan Milosevic's rule, although legislation did not condone discrimination against Roma, the war in the former Republic of Yugoslavia and rising nationalism contributed to many instances of discrimination in everyday life, often supported by the actions of local governments. Cultural discrimination was most in evidence through the negation of the Romani language. Roma life was characterized by ghettoization, due to economic factors (poverty) and ethnic discrimination.

Discrimination against the Roma intensified towards the end of this period. Following the conflict, Serbs, Egyptians, Ashkali and Roma fled from Kosovo (one of the most Roma populated parts of Yugoslavia), to other parts of the country. These internally displaced Roma became one of the most marginalised groups in Serbia at the beginning of the 21st century. Little was done by the Serbian authorities to cope with the Roma refugees from Kosovo, forcing them in the majority of cases to live in already impoverished and over-crowded "illegal" Roma settlements. These Roma were denied residence permits or refugee cards, which led to consequent problems in securing their right to health and social protection, education and employment.

The 2006 Serbian Constitution guarantees the rights of national minorities. The Constitution prohibits discrimination and forced assimilation. For the first time in Serbia's constitutional history, the stipulations under the common name "Child Rights" were defined. The 2009 Anti-discrimination Law prohibits all forms of discrimination, including that based on ethnicity. As a result of the democratic changes in Serbia over the last ten years, the situation of Roma people has changed somewhat. Although these changes have been positive, the assessment of their scope and quality largely depends on one's point of view and source of information. In many cases the attitudes of the majority population towards the Roma remain unchanged. Legal instruments to reinforce anti-discriminatory provisions of the various laws and statutes protecting minority communities are needed to protect citizens from discrimination.

Within the context of significant democratic changes in the current process of transition, the Roma are by far the poorest and most vulnerable social group in Serbia. They are marginalised by wider society and are significantly more disadvantaged than the majority population. They have little social power, limited opportunities for improvement in their social and economic situation and a very low social status, vis-à-vis the wider population. World Bank estimates show that 60.5 per cent of the Roma population fall within the category of "very poor," as compared to 6.1 per cent of the majority population. Poverty amongst the Roma is mainly due to poor access to and low participation in the labour market. Compared to the non-Roma population, Roma have an unemployment rate four times higher; this cuts across all age groups and all education levels. It is estimated that the exclusion of the Roma from the labour market, results in yearly productivity losses of some €238 million. This exclusion is the product of racism and discrimination by employers.

The educational profile of the Roma is equally unfavourable. More than 50 per cent of Roma are unable to complete their schooling, principally for economic reasons and negative experiences of schooling (low expectations from teachers, violence and bullying, effective separation in classrooms or sometimes separate classrooms, poor resources delivered to schools with larger Roma pupil groups and discrimination from other pupils and students). Only some 31 per cent are recorded as having completed primary education. Data from the 2010 UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey

(MICS 4),⁴ demonstrates that only 77 per cent of Roma women and 78 per cent of Roma men in the more affluent 15–24 year-old age group, living in segregated Roma settlements are literate, as compared to 99 per cent of young women and men in the majority Serbian population. The situation is even worse amongst the poorest Roma, where only 49 per cent of women and 46 per cent of men are literate. The MICS 4 survey also shows that Roma children from settlements lag behind their peers in the general population. The greatest difference between Roma children and children from the majority population, is in the domain of literacy and numeracy. Only 11 per cent of Roma children in segregated Roma settlements (according to the MICS 4 *Early Childhood Development Index*) are “developmentally on track,” compared to 31 per cent of children from the majority population. According to the authors, one of the most prevalent stereotypes, which significantly defines behaviour towards Roma within the educational system, is that parents do not pay attention to the education of their children.

In Serbia, an understanding of the importance of early childhood development (regarded in Serbia as being between 0–6 years of age), as a crucial element in building the country’s social capital is just beginning to emerge. In general however, health, education and child welfare and protection services are poorly coordinated. Rates of participation in preschool education, particularly for children under the age of 5, are low. Families have limited access to information and resources to assist them in supporting and promoting their young children’s development. Young children and families from Roma communities, who need to be supported the most, have the least access to necessary services.

Chapter 2 describes and analyses state initiatives in several fields: social welfare, health, education, inclusive education, local government and special programmes (frequently supported by international non-governmental organisations). Although such initiatives are necessary and welcome, impact evaluations (when they exist) suggest that government policies have so far provided few positive benefits to the poorest Roma families and their children. There are many reasons to explain this situation but the fact remains, the goal of formulating realistic policies and delivering them effectively to Roma families and communities remain to be achieved.

In general, there does not appear to be an appreciation among government and civil society of the importance of the early years of life or of the need for relevant, comprehensive and multi-sectoral interventions, especially for the most disadvantaged children. In education, it can be seen in the small number of children under-five to whom preschool education is available (prior to one year compulsory Preparatory Preschool Programmes). In the Roma community, which has in some cases been considerably strengthened by a series of development programmes and increased political participation of its members, much greater efforts need to be made in implementing policy and quality programmes to reach and improve the situation of young children and their families (especially mothers). This would be in keeping with the articles of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* that was ratified by the Republic of Serbia over a decade ago.

Among the countries participating in the “Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005–15,” Serbia has identified specially selected measures to improve the position of women (especially in the area of education). Nevertheless, the situation of Roma women still needs serious attention. Gender analysis carried out to date shows that gender inequality – in the sense of unequal distribution of power between men and women – is especially pronounced in the Roma population, and has an impact on life, health and welfare. Roma women suffer the burden of two-fold discrimination – on the grounds of race and of gender.

4 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2011), *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2010*, Final Report. Belgrade, Republic of Serbia.

There are considerable problems related to monitoring and reporting of policy related to early childhood development, in terms of quality and implementation. This makes it difficult to make an objective assessment of the success or failure of measures that have been put in place. The problem in supplying reliable and comparable data on indicators is still unresolved, although lists of indicators have been produced to track health conditions in selected groups and baseline data has been established within various institutions. What is apparent is the lack of baseline data dealing with young children, to assess and monitor their development and responses to new measures being introduced.

There remain a large number of challenges in addressing early childhood inclusion within the Republic of Serbia. Recent governments have made extensive efforts to adopt legislation and to issue strategic documents that promote an improvement in the position of the Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali populations. The legislative framework is, to a large extent, synchronized with international standards of human rights. The establishment of the *Law on Children's Rights*, which will strengthen the protection of children's rights, is underway. The *Law on Children's Rights* will be the first legislation proposed by the institution of the Ombudsmen of the Republic of Serbia and, at the same time, the first law to incorporate all legal regulations and norms for this area.

However, real changes in the lives of young Roma children and their families are barely visible as yet. Local government departments have insufficient funds for implementing measures; this means that impoverished parents will continue to be excluded or bear additional expenses in order to be able to access services for their children. The principal responsibility for the social inclusion of the Roma in national health, education and child welfare and protection systems lies with the state and effective mechanisms and processes need to be established speedily. The state has the necessary support from the EU/EC, and the World Bank, as well as other large international agencies and organizations like UNICEF, the Roma Education Fund (REF), the Foundation for an Open Society Serbia (FOSS), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The NGO sector has been active in Serbia and is engaged in creating models for implementation of legislative and other measures, as well as in the monitoring processes. Small-scale, informal programmes for children and families have been initiated by NGOs including activities like playgroups, library activities, travelling theatres, and schools for parents. Regrettably, over the last five years, even these programmes have declined dramatically.

The Serbian National Action Plan for Children has had a substantial influence on the development of crucial policies. However, Roma children in Serbia still do not often enough hear messages that they are welcome and that they are equal members of society. Children aged between 0–6 years are faced with a much greater risk of poverty than any other age group. Their poverty index rises considerably above average, year after year. Children who live in poverty do not have access to quality nourishment and the learning opportunities necessary for their optimal development. The level of poverty found in the Roma population is ten times greater than that for the majority population. Roma children, in many cases, are near starvation and live in cardboard and sheet metal houses at city landfills, with no toys or learning materials and in high-risk conditions. Therefore, the impression is that the state is primarily concerned with children who are already within the system. This situation automatically puts Roma children at a disadvantage because, in most cases, they are not within the system.

In summary, the following challenges need to be addressed to ensure that the sound legal and policy frameworks that already exists in the Republic of Serbia, works for the betterment of the lives of Roma children and their families:

- Promoting the critical importance of the early childhood period.
- Increasing awareness of the Roma community.

- Bridging the gap between legislative aspirations and implementation in the community.
- Overcoming widespread discriminatory attitudes and practices towards Roma by the majority population.
- Recognizing the potential of early childhood development and education for improving the overall situation of Roma people.
- Introducing more flexible, diversified forms of pre-school education that meets the needs of Roma families and children (play based, educational programmes, specialized programmes for learning language and social skills, programmes of short duration that are primarily development oriented versus whole day programmes adjusted to the needs of working parents).

A number of detailed recommendations to address these challenges are briefly summarised below:

To promote the importance of quality interventions, especially for young Roma children:

- Organize national campaigns to promote the importance of quality early interventions for all children, and especially for children from disadvantaged and excluded environments, such as Roma.
- Translate into Serbian and Romanës, the most relevant and recent research on the importance of early childhood development and recommendations for improving the overall situation of children.
- Develop communication materials and activities for Roma parents.
- Develop models of high quality and diversified programmes and arrangements for early learning; these should conform to clearly defined standards of quality and at the same time be customized to the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable families.

To overcome challenges internal to the Roma community that affect its members' development:

- Develop a strategy at the level of the National Council of the Roma National Minority (NCRNM) for promoting the Roma community in order to present Roma men and women as equal citizens of Serbia.
- Deconstruct the stereotypical image of the Roma on their attitude toward children, family and women, and their knowledge and skills around child-rearing.
- Build support networks for women and mothers within Roma settlements.
- At the level of the Roma community, develop and implement programmes of economical "self-development" – such as micro-credit loans, small businesses and self-employment. Special attention needs to be paid to the possibilities of financial independence of Roma women.

For more successful implementation of laws:

- Make a detailed analysis of compliance of existing policies (especially in health, social protection and education) to international standards, not only at the level of documents, but also at the level of implementation, and make recommendations for overcoming the discrepancies between the two.
- Regulations and recommendations must clearly define the mechanisms for the realization of rights and recognize responsibilities, defining both material and human resources needed for implementing laws and, providing mechanisms for monitoring and reporting in order to determine the chain of responsibilities.
- Enhance the capacities of local self-governments for planning and budgeting for children and for the fair distribution of local budgets in order to address the needs of marginalized communities.
- Establish inter-sectoral bodies/councils to deal with developing, implementing and evaluating policies for the early development of children at the local level, with a special focus on Roma children.

- Organize and carry out research in order to identify the needs of children and parents (with a special focus on the Roma population) and undertake assessments of the effects of measures and policies related to children and their families.
- Provide relevant and reliable data of good quality; establish mechanisms and common procedures of collecting data, coordinating data collection with EU standards, so that comparisons are possible; define indicators for monitoring the effects of implementing policies; disaggregating data for vulnerable groups, including Roma children.
- Include the Roma community in the process of developing all policies and not just those that refer to Roma, so as to guarantee that Roma perspectives are incorporated.

To overcome prejudice and prevent discriminatory practices:

- All relevant institutions (education, health and social protection institutions) should include in their work plans specific measures to increase participation of Roma children and improve the delivery of services.
- Provide anti-bias education to counter prejudice and discrimination for employees in institutions from national to the local level (including the inspection and advisory services, directors, patients' rights defenders, employees in the ministries and others).
- Ensure standards for external evaluation and self-evaluation of pre-school institutions incorporate indicators of inclusiveness, respect for diversity and democracy.
- In defining the competencies of employees in education (including the pedagogical inspectors, advisors and representatives of schools), special attention needs to be paid to competencies in inter-cultural work, monitoring discrimination and preventing segregation in education.
- Use of the Romani language in communication with children and parents, in the texts and information given to parents.

Related to pre-school education:

- Develop, improve and expand the preschool institution network and expand coverage and access through high quality diversified community-based programmes.
- Provide children from the Roma community with additional support to enable them to effectively access pre-school and maintain their participation.
- Introduce at least 2 years of mandatory pre-school preparatory programmes (PPP) and a broader range of early childhood services and provision, for all children and especially for children from the socially excluded groups (including Roma children).
- Develop a communications pack (e.g. a set of brochures) for promoting the role of quality pre-school education for children from disadvantaged communities, especially for Roma children.
- Introduce quality monitoring of children and collection of relevant data on young children through co-operation between health, education and social protection institutions, with CSOs.
- Complete the design of the training programme for Roma teaching assistants.
- Reform the pre-service education and in-service training and professional development of nurses, educators and other professionals to include topics such as respect for differences, inclusion, justice and equality.

INTRODUCTION

Section 1: Making the Case for Early Childhood Development for All Children, Including Roma

1.1. The Roma Early Childhood Inclusion Reports

The *Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (RECI) Reports* are sponsored and managed by the Open Society Foundations, the Roma Education Fund and UNICEF. The purpose of the reports is to present data and information on the inclusion of young Roma children in the early childhood services of four Central and Eastern European countries: the Czech Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, and Romania. Under the guidance of a senior expert in European early childhood development, each country report was researched and written by national experts in the fields of early childhood development, education and Roma inclusion. The senior expert also served as the lead researcher.

A detailed conceptual framework, a report format and a questionnaire were developed by the senior expert to guide the content and writing of all the national reports. The format clearly stipulated the baseline data to be collected in each country, indicated key themes for analysis and provided specific instructions on the presentation of information. It was anticipated that this approach would allow for valuable comparisons to be made between countries and would provide readers of the reports, as well as external evaluators and researchers, with reliable information on important early childhood policy matters. Decision makers and other important stakeholders, from the health, education and social protection sectors in each country, had the opportunity to read the respective draft reports. Their inputs and reactions were solicited through a national consultation process and incorporated in the final report. In each report, the final chapter on recommendations was prepared by the researchers *after* the national consultation in order to reflect the views and suggestions of the participants.

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1.1.1. Defining early childhood services

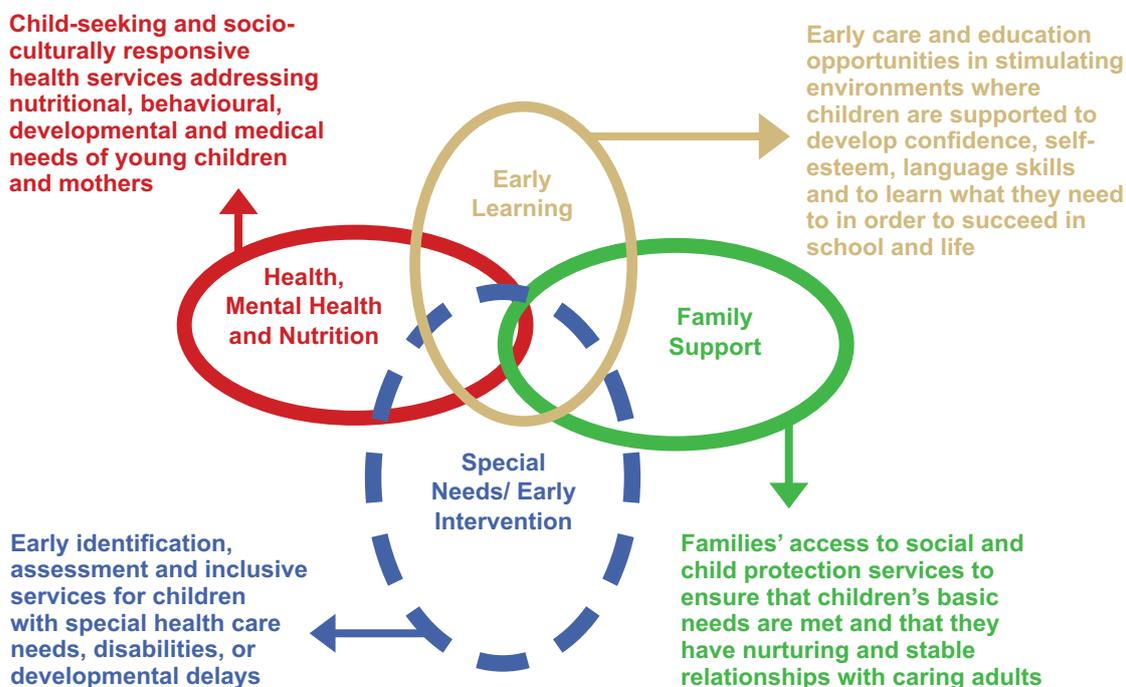
The term “early childhood services” is used in the Reports, rather than “early childhood education”. The reason for this choice is the danger of limiting the discussion to kindergarten service if the term “*early education*” alone is used. Socially excluded children and their families need a far broader range of services than those traditionally provided in kindergartens for children aged 3–6 years.

Since it has been clearly established that the early years' period, from prenatal to 3 years, is critical for the future development of an individual, the challenge is to respond to this crucial window with the right combination of initiatives. A first step implies that governments and local authorities need to cease thinking of early childhood intervention only in terms of preschool enrolment, which is made available to children from the age of 4 years, and instead provide multifaceted, early childhood services from the earliest age, as shown in Figure 1. These services include early childhood health (including prenatal health services for mothers), and development and education initiatives that are flexible and accessible to all families, including the most marginalized. The task is daunting, but the proven returns to individual children and society are enormous.

Early childhood services include all arrangements providing health, care, development and education for children below the age for compulsory school attendance, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours or programme content. These arrangements necessarily differ according to the age of the children in question and the sector concerned. When children approach school age, early childhood services focus on their readiness for school in the broad sense, that is, readiness that includes health and emotional well-being as well as cognitive and language development. As transition into school is a particularly critical moment in the lives of Roma children, the authors of the Reports were also asked to examine the first two years in primary school, which are between 6–8 years old, to ensure that adequate policies are in place to achieve successful transitions into standard school. At the earlier end of the age spectrum, early childhood services for children under the age of three are also paid attention to, in addition to child health and development, and to family and social environments, including parental education and leave arrangements.

The diagram in Figure 1 illustrates the dimensions and interfaces of a comprehensive early childhood system.

Figure 1. Critical components of an inclusive early childhood system



Source: Adapted by UNICEF from ECD Systems Working Group, Minnesota, 2007 (<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/cfh/meccs/framework.html>).

1.2. Rationale for the Reports

The need for the Reports arose from the convergence of different rationales: firstly, the unacceptable situation of Roma populations and their children in the Central Eastern Europe (CEE) countries; secondly, the growing commitment of Roma populations, governments and international agencies and organizations to end this unacceptable situation; and thirdly, the understanding that the early childhood period is the foundation stage not only of individual health, upbringing and education but also of inclusive education.

The downward spiral of the social exclusion of Roma evident in many countries even before the financial crisis, has recently increased.⁵ In consequence, the situation of Roma in Europe has become more visible on the political agenda of the European Union (EU) and the Member States, and equally among international organisations and civil society. There is widespread agreement that efforts to improve social inclusion have not touched poor Roma families to the extent required. Compared with the majority populations, the living conditions of many Roma families remain extremely poor. This raises serious concerns about the nutrition, health and early development of young children. Yet, the plight of Roma children remains to a large extent outside the poverty debate. Xenophobia and anti-Gypsyism pre-date the financial crisis but appear to have been aggravated by it, leading to greater segregation of the Roma population in many countries. Strategies for child poverty reduction are still struggling to grapple successfully with the complex interactions between material deprivation, physical exclusion and the discrimination against Roma populations.

Education is one of the most critical areas of intervention for Roma children. Indeed, the Decade of Roma Inclusion, from its inception in 2005, has made education one of its four priority concerns along with employment, housing and health. There has been extensive research on the effect of early childhood education programmes in preparing children for school. Progress in making national early education programmes genuinely inclusive will be decisive both for Roma children, and for larger social inclusion goals, at both national and European levels. Inclusive early childhood education services are essential for improving readiness for school, and to give young Roma children an equal starting point as they enter primary school, as well as reducing the likelihood that their rights will be abrogated through inappropriate enrolment in “special schools” or “special classrooms”, designed to support children with mental or cognitive challenges.

In a report adopted by the European Social Affairs Parliamentary Committee, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) asked for better inclusion of Roma in the labour market.⁶ The MEPs explicitly recognised that this better inclusion has to be achieved, ultimately, via better education for Roma youngsters. The report confirms that since the Eastern enlargement of the EU, the situation of Roma in new Member States has not improved. Even if the proportion of Roma children in schools has slightly increased in recent years, they are still discriminated against in their efforts to access education. Also, if Roma children are to benefit from primary education opportunities, the youngest children must first be made ready for school and schools made ready to receive Roma children.

5 European Parliament, 2009.

6 EP press service, 2009.

1.2.1. Making the case for early childhood development for all children, including Roma

Why should Roma families and children receive special attention and support? Many cogent arguments have been put forward to justify the attention to Roma children and families in Europe.

1.2.1.1. *An ethical/human rights argument*

The current situation of many Roma children undermines Europe's authority and reputation on human rights issues and its legal commitment to uphold fundamental rights, recently reaffirmed in the Lisbon Treaty. Although varying degrees of inequality are accepted by electorates in European countries, the level of poverty experienced by many Roma is extreme, all the more so because the situation has arisen from centuries of neglect and discrimination against the group by mainstream societies. In particular, the condition of young Roma children contravenes agreed human rights texts, such as the United Nations Conventions on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the EU Directive 2000/43 on Equal Treatment on Grounds of Racial and Ethnic Origin, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

1.2.1.2. *A macro-economic argument*

As noted above, some 10–12 million Roma live in Europe. The European Union cannot afford to ignore the potential of this population. It must begin now to improve basic health conditions, to educate Roma children and to provide hope to families by providing jobs and housing. If the situation is not tackled urgently – and concrete outcomes achieved – an intolerable burden will be placed on welfare, health and education services and on the next generation of Europeans. See Annex 1: The World Bank Argument for Investing in Roma Children.

1.2.1.3. *A return on investment argument*

Because of the interaction between environment and human development, the negative impact of poverty is more intense in early childhood and has a far greater impact on outcomes than poverty experienced in later life.⁷ Persistent poverty during the prenatal and postnatal period is particularly negative in relation to children's cognitive development; poor foetal growth and low birth weight are likely results, linked in turn to the development of later childhood cognitive and behavioural difficulties as well as vulnerability to disease (obesity, heart disease, diabetes, mental health problems) in adult life. In addition, as adverse economic conditions and parenting practices are linked, children living in conditions of extreme poverty may not find successful role models, or acquire in the early skills and motivations that underlie all learning. Skills such as adequate concept and language acquisition, self-regulation, and confidence to interact or express themselves may be missing. In comparison, remedial education interventions targeting young school drop-outs or adults with poor basic skills are far more costly and of limited benefit.⁸ Thus intervention at an early age among marginalized populations is a public policy initiative that not only promotes fairness and social justice but can have a far greater impact than interventions later in life (e.g. reduced pupil-teacher ratios, public job training or tuition subsidies). By then, these deprivations have already manifested themselves in terms of diminished capacity to contribute to the community and society.⁹ See Annex 2 for a brief summary of the economic benefits of early childhood services.

7 WHO, 2007.

8 Alakeson, 2005.

9 Heckman, 2006.

1.2.1.4. *A human capital argument*

An important goal of education systems is to provide young people with the technical skills and knowledge base needed by evolving economies and societies. Early childhood programmes set the child on the journey toward knowledge and skills, but above all, they instil important “soft” skills that are critical for creativity and for working in teams. In high quality programmes, positive dispositions toward society and learning are absorbed and basic life skills acquired, such as autonomy, cooperation with others, problem-solving and persistence. In turn, these skills are reinforced by good schools, or as expressed by Carneiro and Heckman (2003)¹⁰ *skills beget skills*, that is, learning in one life stage begets learning in the next. In sum, to ensure a well-educated workforce, governments need to invest in high quality early childhood programmes and in learning opportunities throughout life.

1.2.1.5. *A preparation for school argument*

Early childhood programmes have been researched extensively for their effect on preparing children for school and on later school outcomes. It has been repeatedly and convincingly proven that investments in early childhood education and improving school attendance and completion are the most promising interventions to break the inter-generational transmission of social exclusion. Moreover, effects are strongest for poor children and for children whose parents have little education.¹¹ Thus, appropriate ECD services are essential for improving readiness for school and to giving young Roma children an equal starting point as they enter primary school, and, at the same time, reducing the likelihood that the children will enter special schools or classrooms.

The Europe 2020 Strategy contains an explicit target for the reduction of early school leaving, down to only 10 per cent. With the current figure for school leaving during secondary education standing at 80 per cent for Roma, there is clearly a long way to go to meet this target. As long as young adults fail to gain the competences and work attitudes that employers need, this has direct consequences for the national workforce and its ability to compete. Appropriate access to early childhood development programmes is necessary if Roma children are to enter school with any chance of success and completion.

1.3. Structure of the RECI Reports

Each Report is organized into five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1. The country context and the situation of Roma populations

This chapter contains an introduction to the country: the demographic situation with a special focus on Roma demography and location patterns; the history, culture and present situation of Roma within the country; the general socio-economic status of the Roma population compared with the mainstream; contemporary mainstream perceptions of Roma and their child-rearing patterns; and, the legal protection of minorities in the country.

Chapter 2. Overview of health, social and education services, and impact on Roma groups

This chapter provides an overview of health services for families with young children in the Country, including: special initiatives to improve the health and well-being of socially

¹⁰ Carneiro and Heckman, 2003.

¹¹ Brooks–Gunn, 2003a.

disadvantaged families; access to and use of these services by Roma families; the main corpus of laws protecting children with special needs; the official directives for the provision of screening and treatment; an overview of social welfare and housing policy in the country, including a note on the use of these services by Roma families; an overview of education services in the Country, including preschool organisation; major European and international agency initiatives for Roma education in the Country since 2000; and local government responsibility for health, social affairs, and education.

Chapter 3. The early childhood system and the place of Roma children and parents within it

This chapter outlines the early development services of public kindergartens for young children aged 0–3 years, and other educational services for children aged 3–6 years. It explains the systems of management at local level and describes specific policies or strategies for the early development and education of Roma children aged 0 to 6 years. It analyses the causes of low Roma enrolment and answers questions regarding desegregation as well as the availability of incentives for participation in educational programmes. It also examines qualifications for kindergarten teachers and assistants, training and representativeness while also describing the curriculum, teaching methods and parental involvement in early development and education.

Chapter 4. Key challenges in the process of inclusion of the Roma population in early childhood development processes

This chapter is based on data and evidence presented in the previous chapters and identifies cultural, economic and social challenges faced by Roma parents with young children; challenges to the health and well-being of very young children (aged 0 to 3 years); the broader education challenge, with a focus on the early education challenge; and, the data collection challenge.

Chapter 5. Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter, which was written following a national consultation in each country, addresses issues that were raised in Chapter 4. The purpose of writing this chapter after the consultation was to enable experts and stakeholders who have experience of the organisation of services in a country, and of the cultural and other barriers, to be able to provide a much more realistic analysis of what is needed to improve significantly the access by Roma children to basic services and participation in education.

1.4. Research Methodology

The Reports are grounded in normative values (e.g. the basic rights of children and minority groups as outlined in the United Nations Conventions and EU Directive 2000/73 of 29 June 2007), agreed early childhood research positions on the strategies to be adopted (e.g. the need to provide strong leadership and funding to achieve inclusive education; the need to involve all the major stakeholders, especially the target group etc.); and, evidence-based investigation (based on extensive and reliable quantitative data). In parallel, they include qualitative analyses of the issues in the different countries and they place a strong emphasis on the progress achieved and those innovative programmes that can be generalised to benefit all countries.

In addition to detailed desk reviews, the Report authors were encouraged to make field observations, that is, targeted field visits to places where particularly successful approaches were identified, and to support their observations with interviews and elements of project evaluation.

Each Report was validated in the following way:

- During the writing of the report, through interviews with selected decision makers, education professionals, etc.; through consultations with stakeholder groups; and through visits to successful initiatives that support the development of young Roma children and their inclusion in standard early education and primary schools.
- After the completion of the first four chapters, through a consultation at national level with principal stakeholders, including government counterparts at national and sub-national levels, managers and programme staff from partner project implementers, Roma and non-Roma NGOs, international organizations, education specialists, etc.
- Through validation by expert peer reviewers, the management committee and senior consultant for its conformity to the agreed national format sent to the authors before the country research was undertaken.

Section 2: Early Childhood Services for Excluded and Minority Children: Lessons from International Research

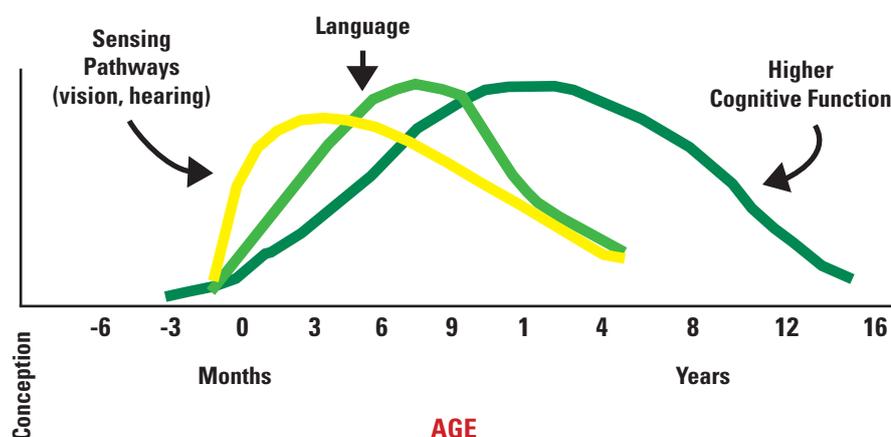
2.1. The Particular Importance of the Years Before Preschool

Neurological research over the past decade confirms that critical brain and biological development occurs in the first years of a child's life. The period from 0 to 3 years (including pregnancy) is an optimal – indeed a critical moment to support infant health, and sensory, social and language development. In the following chart, Professor Charles A. Nelson of the University of Minnesota, outlines the wiring (synapse formation) and sculpting of the brain in the early months and years, with respect to sensing pathways, language and cognition. The timing of these developments is important: problems in the development of sensing pathways influence later language development, which in turn influences cognitive development. The research underlines the need for countries to invest as much as possible in prenatal and postnatal health services, making them available in particular to families from disadvantaged backgrounds. The diagram in Figure 2 summarizes the brain development in the early months and years. The left-hand side of the diagram deals with the *months* of the prenatal and postnatal period and the right-hand side with the childhood years up to the age of 16.

Figure 2. Brain development in the early months and years

0–6 years – the years of golden opportunity

Early childhood is an optimal moment to support sensory, cognitive, social and language development



Source: C. Nelson in *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000.

In spite of this growing corpus of research showing the importance of the earliest months and years for health, language and cognitive development, investment in these years lags far behind investment in other educational cycles. Although 85 per cent of a child's core brain structure is formed by the age of three, in the United States of America (US), less than 4 per cent of public investment in developmental programmes for young children has occurred by that time.¹² The investment situation in most European countries is not very different, although perhaps not quite as extreme because access to immunisation, prenatal and postnatal services and, early childhood services are generally better in European countries, but the evidence would suggest that this is not the case for Roma groups.

In the CEE countries, child care services, in particular, suffer from lack of funding, particularly in two-tier systems divided into "childcare" for the younger children followed by "pre-primary education" for 3-, 4- or 5-year-olds. This is the case in several of the countries being examined. The result is often a fragmentation of services and a lack of coherence for children and families as care and early education institutions differ greatly in their funding requirements, operational procedures, regulatory frameworks, staff-training and qualifications.¹³ As a result, childcare services tend to be less developed in terms of coverage, and in some countries, the childcare field is a patchwork of private providers and individual family day carers. Affordability to parents is often an issue, and in consequence, low- and middle-income groups can be excluded from access to centre-based services, unless government financed, targeted services are available.¹⁴ Frequently, staff – almost exclusively female – have low educational qualifications and wages, and may not be given employment contracts or insurance. In the area of private provision, a current trend is for smaller services to be bought up by larger commercial companies, some of which lobby for greater deregulation of the field.

¹² Child and Family Policy Centre, 2004.

¹³ OECD, *Starting Strong*, 2001.

¹⁴ When means testing is the practice for admission to targeted services, mid-low income groups are often excluded.

Various analyses, including the OECD reviews, show the advantages that can flow from bringing policymaking under one agency:

- Greater consistency and higher quality across the sectors (in terms of regulation, funding and staffing regimes, curriculum and assessment, costs and opening hours), in contrast to high fragmentation of policy and services.
- Enhanced continuity of children's early childhood experiences as variations in access and quality are lessened under one ministry, and links at the level of services – across age groups and settings – are more easily created.
- Improved public management of services, leading to better quality and greater access by parents.

In order to enhance the integration of early childhood services for children from birth to 6 years of age, the OECD's Starting Strong reviews recommended to governments, the establishment of a coordinated policy framework for all young children, at both centralised and decentralised levels, and the nomination of a lead ministry for young children, which would be responsible for overall policy, while working in cooperation with other departments and sectors. This recommendation is not just a matter of which department takes charge. It aims to stress the developmental value of all programmes, to strengthen accountability and to impose the responsibility on the selected ministry of comprehensive policymaking; funding; regulation; personnel profiling; training; certification and professional development.

2.2. Early Education for "At-Risk" Children

At a presentation to the United States Congress in 2003 Jeanne Brooks-Gunn¹⁵ confirmed that mainstream research on early childhood indicates that:

- High quality centre-based programmes enhance the school-related achievement and behaviour of young children.
- These effects are strongest for poor children and for children whose parents have little education.
- Positive benefits continue into late elementary school and high school years, although effects are smaller than they were at the beginning of elementary school.
- Programmes that are continued into primary school, and that offer intensive early intervention, have the most sustained long-term effects.

The research position as summarised here is further confirmed by the practice of the OECD countries, where over 80 per cent of children are enrolled in preschool programmes. However, as Brooks-Gunn points out in another paper,¹⁶ the effects of early education programmes are mediated significantly by three factors: the developmental state of the child entering early education programmes; the on-going effects of family (and community) processes on child competencies and learning; and, the quality and comprehensiveness of the actual early childhood intervention programme. These conditions draw attention to the need to support more actively the family environment of the child, from pregnancy to 3 years of age, and as outlined in the conceptual framework, to identify the features of early education programmes that have proven to be effective for children and families from excluded groups.

15 Professor of Child Development at the Teachers College and at the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University.

16 Brooks-Gunn, 2003b.

2.3. Early Childhood Services for Socially Excluded Children – Theoretical Frameworks

2.3.1. The normative framework

The responsibility of governments to look after the welfare and education of children is laid out comprehensively in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education; the United Nations Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; and in the EU directive 2000/73. In summary, some of the salient points emerging from these founding documents are the following:

Equal treatment on grounds of racial and ethnic origin: The United Nations CRC provides the normative, human rights foundation for inclusion in all the participating countries, each of which has ratified the Convention. The Committee on the Rights of the Child further spells out in General Comment No.7, how countries should interpret the Convention with regard to young children.¹⁷ It urges countries that have ratified the Convention to become actively involved with families and young children. If chance or market laws are allowed to govern early childhood and family policy, then societal divisions and exclusion will emerge, grow and become entrenched.

The economic rights of children, that is the child's right (and hence the family's right) to an adequate standard of living. The research evidence shows that in most OECD countries, children from low-income groups tend to access health services and early childhood services less than children from more affluent backgrounds, and to succeed less well in school.¹⁸ Attention needs to be given to the link between poverty and poor educational outcomes. Countries that fail to reduce child poverty will have reduced access to early childhood services and have education systems marked by early school leaving and/or chronic failure of children from excluded or minority groups.

The social rights of children, that is, the child's right to the highest available standards of health care, social security and education. In its Report Cards 7 and 8,¹⁹ UNICEF measured the health care available to infants and toddlers in rich countries across three indicators: IMR or infant mortality rate (the number of children dying before becoming one-year-old); the percentage of children from 12 months to two years immunised against measles, diphtheria and polio; and the percentage of infants born with low birth weight (less than 2,500 g.). The performance of the CEE countries is generally poor on the combination of these measures, which further suggests that prenatal and postnatal services may be weak. Rates for Roma populations in these countries are difficult to estimate, but it may be assumed that access by Roma mothers to maternity services is relatively low and that the nutritional and primary health status of Roma infants and toddlers is far from ideal.

The cultural rights of children, that is, the right of children and their families to be respected for their particular language, culture or religion. Socio-cultural researchers argue²⁰ that the presence of large immigrant and ethnic minority families in a country requires the dominant national culture and its early childhood institutions to reconsider their approaches and to change their mono-cultural practices. Dialogue with the minority population's parents of young children is necessary as well as the negotiated use of

17 United Nations, Geneva, CRC, 2006.

18 OECD, Starting Strong, 2001; PISA, 2004.

19 UNICEF, Innocenti Centre, 2006 and 2008.

20 See, for example, Tobin 2006 and Vandenbroeck, 2006 and 2007.

minority languages, cultural practices and symbols. Educationalists need to be aware of this opportunity and to respond sensitively to diversity.

2.3.2. The policy analysis framework

Analyses of country policy and approaches to programming²¹ suggest that effective Early Childhood Programs for at-risk children include features that are additional to the mainstream programming. At the same time, programmes for excluded children should not be set apart. If targeted programmes are to avoid stigma, poor outcomes and weak majority support, they gain in efficacy if they are part of national universal programming.²² Such programmes are most effective when additional attention and funding to excluded children is provided *within* standard schools and kindergartens, and when national policy as a whole is marked by high levels of access, quality and equity.

Though not exhaustive, the following list is derived from the analysis of a broad range of policies aiming to succeed in including socially deprived children within mainstream early childhood services. The policies are listed along two broad axes: ensuring the readiness of services for Roma children and ensuring the developmental readiness of Roma children for services and schools.

2.3.2.1. Ensuring the readiness of services for Roma children

Framework and governance issues

- a. *Government acknowledgement, through national law and active programming, that excluded children have a special right to early childhood services*, in particular in racialised and prejudiced contexts. General Comment No.7 calls on States parties “to ensure that all young children (and those with primary responsibility for their well-being) are guaranteed access to appropriate and effective services... Particular attention should be paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children, and to those at risk of discrimination.”²³ Inclusive education is more likely to ensure that all children develop as people who are fit for life in contemporary societies, which are generally diverse and multifaceted. There is an economic justification too as it is less costly to establish and maintain schools that educate all children together. Inclusive education makes children with a disability or with additional learning needs less dependent and therefore less in need of care.
- b. *If necessary, active and on-going education of the majority population*. The practice of democratic principles – such as respect for diversity within national societies, the principle of equity, and the principle of participation – are necessary aspirations for all European countries within the Union. Respect for diversity implies majority assent to the coexistence of different cultures within the state and to funding proactive policies for disadvantaged minorities – including in national education systems. The principle of equity promotes equal opportunities for all children, while advocating for an inclusive and intercultural paradigm of education. The participation principle encourages a shift towards involvement, dialogue, cooperation and shared responsibility.
- c. *To give due attention to the links between central government policy, funding and local authority practice*. Although national frameworks and policies may have high inclusive aspirations, experience shows that these may never be implemented because governments devolve responsibility to local authorities who may not be able to allocate adequate funding, resources or personnel to the task. This is not to suggest a withdrawal from local government, but rather the strengthening of it. The issue is critically important for Roma inclusion: the local level is often the level at which prejudice is strongest.

21 OECD, 2001 and 2006.

22 OECD, 2006.

23 CRC/C7GC/7/Rev.

- d. *To move away from “deficiency” programming.* New thinking about diversity refuses to diagnose young children in terms of what they lack, or on the grounds of race, religion, second language, etc. All individuals have multiple identities and qualities that cannot be captured by broad labels. Successful programmes do not categorise particular groups as being “problematic” or children as being less than normal, but believe that these children will learn and develop quickly if given a supportive, learning environment.
- e. *To differentiate between Roma groups.* There are significant differences in the status of Roma in different countries; within Roma groups and families, between the generations; in the extent and forms of discrimination practised; between typical government responses and above all, on the attitudes of the majorities in the participating countries toward ethnic and cultural diversity. It is important to consider the particular situation and challenges faced by Roma groups in the different countries to ensure appropriate policy responses.

Service issues

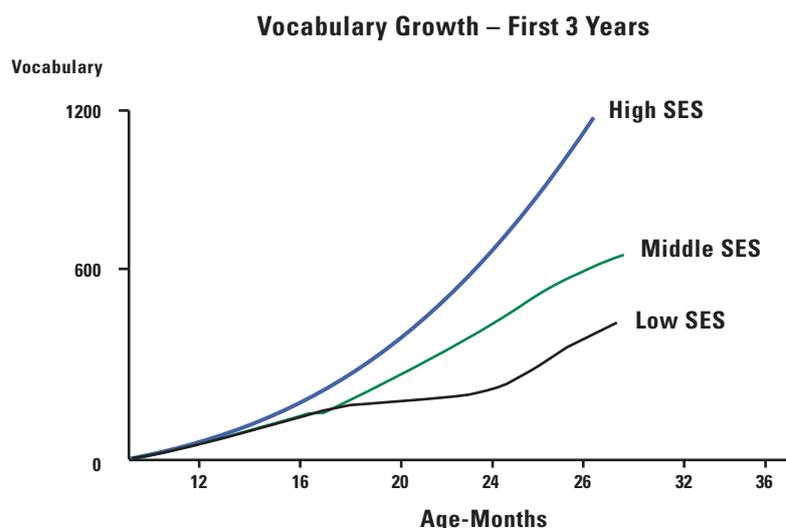
- a. *A first task is to ensure that a national network of services is available across the country, particularly in excluded neighbourhoods where families need them most.* The OECD Starting Strong reviews²⁴ showed clearly that although excellent services may be present in a country, such services (including infant and primary health) were much less available in the poorer rural and municipal neighbourhoods than in middle-class and affluent areas. Reports on the CEE countries suggest a similar weakness in service mapping.²⁵
- b. *To organise and fund comprehensive services whenever they are needed.* Comprehensive services go beyond curriculum and activities for children and pay attention to out-of-school issues, such as the social, community and home environments. Typically, a comprehensive services centre works in cooperation with other community services and pays particular attention to parents and out-of-school care. This approach is particularly useful in early childhood services and schools situated in poor neighbourhoods, and the success of children’s education and care can often depend on the capacity of educators to practice family and community outreach.
- c. *To avoid distortion in staffing, curriculum and teaching methods for excluded children – and indeed for all children of preschool age (3–6 years).* That is, services should aim for holistic goals and avoid focussing resources on pre-literacy and pre-maths areas only. Holistic goals include primary health and development assessments; good eating habits and physical fitness; citizenship education (living together), cooperative action and social solidarity; play; science; art; music and movement; and, personal character development and creativity. Respect for minority cultures should also be reflected in curricula; this requires the training and employment of more teachers and assistants from minority backgrounds.
- d. *In parallel, a special focus on language acquisition is needed, even in circumstances where a second language is not in use.* Recent research on literacy development indicates that attention to language development in infancy and beyond contributes significantly to long-term literacy and reading skills in third and fourth grades. A study of the development of the vocabulary of children aged between 12 to 36 months²⁶ estimated that children from advantaged homes had productive vocabularies of 766 words at 30 months, while the figure was 357 for children from low-income homes (see Figure 3). More significant for schooling was their finding that between 30 to 36 months, the productive vocabularies of each group of children would grow by about 50 per cent, giving children with larger vocabularies roughly 350 new words, and children with smaller vocabularies an increase of only 168 words. As James Heckman remarks in a similar context: “skill begets skill.”

24 OECD, 2006.

25 REI, 2006.

26 Hart and Risely, 1995.

Figure 3. Vocabulary Growth in the early years



Source: B. Hart and T. Risley (1995) *Meaningful Differences in Everyday Experiences of Young American Children*.

Additional challenges exist for children who do not belong to the majority language group. A child judged to be non-communicative (perhaps language poor) by adults in a confident majority culture may, in an excluded minority culture, be considered an ideal child who can be relied on to observe quietly and keep his/her own counsel.²⁷ In addition, where second-language children are concerned, there are practical organisational questions to decide, e.g. what is the best age for minority children to begin learning the majority language; how to safeguard the minority language and culture within mainstream provision;²⁸ how to recruit and train staff for language acquisition purposes; and so on.

- e. *To formulate particular standards for the learning environment of excluded and/or second language children and families.* Successful early childhood systems are generally governed by clear regulations and standards.²⁹ Early childhood services for excluded children and families may need additional emphases, such as the following:
- *To place primary importance on building and maintaining trusting relationships with minority children and parents.* Many early childhood institutions, established and staffed by the majority culture, have still not come to terms with societal diversity and the basic rights of minorities. In early childhood services in particular (as child-rearing is intimately linked to culture), minority parents and children need to be reassured in word and practice, that they are fully entitled to keep their culture, language and cultural practices and that these will be respected within services by majority educators and children.

27 Research on First Nations children in Canada shows, for example, that in some tribes, an ideal child is one who has the ability to be quiet and to learn by observing a whole sequence of behaviours with minimal verbal mediation (Balls, 2002).

28 Several factors enter into “appropriateness” in deciding where tuition in a second language is required: the actual proportion of parents demanding minority language tuition; the means of a country, ministry or municipality to finance such a scheme; the degree of devolution of educational responsibility to local regions or districts; the availability and training of appropriate staff etc. In all cases, it should be possible, however, to show respect for minority languages and culture, if not through teaching these languages, at least through celebrations and respectful attitudes toward children when they speak in their mother tongue.

29 See, for example, the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) pedagogical standards, 2008.

- *To focus strongly on the process features of programmes*, that is, on the quality of the social and instructional interactions that children experience in early childhood settings. Children learn best when responsive teachers encourage their autonomy; organise interesting experiences and projects; encourage questions and understanding, extend meanings and offer feedback to children on their learning.
- *Within mainstream universal services, to create flexible groupings, individual support and learning plans for children with special learning needs*. Inclusive education for children with special needs has to be appropriate and flexible. Individual learning plans agreed with the child and parents are not only useful for measuring outcomes but also for encouraging child and family responsibility for learning.
- *To develop agreed outcomes for all young children approaching school age across different developmental domains*. While avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach to child development, a focus on equitable outcomes and key competencies is necessary if accountability is to be ensured.
- *To practise continuous and intensive outreach from early childhood services to families*. As the first educators of their children, parents provide the environment in which primary human traits can develop: emotional stability, self-regulation, sociability and the motivation to learn. Early childhood services can provide a unique support and information resource for parents to successfully take on this role.
- *To provide extra funding to ensure that the highest quality possible is offered to excluded children, with low child: staff ratios and experienced, well-trained teachers*. If the disadvantages of home and neighbourhood for child health, language, socio-emotional development and learning are to be overcome, kindergarten programmes for excluded children need to be of the highest quality. In other words, equal funding is not enough (See Box 1).

2.3.2.2. Ensuring the developmental readiness of Roma children for services

- a. *The reduction of child and family poverty among the Roma population is a necessary precondition*. If young children are to have a fair start in life, governments will need to employ upstream policies to reduce poverty; employment discrimination; labour; health; and housing disadvantage among their parents. Improved labour force participation in paying jobs is a necessary condition for Roma inclusion – an objective that needs careful consideration and specific policies in deteriorating economies. In parallel, the establishment of high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) programmes will also likely contribute to the education and employment of Roma, particularly of women.
- b. *The mobilisation and involvement of Roma families and NGO groups to set-up and conduct pre-kindergarten programming*. It is important that Roma parents and NGOs conduct child-rearing and parenting programmes, with state support and help, if requested, from majority or Roma professionals. Research shows clearly that the influence of family on children is much greater than any outside service. Discrimination and having to rely on programmes established by majority groups who see the Roma as inferior pose a constant threat to Roma social organisation, identity and self-esteem.
- c. *To focus attention on preventive services for families and children below the age for kindergarten entry*: From the figures available, it may be assumed that the access of Roma mothers to maternity services is relatively low and that the nutritional and primary health status of Roma infants and toddlers is far from ideal. Research from the Scottish Government Health Analytical Services Division³⁰ suggests that the following programmes are critical for the health and development of young children from disadvantaged backgrounds: prenatal and postnatal health care for mothers; safety; good nutrition and cessation of smoking and alcohol intake during pregnancy;

30 Hallam, 2008.

home visiting programmes by health nurses; parenting education and support; and from 3 to 8 years, early childhood education and care. For children from 0 to 3 years, regular health visits by nurses were considered to be most effective.

- d. *To encourage Roma families and communities to establish their own pre-kindergarten educational programmes, with clear goals and assessment procedures.* The disadvantage of excluded children is greatly reinforced if they come from second-language backgrounds. To prevent that occurrence, Roma communities need to establish – with funding from the state – pre-kindergarten programmes for parents and young children focussed on play, language acquisition and parent literacy. Such play groups or parent-child groups could take place a few times per week, and could include older children during the holiday periods.

Box 1. Rules Governing the Arkansas Better Chance Programme (ABC)

In addition to defining child and provider eligibility for the programme, the rules governing the ABC programme address five key areas:

Child:staff ratios and group sizes. Child:staff ratios in the classroom shall not exceed: 4:1 for infants up to 18 months; 7:1 for toddlers 18 months to 3 years; and 10:1 for children 3 to 5 years. Maximum group sizes for these age groups are respectively: 8, 14 and 20 children.

Staff profiles, staffing patterns and professional development. Staff are divided into three categories, each being required to have minimal certification: *Lead teachers* with a Bachelor's or Master's degree in early childhood education (or other relevant degree with an emphasis on child development); *Classroom teachers* with an Associate Arts degree (2 years tertiary) in early childhood education; and *para-professional aides* with a child development associate credential. ABC staff should also reflect the ethnic diversity of the children participating in the ABC programme. Lead teachers are responsible for curriculum, programme planning and supervision of aides, and should have 30 hours annually of professional development; aides have a right to 20 hours. Each classroom should be staffed by one teacher and one aide. Centres with four classrooms must employ two lead teachers, two classroom teachers and four para-professional aides.

Programme standards and curriculum. Programmes shall be developmentally appropriate and individualised to meet the needs of each child. Centres follow the guidelines from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Arkansas ECE Framework. In addition to enriched environments (equipment and materials for children; interest areas and learning corners; appropriately planned outdoor areas), programmes will have thematic units and goals related to: cultural diversity; socio-emotional learning; creative-aesthetic learning; cognitive development; physical development and language. Teachers shall implement and maintain individual child portfolios, including samples of children's work, teacher and parent observations. The daily schedule should reflect a balance between indoor/outdoor; quiet/active; individual/small-group /large-group; gross motor/fine motor; and child initiated/teacher initiated. A meal and snacks are provided free to children in need, and mealtimes and other routines are used as opportunities for incidental learning. Attention should be given to easing transition for children from one programme or age grouping to another, with particular attention to the transition to public school kindergarten.

Child assessment, developmental and health screening. All children in ABC programmes shall receive comprehensive health and developmental screens to determine their individual needs. Health screening will cover: growth and nutrition; developmental assessment; neurological and cardiac status; vision; hearing; teeth; immunization status; blood and urine lab-tests. The developmental screen will cover the following areas: vocabulary, visual-motor integration, language and speech development, fine and gross motor skills, social skills and developmental milestones. A comprehensive longitudinal study shall also be implemented to evaluate the ABC programme over time and to ensure that it meets its goals.

Parent/community involvement. Each programme shall have a parent handbook and a plan for parental involvement that will include opportunities for parental inputs into programme operation and design. The plan will include parental reviews of programmatic plans, parent conferences and a method to involve the parent in the child's educational experience. There will also be an "open door" policy for parents, to encourage visiting and participation in classroom activities.

CHAPTER 1

The Country Context and the Situation of the Roma Population

General Data on the Country and the Roma Population

The Republic of Serbia is situated in South-Eastern Europe, in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula. Its capital is Belgrade, and the official language is Serbian. The Republic of Serbia is divided into 152 municipalities, 29 administrative districts, 24 towns, and 22 town municipalities.³¹ The City of Belgrade and the City of Nis are separate territorial units. The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina is a part of Serbia which maintains a degree of territorial autonomy.³²

Serbia is a country in transition, burdened by the conflicts of the recent past, with a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) and a high rate of unemployment, as well as major poverty issues. According to the assessments made for the first half of 2010, some 650,000 people are unable to meet their primary living needs.³³

Serbia is determined to join the EU. The Republic of Serbia signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) and applied for EU membership, thus making social inclusion and poverty reduction mandatory components of its integration policy. The Government is dedicated to meeting the requirements defined by the EU at summit meetings in Lisbon and Copenhagen, and it conforms to the decisions contained in the Europe 2020³⁴ document. As one of the essential requirements of the EU accession process, Serbia has undertaken a process of social inclusion which implies the development and improvement of policies, institutional framework and methodology for supervising social inclusion of individuals and social groups in the Republic of Serbia.

The Serbian National Strategy for Accession to the EU highlights as one of the priorities, the issue of achieving a better situation for the Roma population. The Plan of the Serbian Government for Implementation of the European Partnership states, in Article 3 item 3.1.6, (Human Rights and Protection of Minorities), that: "Strategies and action plans

31 Based on data from 01.01.2011. <http://webzrs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/Public/PageView.aspx?pKey=321>.

32 The Serbian Constitution as well as a number of official documents, and general public hold Kosovo and Metohija to be another autonomous province, yet Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008.

33 Matković, 2011.

34 Roma Education Fund, REF, 2010.

need to be implemented, which have an impact on the Roma population's integration, including the returnees."

Based on the latest census (2002), the population of Serbia, (excluding Kosovo) is 7,498,001, consisting of: 82.8 per cent Serbs; 3.91 per cent Hungarians; 1.81 per cent Bosnians; 1.44 per cent Roma; and 1.08 per cent Yugoslavs.³⁵ On 1st January 2010 the Serbian population was estimated at 7,306,000 in total.³⁶ Since the beginning of the 21st century, the population in Serbia has constantly fallen, and has now decreased by 220,000, having dropped by a further 28,300 since early 2009. The major reason for this is thought to be negative population growth. The proportion of older people in Serbian is amongst the highest in the world. According to the estimates of the Republic Statistical Office (RSO), in the year 2008, 21.27 per cent of the population was younger than 19, while 51.54 per cent of the population was older than 40 (22.52 per cent of these being older than 60).

Reliable data on the Roma population do not exist. Official statistics claim that there are only 108,000 Roma people³⁷ in Serbia, while Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) estimate that there are as many as 800,000. It is generally accepted that there are some 450–500 thousand Roma in Serbia. This estimate has been agreed by both the government and the NGO sector.³⁸ It is expected that the 2011 census will provide more accurate insights into the true number of Roma in Serbia.

Roma are Serbia's largest and most vulnerable national minority. According to the 2002 census, the Romani language was cited as the mother tongue of 76 per cent of Roma citizens.³⁹ Bearing in mind that the number of Roma people that participated in the census was considerably smaller than the real number of Roma living in Serbia, the accuracy of this information appears dubious.

Roma are the youngest population in Serbia. Children under 14 years of age make-up 40.7 per cent of the population, while 31 per cent is children/youth aged 15–24. This, relatively low, average age of the Roma population is in clear contrast to the increasingly old general population in Serbia (see previously given data).⁴⁰ Data from the Ministry of Health, dating from 31st December 2010, for a sample of the recorded total of 120,708 Roma people, states that: 40.56 per cent are children aged 0–18 years, with 8 per cent of those being children 0–1 year old; 5.87 per cent are teenagers of 15–18 years; and, youth of 19–26 years make-up 17.38 per cent of the population.⁴¹

The unreliability of demographic data has been further complicated by a quite significant rate of migration, mainly related to the movement of refugees during the 1990's. Roma refugees arriving in Serbia were rarely registered officially. In addition, after the year 2000, according to agreement on readmission,⁴² tens of thousands of Roma were sent back to Serbia from Western countries. Thus the Roma population of today comprises:

35 Roma Education Fund, REF, 2010

36 Latest estimates of the Republic Statistical Office.

37 Census, 2002.

38 REF, 2010, p. 8.

39 RNO, Census, 2002.

40 REF, 2010, p. 9.

41 Data provided by Dr Šaranovič Racič, Ministry of Health.

42 Readmission is the process of returning and admitting of persons that do not fulfil the requirements to enter or stay on the territory of other countries. The Republic of Serbia has signed a great number of such agreements in recent years, followed by signing the general agreement with the EU that entered into force on 1st January 2008.

Roma born in Serbia, speaking Romani, Serbian or, in some cases, Hungarian; refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs, speaking Romani, Serbian or Albanian; and returnees, speaking Romani or another European language, usually German).⁴³

Historically speaking, the immigration of Roma to what is territory currently belonging to Serbia, coincides with the Turkish conquest. According to their place of origin,⁴⁴ Roma people in Serbia are divided into the following groupings:

- *Turkish Roma* who settled in Serbia in the mid-XIV century. They consist of *Gažikano Roma* (Serbian Roma), who often adopted Christianity, and *Korane Roma* (Qur'an Roma), mainly of the Islamic conviction, who keep the tradition of speaking among themselves in Romani. Turkish Roma tended to have better positions than the other Roma groups. Practitioners of similar professions often made permanent settlements.
- *White Roma*, who came to Serbia from Bosnia. These mainly had strong bonds with their settlements, and they did not demonstrate nomadic tendencies. They are mainly Muslim, and usually speak Serbian.
- *Vlach Roma*, who came to Serbia from Romania in the XIV century, and whose descendants are thought to be the most numerous Roma group in Serbia. They are called the Banjas Roma, while those living near the river Drina close to Bosnia are Karavlahs.⁴⁵ Almost all of them are Orthodox, mostly speak Serbian, while some sub-groups speak both Serbian and Romanian.
- *Hungarian Roma or Roma from Banat, who came from the Austro-Hungarian Kingdom*. A significant deterioration in the position of the Roma population in the region, and legal discrimination due to their ethnic specificities, was initiated as a result of regulations issued by the Austrian state during the rule of Maria Theresa and Joseph II (e.g., ordering separation of Roma children from their families and their placement with Christians; limiting freedom of movement for Roma; prohibiting use of the Romani language).⁴⁶

During the period of the establishment of the Serbian state, the attitude towards Roma changed (primarily due to their participation on the Serbian side in uprisings against the Turks), and regulations were adopted that gave them equal status and contributed to their emancipation. Although some regulations still discriminated against Roma (mostly against nomadic groups), the supreme legal act, the 1835 Constitution, prescribed the legal equality of all Serbian citizens, regardless of their ethnicity.

During World War Two, Roma were second only to Jews in terms of casualties, since they lost 31.4 per cent of their population from what was then Yugoslavia,⁴⁷ *although this fact is little known and rarely spoken of today.*

43 REF, 2010.

44 Djordjević, T., "Who Are the Gypsies, Our National Life," book IV, Belgrade 1932. (pp. 90–119), according to Vodinečić and Gajin, 2009.

45 In Turkish Kara is black – Kara Vlachs – Black Vlachs.

46 Vodinečić and Gajin, 2009.

47 Bogosavljević, in Vodinečić and Gajin, 2009.

In the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Roma had the status of an ethnic group, but not of a national minority, and were exposed to strong assimilation pressure, but their social position was relatively stable.⁴⁸

In 1976, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) began work on the position of Roma. It established the Committee for Studying the Life and Customs of Roma. This Committee began organizing scientific conferences in the 1980's and published the first collections of papers on Roma in 1992 and in 1993. The papers, some of which were written by Roma, dealt with the most pressing problems for the Roma community, with a special emphasis on accommodation, education and language. Hence, even at that time, the need for preschool education and favourable conditions to encourage attendance by Roma children was being discussed. It was emphasized that Roma children should attend at least 2 years of preschool before they enter school.⁴⁹

In the era of Slobodan Milošević, although legislation did not support discrimination against Roma, there were many cases of discrimination in everyday life, often supported by the actions of local governments. Cultural discrimination was most in evidence through the negation of the Romani language.⁵⁰ Linguistic arguments around Romani were used as an excuse for not introducing it into official communication (e.g., the lack of court interpreters), while simultaneously there were radio and TV programmes made in Romani, and one theatre would occasionally stage plays in this language. Another form of discrimination was, and still is, related to accommodation and living conditions, induced by severe poverty, discrimination and social submission of the Roma population. Roma life during Milošević's rule was characterized by ghettoization due to social factors (poverty) and ethnic discrimination.

The situation further deteriorated during the embargo and the period of UN economic sanctions. It is believed that the position of Roma was quite unbearable then, since they were already extremely poor and they then ceased to receive aid from their relatives abroad. During this period, the authorities put a halt to programmes designed to improve the education and position⁵¹ of Roma. Discrimination against Roma in Yugoslavia intensified towards the end of Milošević's rule. In 1996, the US State Department publicized⁵² the fact that Roma children did not have the opportunity to attend school in their own language,⁵³ and that as few as 20 per cent of Roma children finished primary schools. Around the same time, acts of violence increased. The violence of skinheads gained momentum and on October 18th 1997, a 14 years old Roma named Dusan Jovanovic, was killed, while in the following year, the NGO: Roma Documentation and Information Centre, in Belgrade, was attacked.

Intensified clashes in Kosovo resulted in an increased number of displaced Roma. After the bombing finished, Serbs and Roma from Kosovo fled to other parts of the country. These internally displaced Roma would become one of the most marginalised groups in

48 Kovačević, 2009.

49 Suncica Findek, the SANU collection: The Development of Roma in Yugoslavia, Problems and Tendencies, 1992.

50 Vodinelić and Gajin, 2009.

51 *Ibid.*

52 US State Department.

53 This was officially justified by the fact that Roma did not have the status of a national minority, and thus had no legal right to attend school in their own language.

Serbia at the beginning of the 21st century.⁵⁴ The collection centres often did not have enough space to admit the Roma from Kosovo, so in the majority of cases they were accommodated in illegal Roma settlements. These Roma were unable to get residence permits or refugee cards, which led to many problems in securing their right to health and social care, education and employment.⁵⁵

With the democratic changes in Serbia over the last ten years, the situation of Roma people has changed. Although everyone agrees that these changes have been positive, the assessment of their scope and quality largely depends on one's point of view and source of information.

Since 2000, Serbia has made progress in terms of improving minority rights. In relation to international documents, the state union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2001 acceded to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe, while the European Charter for the Regional and Minority Languages was ratified in 2005.⁵⁶ The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights⁵⁷ and the Republican Council for National Minorities were established. Furthermore, the Declaration of a New Democratic System to Promote the Position of National Minorities (2002) was adopted, while the Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities (2002) was issued.

The National Board of the Roma Minority⁵⁸ was established in 2003, and operates a level of cultural self-government for the Roma community, since it participates in the decision making process when it comes to issues of language, education, information and culture. The Board members⁵⁹ are elected by the legally proscribed electorate. The special Roma electoral roll consists of 56,076 names of Roma people registered as living in Serbia at May 2010.⁶⁰

At the state authority level, an institutional framework for the integration of Roma was created. Within the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, the Office for Implementation of the National Strategy for the Promotion of the Position of Roma in Serbia was established. In Vojvodina, the Provincial Council for Integration of Roma and the Office for Roma Inclusion⁶¹ were established. The level of Roma participation in all these bodies is good.

In 2006, a new Serbian Constitution was adopted, which guarantees the rights of national minorities to: full equality and respect for identity; individual and collective

54 Vodinelić and Gajin, 2009.

55 Kovačević, 2009.

56 Among other international documents, Serbia has 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, the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education.

57 Upon the dissolution of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2006, The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights ceased to exist and were replaced by the Agency for Human and Minority Rights, but then were reinstated after the parliamentary elections of 2008.

58 Other minorities have their boards as well.

59 The Board has 35 members, including the chairman; three vice-chairmen; executive committee with six members; separate committees for education; accommodation; culture; social and health protection; political participation; NGO sector; employment; internally displaced persons and returnees. Roma boards are also organized in the municipalities with a legally proscribed minimum of Roma population.

60 <http://izbori.ljudskaprava.gov.rs/ci/info/story/>.

61 The Office for Roma Inclusion was established in 2007, under the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality, at the initiative of the said Provincial Secretariat and with the financial support of the Open Society Fund.

rights; positive discrimination; self-government in the sphere of culture; education, information and the official use of their language. The Constitution also prohibits discrimination and forced assimilation.⁶² For the first time in Serbia's constitutional history, the stipulations under a common name "Child Rights" were defined:

"A child shall enjoy human rights suitable to their age and mental maturity. Every child shall have the right to a personal name, entry in the registry of births, the right to learn about its ancestry, and the right to preserve his/her own identity. A child shall be protected from psychological, physical, economic and any other form of exploitation or abuse. A child born out of wedlock shall have the same rights as a child born in wedlock. The rights of the child and their protection shall be regulated by the law."

Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, Article 64, Parents and Children.

The Republic of Serbia has established a series of institutional mechanisms in the field of human rights, freedoms and prevention of discrimination. Apart from the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights (established in 2008), certain independent institutions were established such as: the Commissioner for the Information of Public Interest and Protection of Personal Data (2004), Ombudsman (2007) and National Audit Office (2007). In May 2010, the National Assembly elected the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, as one of the key mechanisms to fight against discrimination.

In 2005, Serbia signed the Declaration on Participation in the Decade of Roma Inclusion (DRI). In January of the same year, National Action Plans (NAPs)⁶³ were adopted, aimed at improving the prospects of Roma in the fields of education, employment, housing and health, and included multi-sectoral topics on the battle against discrimination, gender equality and poverty reduction.⁶⁴

During the summer of 2008, the Government of the Republic of Serbia established the Council for the Improvement of Roma Population's Position and Implementation of DRI, comprised of Roma NGOs, political parties and relevant state institutions. The Deputy Prime Minister for EU Integration and the National Coordinator of the DRI, chair the Council. Within the Government of Vojvodina, the Council for National Minorities has recently established the Office for the Roma, in order to monitor the implementation of the DRI. The city of Belgrade formed a Coordination Centre for the Inclusion of Roma. Many municipalities in Serbia engage numerous coordinators to work on issues concerning the Roma population. However, the majority of actions related to the DRI were coordinated by the Agency/Office for the Roma National Strategy, and the National Coordinator of DRI. Working groups are responsible for carrying out the DRI Action Plans.

The Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit (SIPRU), within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, was established by the Government in 2009. The establishment of this team was a first step in establishing an institutional framework for the development and implementation of social inclusion policies. The team provides support to the Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration in coordinating, monitoring and reporting of government activities in the field of social inclusion. The team is responsible for

62 Legal Newsletter "Regulations and Practice," 2010.

63 NAPs were later revised and improved.

64 Kovacevic, 2009.

strengthening of the Government's capacity to develop and implement policies for social inclusion, based on best practice in Europe. It provides support to line ministries in developing and implementing social inclusion policies, and is responsible for regular consultations with civil society organizations (CSOs).⁶⁵

Essentially, human and minority rights are protected and respected, even though regulations are not met in practice, despite great efforts. Special obstacles can be noted within some categories of population, including Roma. There have been some cases of expression of hatred and intolerance against Roma, some of which have been recorded. Re-admission of large numbers of Roma from EU states caused a series of administrative and other obstacles to those coming back to Serbia. More than 100 municipal units have not yet developed action plans for improving the position of Roma.⁶⁶

In March 2011 a new Law on Ministries was adopted and the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights has been merged with the Ministry for State Governance, to become the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, State Government and Local Self-Government. The Ministry of Education is now the Ministry of Education and Science. What kind of effects these changes will make remains to be seen.

Overview of the Current Socio-Economic Status of Roma in Serbia

"Nobody has money, the financial situation is very bad, the majority of Roma families are living on social welfare."

(Focus group, health mediator, Novi Sad, May, 2010)

In the current process of transition, and within the context of significant democratic changes, Roma are by far the poorest and most endangered social group in Serbia. They live on the margins of society, and are significantly more underprivileged than the average population. They have little social power, limited life opportunities and low social status.⁶⁷ World Bank estimates show that 60.5 per cent of the Roma population falls within the category of "very poor," compared to 6.1 per cent of the average population. Some of the data⁶⁸ indicates that in 2007, 6.6 per cent of Serbian citizens lived below the poverty line, compared with 49.2 per cent of Roma, 6.4 per cent of whom lived in extreme poverty. Within the poor Roma population, women and children are especially at risk.⁶⁹

A high unemployment rate and low rate of participation and employment are the reasons for the great poverty of Roma. Compared to the non-Roma population, Roma have an unemployment rate which is four times higher and covers all age groups and all education levels.⁷⁰ Other analyses suggest that their extremely high vulnerability

65 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011.

66 *Ibid*, p. 174.

67 Dr Aleksandra Mitrović, presentation in SANU, 7. 12, 2010.

68 The project of RSO and the Team for Implementation of the Strategy for the Reduction of Poverty within the cabinet of the Deputy Prime Minister, "Identification of Poverty in Serbia" awarded by the World Bank.

69 Kovać Cerović, 2007, p. 15.

70 REF, 2010, str. 8.

is primarily due to an extremely high unemployment rate of 31.6 per cent (which is as much as 17.7 per cent higher than the unemployment rate of the total working age population), and their low rate of activity of 48.7 per cent (15.5 per cent lower than the national average). The percentage of employed vulnerable groups' members is 5.5 per cent higher than the average.⁷¹

The main problem for Roma unemployment, as with the general population, is the long-term unemployed. *Unemployment among Roma is constantly on a steep increase, as a result of poor education, prejudice, and the economic crisis in Serbia. When considered from the angle of professional development, it might be concluded that Roma are predominantly employed in occupations with a very low social and economic status.* More than 40 per cent of Roma are employed in blue collar jobs, and those that do not require professional qualifications and in which no one else is interested.⁷² Since Roma very rarely find regular jobs, as many as 83.5 per cent work in the informal economy. There is a huge participation of Roma in the informal economy (83.5 per cent) when compared to the general population (34.9 per cent). This illustrates the Roma's high vulnerability in the labour market in relation to the quality of jobs.⁷³ *Roma more often than not rely on the grey economy, as the only form of employment giving them the opportunity to earn an income without discrimination. This type of labour is accompanied by the fear that, once their activities are revealed, their work and existence will be jeopardized.*⁷⁴ *When formally employed, Roma usually work in the social sector and public institutions.*⁷⁵ According to the sector of activity, the largest number of Roma is engaged in services (trade, often on the grey market) (44 per cent), and in agriculture (32 per cent). More than half of Roma are only occasionally engaged in employment, or as seasonal workers (26.9 per cent in trade and 37 per cent in agriculture).

Exclusion of Roma from the labour market and their non-participation in the generation of income and productivity, results in yearly productivity losses to the Republic of Serbia of some 238 million Euros and 58 million Euros in fiscal incomes.⁷⁶

The educational structure of Roma is highly unfavourable (Table 1). More than 50 per cent of Roma did not finish school. Only some 31 per cent are recorded to have completed primary school, and approximately 80 per cent of the population is functionally illiterate.

71 Krstić et al. The position of vulnerable groups in the labour market, 2010, pp. 75–82 – the sample did not include the Roma from slums.

72 Djordjević, p. 156.

73 Krstić et al, The position of vulnerable groups in the labour market, 2010, pp. 75–82.

74 Kovačević, 2009, p. 9.

75 RIC, 2008.

76 Estimation of the World Bank "The price of Roma Exclusion" in the First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in RS, 2011, p. 91.

Table 1: Educational level of Roma⁷⁷

Educational level/years of schooling	Percentage of Roma older than 15		
	1991 census	2002 census	LSMS 2007
Less than 4 years of schooling	34.8	32	32.1
Less than 8 years of schooling	78.7	63	58.1
Finished primary school	17	29	31.1
Finished secondary school	4	7.8	10.8
College and faculty	0.3	0.3	0

According to data from the Ministry of Health for December 2010 gathered from a sample of 71,740 Roma, 40.49 per cent of Roma did not finish primary school.⁷⁸

Data from the MICS 4 demonstrate that only 77 per cent of women and 78 per cent of men in the 15–24 age group that live in segregated Roma settlements are literate, compared to 99 per cent of young women and men in the general population in Serbia. The situation is even worse among the poorest Roma where only 49 per cent of women and 46 per cent of men are literate. When it comes to exposure to mass media and information/communication technologies the situation is worse for Roma women. Only one fourth of Roma women (aged 15–24) from Roma settlements use internet (25.2 per cent compared to 85 per cent of young women in the general population); 39.1 per cent of Roma women (age 15–24) use computers (compared to 91.4 per cent of women in the general population) and 19 per cent of Roma women (aged 15–49) are exposed to the mass media (compared to 56.7 per cent of women in the general population).

Housing conditions of Roma families are also extremely different from the general population. According to research carried out in 2002,⁷⁹ there were 593 Roma settlements in Serbia, 285 of which were located in urban areas, and the rest in the suburban and rural areas. According to data gathered up to the end of December 2010, by health mediators, there are many more settlements (850).⁸⁰

More than two thirds (67 per cent) of Roma children from settlements are poor, and 62 per cent of Roma households with children live below the poverty line, and 90 per cent of children come from households that consider themselves underprivileged.⁸¹

MICS 4 results show that Roma children from settlements lag behind their peers in the general population. The assessment of young children’s development (36–59 months) has shown that in Serbia the Early Child Development Index (ECDI) score⁸² is 94, while for children in Roma settlements it is 88.

77 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011, p. 187.

78 Dr. Saranović Račić, The Ministry of Health, 2011.

79 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011, p. 240.

80 Dr. Saranović Račić, The Ministry of Health, 2011.

81 http://www.unicef.org/serbia/Stanje_dece_u_Srbiji_2006_1-56.pdf.

82 The Early Child Development Index (ECDI) is the percentage of children who are developmentally on track in at least three of four domains: literacy-numeracy, physical (motor skills, freedom of recurrent illness), social-emotional and learning (ability to follow simple instructions, ability to occupy herself/himself independently).

The biggest difference between Roma children and the general population is in the domain of literacy and numeracy; only 11 per cent of Roma children in segregated Roma settlements (according to ECDI) are “developmentally on track,” compared to 31 per cent of children in the general population.

The home learning environment of Roma children from the settlements is rather poor and not stimulating. One out of four under-five children (23 per cent) from Roma settlements has 3 or more children’s books, compared to 75.9 per cent in the general population. Children in Roma settlements often play with toys from a shop (78 per cent compared to 95 per cent in the general population), more than half play only with household objects/objects found outside (58 per cent compared to 62 per cent in the general population), 28 per cent play with homemade toys (in the general population 25 per cent).

The percentage of Roma fathers participating in children’s learning is 62.5 (compared to 78 per cent in the general population) and only 67.2 per cent of Roma children get support for learning in general (compared to 95.2 per cent in the general population).

Five per cent of children in Roma settlements under the age of 5 years are left with inadequate care, either left alone or in the care of another child (as compared to 1 per cent in the general population). This happens more often to children from the poorest households in Roma settlements (8 per cent).

Nearly 7 per cent of children under-five in Roma settlements are moderately underweight, while 1 per cent of children are classified as severely underweight. Every fourth child (24 per cent) is moderately stunted or too short for their age while 10 per cent are severely stunted. Five per cent are moderately wasted or too thin for their height. The same indicators for the general population are as follows: nearly 2 per cent of children are moderately underweight and 1 per cent are severely underweight, 7 per cent are moderately stunted, and 4 per cent are moderately wasted. In Serbia, about 90 per cent of babies are ever breastfed. Half the children from Roma settlements aged 0 to 5 months are predominantly breastfed (52 per cent), and continuously breastfed until 1 or 2 years of age (54 and 37 per cent accordingly). The type of settlement makes a difference in the percentage of children who are predominantly breastfed within the population of Roma settlements (64 per cent in urban and 38 per cent in rural areas). Gender disparity is obvious for children from Roma settlements where only 4 per cent of girls aged 0 to 5 months are exclusively breastfed compared to 14 per cent of boys. The percentage of appropriately breastfed children aged from 0 to 23 months from Roma settlements is 33 per cent compared to 19 per cent of the general population. This difference mainly comes from higher breastfeeding rates among Roma. On the other hand, analysis of frequency of meals shows a much worse situation. Overall, about two-thirds of children aged 6 to 23 months (72 per cent) receive a “minimum frequency of meals”⁸³ compared to 84 per cent of children from the national sample. Some 60 per cent of children from Roma settlements aged 0 to 23 months who are not breastfed receive at least two milk feeds per day compared to 90 per cent of general population.

Birth registration with civil authorities for children under the age of 5 in Serbia is 98.9 per cent and the same is true for Roma settlements – 98.8 per cent. The percentage of children under 5 with health insurance cards is 98 per cent and for children in Roma settlements is 96 per cent.⁸⁴

83 Minimum meal frequency for children of 6–23 months, who are not breastfed, is defined as minimum of 4 meals of solid, semi-solid, or soft foods or milk feeds a day.

84 MICS 4, op cit.

According to Dr. Aleksandra Mitrović,⁸⁵ the characteristics of a typical poor Roma family are: the Roma family is an extended one; it consists of a number of generations and marital communities living together under the same roof; the household is headed by a senior man who organizes family life, while other members' roles are subjugated; early marriages common (minors' marriage), so that parents are often still children; the lack of family planning (resulting in a great number of children); generational unemployment and illiteracy, especially among mothers; low aspirations when it comes to children's education; and, generational poverty.

Roma women are considered to be one of the demographic categories in most danger in Serbia. Among the already marginalized population of Roma people, they are the most marginalized, uneducated and poor.⁸⁶ The impact of what is regularly referred to as "Roma tradition" is omnipresent in behaviour towards girls and women of Roma origin. Even 63 per cent of girls would feel guilty for acting against their tradition, 36.2 per cent would not, while barely 2 per cent said that they do not know.⁸⁷ As for the educational scale, 87.1 per cent of Roma girls have no education – either without any schooling (18.8 per cent), or are functionally illiterate (68.3 per cent). Only 0.4 per cent have higher education. Roma women are particularly hit by unemployment. More than half of all active women are unemployed (57.1 per cent). The rate of Roma women's employment is just 10 per cent, which is some 46 per cent less than that of men.⁸⁸

Roma women are still getting married before they turn eighteen. Results from MICS 4 show differences in marriage trends between women in Serbia and from Roma settlements as well as clear connection between education level and early marriages. About 16 per cent of women from Roma settlements get married before the age of 15 and 54 per cent before the ages of 18 (compared to 0.8 and 7.7 per cent of general population accordingly). The percentage of early marriages is higher among the less educated and the poorest. Among women from Roma settlements, 59 per cent are married before the age of 18 with no education or only with primary education compared to 21 per cent of those with secondary education. Early marriage is the case for 66 per cent of women in Roma settlements in rural areas, and 48 per cent in urban areas. Early marriage decreases with increases in the wealth index. In comparison with only 5 per cent of women aged 15–19 in Serbia who are currently married or in a union, almost half the women of the same age in Roma settlements are married or in a union (44 per cent).⁸⁹

Even before entering marriage, Roma girls are expected to be obedient, to look after the household they live in, to take care of their siblings, and they may be forced to leave school early. The level of knowledge amongst Roma women is very low on protection from unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and the use of contraception. As many as 72 per cent of married Roma women who live in Roma settlements do not use any means of birth control (compared to 59 per cent of women in Serbia).⁹⁰ The average number of abortions performed on Roma women is from 8–14, but they use neither contraception, nor sterilization, as they are not sure whether their husband would like another child.

85 Society for the Development of Roma Settlements, comments after the National Consultation on the Report Roma Early Childhood Inclusion," March 2011.

86 One of the conclusions of the Workgroup at the Conference on Education of Roma Girls and Women, October 2010, with the support of the Ministry of Education and Science, EU and OEBS.

87 NGO Bibija, 2009.

88 Krstic et al, The position of vulnerable groups in the labour market, 2010, pp. 75–82.

89 *Ibid.*

90 Dinkic et al, 2009.

Recent data from MICS 4 shows a different picture. According to this data, 64 per cent of women from Roma settlement use contraception, more than women in Serbia in general. However, they use traditional methods much more than modern (58 per cent and 6 per cent respectively) mainly withdrawal and lactational amenorrhea. The birth rate among adolescent girls from Roma settlements is rather high (158 per 1,000 women) compared to the general population (24 per 1,000 women).

Roma women are frequently victims of family violence, which they do not report as they have no trust in services and institutions, but also because they believe that men have the right to act violently. Every fifth woman in Roma settlements believes that husbands are justified in beating their wives. It is significant that 17 per cent of Roma women approved of a husband or partner beating the woman if she neglects the children, 12 per cent if she argues with him, 11 per cent if she goes out without telling him and 8 per cent if she refuses sex with him. These kinds of attitudes are in reverse correlation to women's education level or welfare index.⁹¹

Similarly, a violent approach to the disciplining of children is common. Twenty-eight per cent of children in Serbia are disciplined exclusively through only non-violent methods, while in general 67 per cent of children aged 2–14 years have experienced violent discipline, which includes psychological aggression and/or physical punishment. This is more common in a boy's upbringing (70 per cent) than in a girl's (64 per cent). Also, 4 per cent of children in the poorest households are exposed to severe physical punishment. The percentage of mothers/caregivers who believed that children should be physically punished is 7 per cent. Physical punishment decreases with the age of the child. Usage of violent methods decreases with the increase in the wealth index of households.

In Roma settlements, 86 per cent of children have experienced violent discipline methods. Among them the age group of 5–9 years is most exposed to violent methods (90 per cent). The total percentage of severely punished children is 6 per cent, and 5 per cent of children in the youngest group (2–4 years) are severely punished. It is also disturbing that 23 per cent of MICS 4 respondents believe that children need to be physically punished.

Research by the Roma Woman Network indicates that the average life expectancy for a Roma woman is 48 years.⁹² Data from the Institute for Economic Research, dating from 2009, indicate that the average life expectancy for Roma women is 58 years. According to the latest data from 2011 the average life expectancy for women in Serbia in the general population is 76.6 years (for men it is 71.4 years).

The most common perceptions of the Roma are that they represent a homogeneous population (they are all the same and their problems should be tackled in the same manner). Frequent stereotypes portray the Roma as: lazy; prone to violence and crime; only themselves to blame for their situation; that they are fond of their lifestyle; have low educational level; are unemployed; live in unhygienic settlements etc. Whether they are happy, truly unfortunate, or even talented musicians, these stereotypes are still preserved through a number of well-known sayings.⁹³

91 Dinkic et al., 2009.

92 Roma Female Network of Serbia consists of 30 organizations and initiatives <http://www.zenskiprostor.org.rs/>.

93 e.g. A Gypsy will steal from you, you will get lice from Gypsies... all of the sayings are extremely negative.

According to the European Commission Report on racism and intolerance in Serbia,⁹⁴ the major areas in which discrimination against Roma spread, after 2000 are: ownership of personal ID; education; employment; residence; access to health protection services; and, protection from violence. A flagrant example of this phenomenon was the de-population of Roma people from the settlement under the Gazela Bridge in 2009. Their residences were destroyed and they were forced to live in containers. The reaction of the nationals into whose neighbourhoods Roma were supposed to move, caused additional obstacles. They organized protests and burnt their containers.⁹⁵

Intolerant attitudes towards non-Roma children are not regarded as a real problem, but merely as “teasing.” This leads to the conclusion that, either there is no true understanding amongst Roma and non-Roma people regarding what discrimination really is, or perhaps the Roma are so accustomed to discrimination that it appears that they are indifferent to it, including racist harassment.⁹⁶

The latest document,⁹⁷ submitted by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in March 2011 and based on the Report of the Republic of Serbia, expressed satisfaction with what was achieved with the adopted laws and by-laws, ratified international conventions and the efforts invested by the State in order to prevent discrimination. On the other hand, worries were expressed that, in some segments of social and political life (political discourse, media, sport, operation of some groups and organizations), racial discrimination and hate speech are still present. On the position of Roma, the Committee expressed their worries about the discrimination manifest in the living conditions, forced displacement and problems that Roma encounter when they apply for social accommodation (p. 4, clause 14). Worries were also expressed about the segregation encountered by the children of Roma returnees from Western Europe (p.4, clause 15). The opinion of the Committee is that Roma are still faced with discrimination and prejudice, especially when it comes to employment, health care, political participation and access to public spaces (p. 4, clause 16).

A public opinion poll, carried out in 2010 by the Strategic Marketing agency,⁹⁸ demonstrated that awareness of discrimination among Serbian citizens has increased when compared to the previous year.⁹⁹ However, intolerance towards minorities and vulnerable groups has simultaneously risen, along with the percentage of the population prone to justifying the discrimination, at least in some circumstances. Prejudice has increased against all minority groups; least against Roma (it was already high), but focused primarily against sexual minorities and Albanians. A significant number of Serbian citizens name Roma as the group most discriminated against, although this rate is smaller than the previous year (45 per cent compared to 50 per cent).¹⁰⁰ The highest rate of discrimination against citizens is against Roma, especially with respect to employment.¹⁰¹

Roma are aware of the attitudes mentioned above, but rarely do they confront discrimination, mainly out of fear of repercussion, continuation of violence, and due to

94 ECRI.

95 Vodinelic and Gajin, 2009.

96 EUMAP, 2007, p. 116.

97 Office of the High UN Representative for Human Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – “Concluding Remarks of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,” Serbia, 10.03.2011.

98 Continuation of the research started in 2009, supported by UNDP, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the EU.

99 In the meantime, the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination was also ratified.

100 *Ibid.*

101 *Ibid.*

the fact that the judicial system seldom reacts in their favour and that they cannot afford legal procedures.¹⁰²

“They (the majority population) say they are Gypsies, they 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.”

(Focus group, Barajevo, June 2010)

Some of the majority population believes that Roma neither take care of their children, nor do they care about their own wellbeing.

One of the strongest stereotypes, which significantly defines the behaviour towards Roma in the educational system, is that they do not pay attention to the education of their children, they have no awareness of the importance of education, and, therefore, the percentage of Roma children in educational institutions is extremely low. As discussions in focus groups have shown, Roma are mostly aware of the image of them portrayed by others, their reaction is anger, but also to search for empathy for the position they are in.

Generally speaking, Roma people perceive the majority population as more positive than the majority perceive the Roma, and they tend to identify with them. Internalized forms of discrimination and oppression are omnipresent, and therefore it is common for Roma to be ready to take full responsibility for their situation, despite the multiple deprivations they are exposed to. This question is often discussed at meetings with Roma representatives and non-Roma NGO sectors.

“Even when they go to school, kids are being laughed at and mocked, because they wear clothes found in trash bins and containers.”

(Mother of a Roma girl, focus group, settlement Deponija, August, 2010)

Civil society organizations have been trying to tackle these problems, which have been present for more than ten years. Roma NGOs in Serbia were established first in 1990, initiated by the idea of a civil and open society, which was promoted in the democratic countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The Roma issue has been the field of work for many Roma and non-Roma NGOs, especially in the areas of education, employment and social security. Most of the measures that the State is currently undertaking originated from civil society, and most of the Roma representatives who currently work in relevant state institutions started their career in the NGO sector. According to the Roma Information Centre (RIC), there are over 1000 Roma NGOs and societies in Serbia today. These societies frequently cooperate with other NGOs, as well as many international organizations (UNICEF, OSCE, Open Society Foundations, FOSS, REF, EAR,

¹⁰² Kovačević, 2009.

and UNDP) in carrying out projects to support Roma. Many of them, unfortunately, were not sustainable as they were not supported by the Roma community, nor were they acknowledged by the national institutions.

The League for the Decade of Roma (DRI) has also been established, with more than 120 members, and represents the coalition of Roma and non-Roma organizations in charge of monitoring implementation policies, focused on the position of Roma and the achievement of DRI goals. The founders of the League for the Decade are the Open Society Fund Serbia; the Minority Rights Centre; the Roma Children's Centre; Civic Initiatives; Yugoslav Association for Culture and Education of Roma; Roma Students Association; Association for the Improvement of Roma Settlements; the YUROM (YUROM) Centre and the National Council of Roma.¹⁰³

The contribution of the NGO sector to the Roma population is significant. Since the Roma community has gained strength, a Roma intellectual elite has been formed. This has enabled a constructive means of cooperation with the institutional system and the majority population. On the community level, Roma NGOs have contributed to the opening-up and democratization of Serbian society.

103 <http://www.mrc.org.rs/ligazadekadu/>.

CHAPTER 2

Overview of Health, Social and Educational Services and Their Influence on Roma Groups

Health Care System

Legislation and strategic documents

The right to health care is guaranteed to all citizens of the Republic of Serbia by the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, regardless of national, ethnic or religious affiliation. Pursuant to Article 68 of the Constitution, children, pregnant women, mothers during maternity leave and single parents with children up to seven years of age are provided with health care from public revenue, unless they exercise it in another manner, in accordance with the law.

The area of health care is regulated by the Law on Health Care (2005) and the Law on Health Insurance (2005). The Law on Health Care defines organization and implementation of measures and activities of the Health Care System. It prescribes society's care for the health of citizens, general interest in health care, rights and obligations of patients, and of stakeholders and institutions providing health care services to citizens. Article 11 of this law defines particularly vulnerable groups within the population, these being: children up to 15 years of age; women requiring family planning; pregnant women; those giving birth and mothers during the first 12 months after delivery; unemployed people and other categories of socially disadvantaged people with monthly incomes below the legally prescribed minimum. The Law on Social Insurance (2005) regulates rights related to compulsory health insurance, organization and financing of compulsory insurance, voluntary health insurance and other important issues related to the health insurance system. The insured under this law are also people who are socially disadvantaged, as well as Roma who, due to their traditional way of life, do not have a fixed place of residence, and therefore, no residence permit for the Republic of Serbia (art. 22, where especially disadvantaged groups of population are itemized). The resources for their health insurance are taken out of the national budget.¹⁰⁴

104 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011, p. 146.

In July 2010, the Republic Institute for Health Insurance (RIHI) adopted a Rulebook on Ways and Procedures of Exercising the Right to Compulsory Health Insurance¹⁰⁵ that enables Roma people to acquire the status of insured and to exercise their right to health care services by declaring that they are of Roma nationality and registering their temporary place of residence.

The framework of health care system reform is defined in a document called Better Health for All in the Third Millennium (2003) that combines health care policy; a vision of health care in Serbia, and sets out a strategy and plan for health care system reform.¹⁰⁶ This document is of high importance, since it explicitly recognizes the connection between health status and social exclusion. Clear aims are defined for just and equal access to health care services for all citizens, especially in the domain of developing health care for vulnerable groups. As one of its priorities, the 2010–2015 Plan for Development of Health Care in the Republic of Serbia emphasizes health care for particularly vulnerable groups of citizens, such as women of reproductive age; infants and preschool children; school children and youth; disabled persons; and, socially marginalized groups. There are a number of inter-sectoral strategic documents that define measures related to improving the health of vulnerable social groups such as: the National Strategy for the Prevention of Violence and Protection of Children from Violence;¹⁰⁷ the Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for 2009 to 2019;¹⁰⁸ and the Strategy for the Promotion of the Position of Roma in Serbia;¹⁰⁹ etc.

In 2009, the Serbian Government issued a Regulation on the National Programme of Health Care for Women, Children and Youth.¹¹⁰ In Article 3, this regulation defines the health of children, youth and women during pregnancy, delivery and motherhood as one of the priorities of the health care system in Serbia. It stipulates that the care of mother and child and measures in favour of these population groups are implemented through the joint effort of the health care, education and social care sectors. The goal of this national programme is to improve health care for Roma children, children from rural areas and "street children".

In 2009, the Law on Public Health was adopted.¹¹¹ This law regulates the realization of public interest, by creating conditions for preservation and improvement of the population's health. This is achieved through comprehensive activities within society aimed at preserving the physical and mental health of the population, securing a healthy natural and working environment, prevention of its degradation and impact from risk factors which lead to health problems, illnesses and injuries. Methods and procedures, as well as conditions for the organization and implementation of public health measures are set out. The law also promotes inter-agency cooperation.

Beneficiaries in the provision of health care, institutions and relevant services

Primary health care is provided by a chosen doctor in a health care centre, who can be a physician or a specialist in general medicine, a paediatrician, a specialist in gynaecology and obstetrics, or a dentist. The focus is on promoting health and preventive care, which implies moving away from the now dominant curative approach.

105 Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No.10/2010, 18/2010 – ispr. i 46/2010.

106 The Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia.

107 Chapter 5.3 Sectoral Mechanisms for the Protection of Children from Violence, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia No.13/08.

108 Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia no.83/09.

109 Unit 8, Health Care, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia No.05/09.

110 Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia No.28 issued on April 24th, 2009.

111 Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia No.72/2009.

The Regulation on Detailed Conditions for the Performance of Health Care Services in Health Care Institutions and Other Forms of Health Services¹¹² stipulates that health care for 850 children up to 6 years of age is provided by one medical doctor, a specialist in paediatrics and one paediatric nurse/medical technician. According to data from the Serbian Public Health Institute (Dr. Milan Jovanovič-Batut, 2009) health care for children of 0 to 6 years of age was provided by 783 medical doctors. For new-borns, early childhood and preschool children, periodical physical examinations and control examinations are organized. Since 2011, paediatric examination has been performed in the home for the new-born, up to 15 days old. Physical examinations are performed on children at the age of one, three, six, nine and twelve months and at two, four and six years, in order to supervise the growth, development, and body mass and health condition of children. This procedure also allows for the diagnosis of any problems as early as possible.

During pregnancy and delivery it is envisaged that women are provided with regular medical checks (including ultrasound); professionally managed delivery in a medical institution; examinations of mother and child after the delivery; home visits before and after the delivery; laboratory checks and examinations.¹¹³

Beneficiaries and their situation

Even though the general health of the population of Serbia is getting better, two-thirds of people still die from preventable illnesses.¹¹⁴ Smoking is a major causative factor in a multitude of serious diseases. More than half the country's school children have already smoked their first cigarette before the age of 15, while a large number of adults are everyday smokers. Prolonged exposure to stress has led to increased numbers of mental health conditions and to depression.

Data from MICS 4 show that the mortality of Roma children halved over the last 5 years, but mortality rates among Roma children are still twice as high as national rates for infants, and the mortality rates measured by official statistics. The infant mortality rate is estimated at 14 per thousand (compared to 7 per thousand in the national population measured by official statistics), while the probability of dying before the fifth birthday is around 15 per thousand (compared to 8 per thousand in the national population measured by official statistics).

There is a difference between male and female probability of dying; 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.

The highest infant mortality rates (26 per thousand) and under-five mortality rates (29 per thousand) are among Roma children whose mother had no education. At the national level, 99.6 per cent of new borns were weighed at birth and 5 per cent of infants are estimated to be underweight, weighing less than 2,500 grams at birth. In the Roma population, 96.2 per cent were weighed, and 10 per cent were underweight, which is twice as high as in the general population.

112 Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No.43/06.

113 National Guide for the Protection of Pregnant Women.

114 The Batut Institute.

According to MICS 4, 14 per cent of children under five years of age in Roma settlements suffer from diarrhoea (compared to 7 per cent in the general population) and 59 per cent of all children received treatment for diarrhoea. Eighteen 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 general population), out of whom 92 per cent were taken to an appropriate health care provider (90 per cent in general population), and 91 per cent received an antibiotic treatment (82 per cent in general population).

".. trucks pass by all day long, the air is constantly filled with dust, it's unhealthy, there are no healthy children here, they have bronchitis, pneumonia, they remain healthy for a week, then get sick for a month."

(A mother, focus group, Deponija, August, 2010)

Roma women are especially exposed to health risks. Factors that influence their poor health include early marriage; young age at first delivery; enduring pregnancy without any health supervision; living in poverty; and living in extremely unhygienic environments.

Even though problems still occur with the availability of health care for Roma due to the social characteristics of this population group, deficient implementation of institutional solutions and migration of Roma population, the situation is better than it used to be.¹¹⁵ There are no major differences between the proportion of the sick that use health care services among the overall population and among the Roma population: in the total population 66.5 per cent of ill citizens use hospital services, while in the Roma population this figure is 60.8 per cent.¹¹⁶ However, compared to the total population, the Roma more frequently mention as one of the crucial reasons for their failure to visit a doctor, that health care services are too expensive for them to be adequately treated (32.9 per cent compared to 6.2 per cent in 2007¹¹⁷).

In the 2011 research on Accessibility of Health Care to Roma Women during Pregnancy and Delivery in Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,¹¹⁸ Roma women from Serbia quoted problems in health care services provision such as communication: *"The Doctor was very good... it is just that he talked too fast, so I wasn't able to understand him, but my husband understood so he explained it to me afterwards;"* discrimination: *"They weren't really good with me. They yelled at me, even cursed me when I went to ask for my child, because they saw that I was Roma, they didn't want to tell me how my child was;"* and: *"the lack of power to confront doctors, to complain about their treatment."*

115 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2010.

116 LSMS, 2007.

117 Dinkic et al., 2009.

118 Tereza Janjević et al., 2011, the research supported by Zale Global Health Initiative, Open Society Foundations, Budapest.

Monitoring of a sample of 120,708 Roma in 2009 indicated that 67.9 per cent of children/youth aged 0–18 have their own chosen doctor, while 58.98 per cent of grown-up Roma have their chosen doctor. Until the introduction of health mediators only 15.32 per cent of Roma women independently went to a gynaecologist, while now 53.06 per cent of Roma women have their gynaecologist of choice. Such an increase in gynaecological health checks is the result of the implementation of the project for the development of reproductive health, jointly implemented by the health care centres and Roma Associations.

(Ministry of Health, Dr. Saranović-Račić, 2011).

Data from MICS 4 show that 99 per cent of women aged 15–49 years with a live birth in the general population were attended to during pregnancy at least once by skilled personnel and 94 per cent at least 4 times by any provider. Also, almost all women (98 per cent) received a full antenatal diagnostic procedures package. Coverage by antenatal care of women from Roma settlements is a bit lower. Ninety five per cent were attended to at least once by skilled personnel and 72 per cent were attended to at least 4 times by any provider. Eighty nine per cent of women received the full package of antenatal diagnostic procedures. The disparity is related to the education level and wealth status of women from Roma settlements, as only half of the uneducated and 45 per cent of the poorest women had 4 or more antenatal care visits. Less than 75 per cent of women from the two categories mentioned (73 per cent) received the full package of antenatal diagnostic procedures.

Almost all women (99 per cent) both in the general population and Roma settlements deliver their babies in health facilities with the support of skilled personnel (doctor, nurse, or a midwife).¹¹⁹ Fourteen per cent of women from Roma settlements gave birth by caesarean-section (compared to 25 per cent in the general population).

Measures and programmes

The Ministry of Health has a budget line committed to improving the position of Roma, as a part of programme budgeting. Since 2006, when 60 million dinars were allocated, the allocated funds have been decreasing. However, other sources of finance have been introduced (UNICEF, FOSS, OSCE, DILS projects, etc.).¹²⁰

The Ministry of Health, through the Action Plan for the Health Care of the Roma, finances projects jointly designed and executed by the institutions of primary health care and Roma NGOs. The Ministry issues calls for project proposals, and interested parties apply. Apart from the effect that these measures have on women and children, the approach also promotes cooperation between the Roma community and health care institutions. The interventions implemented through these projects are directed towards meeting the needs of the local community. Most of the approved projects deal with the health condition of young children and of women of Roma origin. They cover different issues such as immunisation (vaccination); sexual health; prevention of non-communicable diseases; postnatal problems; Roma women's health etc.;¹²¹ and prevention of trafficking,

119 *Ibid.*

120 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011.

121 Dinkic et al. 2009, pp. 27–29.

sexual abuse and violence. The most favoured projects are those which aim to educate health workers in order to decrease discrimination against Roma.

Health for Children and Youth: Projects approved by the Ministry of Health

(according to Dikinkic et al., 2009)

- **Health of children and youth** (1,823 beneficiaries in 2006; 1,777 beneficiaries in 2007): improvement of health of children and young people; registration of children and young people in informal settlements; increase in number of children and young people maintaining hygiene regularly; reduced number of under-fed children; infant mortality rate in Roma settlements reduced by 25 per cent.
- **Reproductive health, family planning, prevention of malignant diseases** (1,607 beneficiaries in 2006; 4,308 beneficiaries in 2007): education of Roma women on the importance of reproductive health; protection from unwanted pregnancies and prevention of malignant diseases; development of programmes for Roma women of reproductive age (higher coverage by gynaecological check-ups, lab testing, hospitalization, surgeries, incentives for giving birth in hospitals); creating social cards for Roma women; reduction of discrimination against Roma women.
- **Immunisation** (416 beneficiaries in 2006. 1,367 beneficiaries in 2007): public health promotion and education of parents; increased coverage of children particularly in settlements, those who were not born in hospitals and those not attending schools; increased coverage of inoculated children; registration of children and monitoring (inoculation calendar).

Other relevant projects

The 164 projects on health development for Roma implemented through the operation of the health care institutions from 2006 to 2008 covered 41,908 Roma. A system of monitoring and evaluation of projects was established, comprising software for monitoring of indicators. In 2008, the projects were accredited to the public health care institutions in cooperation with Roma associations for the improvement of the health of waste collectors, which covers a total of 500 Roma.

Projects on hygienic and epidemiological condition assessment in Roma settlements were implemented in 2008–2009 by public health institutions in cooperation with Roma associations. A total of 876 Disinfection, Disinsection and Deratization (DDD) treatments were performed in the settlements.

(Ministry of Health, 2008)

Children and youth are one of the priorities of the Action Plan for the Health Care of Roma in the period up to 2015. One of the programmes being implemented is Health for Children and Youth (described in the box above). According to the Ministry, it is a relatively wide programme which includes primary health care services, dental checks and services, laboratory tests, and immunisation for children and youth from 0–24 years of age. Calculated effects from implementation of the programme over ten years indicated that average life expectancy would rise from 58 to 63 years, resulting in a more even demographic distribution of the Roma population. This would lead to indirect effects such as increased inclusion in society; prolonged work duration for the employed Roma; and better productivity and welfare.¹²²

In 2008, as a part of the Programme for the Improvement of Health and Health Care of the Roma, the Ministry of Health supported the introduction of female health mediators.¹²³ The health mediators work on: the development of the health of Roma, especially women and children; improved accessibility of health care services; information on health and reduction of inequality. The basic activities of the mediators are directed towards the increase in the number of: medically insured people; immunized children; physical examinations; people included in the work of advisory service and prevention centres in health care institutions; and, Roma who chose their doctors, and who have adopted healthy lifestyles. The mediators also aim to spread knowledge on: health monitoring; protection against infectious diseases; family planning; harmful effects of psycho-active substances; healthy eating habits and food preservation; personal and general hygiene; the importance of waste disposal; violence; neglect; abuse; trafficking in human beings; rights related to social and health care; and, health insurance. Health mediators work through a home visiting service. They cooperate with health care personnel and collaborators in health care centres; with social care centres; with the Republic Institute for Health Insurance (RIHI) branches; and, with local governments.¹²⁴

Within the Delivery of the Improved Local Services project (DILS project), separate components deal with the development of health for vulnerable groups. One of the activities is the education of health care personnel in 42 health care centres, implemented in accordance with the accredited programme for the reduction of discrimination. The health care centres received grants for the projects to develop Roma health.

122 *Ibid.*

123 At the beginning this project was supported by OSCE.

124 Dr. Saranović and Račić, 2010, <http://www.zdravlje.gov.rs/showpage.php?id=73>.

The results achieved by health mediators¹²⁵

In 2010, home visiting services in health care centres employed 60 Roma health mediators in 50 cities. On December 27, 2010 the number of mediators employed was 75. The data on their work so far indicate that: 9,086 Roma obtained health care cards and other personal documents; 8,238 Roma children were immunized; 2,297 pregnant women underwent health checks; 4,924 Roma women had gynaecological examination; and 14,468 Roma chose their doctor. The number of families entered into records was 36,600 (a total of 120,708 Roma); 1,333 children were enrolled in school; personal documents for 3,017 (48.48 per cent) of Roma were obtained; and material support provided to 1,360 Roma. A total of 138,106 visits to families were made, while 120,708 Roma were entered into official records. In the period from April to December 2010 alone (the Ministry of Health, UNICEF) 60,353 visits were made and 19,869 Roma and 5,784 families were entered into official records. Personal documents and health care cards were provided to 3,368 people; 4,272 of children and 494 grown-ups were immunized; 514 young mothers and pregnant women were examined; 1,589 women of reproductive age attended for physical examinations; 290 mammographies were performed; 2,306 women chose their gynaecologists; 1,391 children, 7,130 men and 8,917 women were diagnosed with some condition; 5,974 doctors were chosen; and 396 children were enrolled in primary school.

All the mediators in Serbia, with the support of donors, were issued with laptop computers including special software, and free access to internet was arranged in order to report more efficiently and communicate with institutions. Under the project "Connecting" (Ministry of Health, UNICEF and Telenor company) health mediators were provided with additional support for efficient implementation of their tasks including: mobile phones and the opportunity to communicate with each other free of charge, laptops and internet. The mediators have now entered 87,227 Roma into the electronic database (according to birth registration number, date of birth) and the data on 850 Roma settlements in 50 Serbian cities using the indicators of the World Health Organization (WHO). The Institute of Economic Sciences is currently analysing the development in the general health of the Roma population which has been attributed to health mediators.

Within the Delivery of the Improved Local Services project (DILS project), separate components deal with the development of health for vulnerable groups. One of the activities is the education of health care personnel in 42 health care centres, implemented in accordance with the accredited programme for the reduction of discrimination. The health care centres received grants for the projects to develop Roma health.

125 The Ministry of Health, Dr. Saranović-Račić, www.zdavlje.gov.rs.-showpage.php?id=

System of Social Welfare and Child Protection

Law regulations and strategic documents

The current system of social welfare and child protection is based on the Law on Social Welfare and on Social Protection (2004)¹²⁶ and the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children.¹²⁷ They define the rights to benefits (material security; caregivers allowance; child allowance; parental allowance; etc.), as well as to social services (residential care institutions, day care for children and disabled people, home help etc.). The Family Law (2005)¹²⁸ defines the rights and protection of the child, relationships in marriage and domestic partnership, and protection against domestic violence. Throughout 2009, amendments have been made to the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children. These changes define more precisely the benefits for working mothers during maternity leave, as well as the right to child allowance of the guardian and foster carer for more than the usual four-child limit.

In 2010, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy drew up a draft Law on Social Welfare¹²⁹ which provides mechanisms for extending help to the poor, through increases in transfer payments and in the number of users. This applied especially to households with many members and households with no members capable of work. Earmarked transfers have also been proposed from the Republic of Serbia's budget, for the financing of services under the authority of the local government units.¹³⁰ The mechanism of earmarked transfers is primarily directed towards the underdeveloped and poorest municipalities, which are those that do not have enough means to develop services which are normally already within their competence. In the last two years, over 120 local governments developed local plans for implementing social policy.¹³¹ The goal of the Serbia 2020 strategy is to lower the poverty rate from 17 to 14 per cent.

Participants in providing social protection, institutions and relevant services

The network of social and child protection is composed of 136 centres for social work¹³² (CSWs) and social protection institutions for residential care. According to the most recent Decision on the Network of Social Care Institutions dated 1 January 2011, the social care institutions for the placement of beneficiaries were defined as: homes/residential wards for children and youth (12); one centre for the protection of children and youth (within which 7 organizational units deal with children and youth); correctional facilities for children and youth, which take in children with behavioural problems (3); homes for children and youth with developmental problems (6);¹³³ and eight family placement centres (fostering).

Different social security rights are regulated by the Republic of Serbia, and local government can make decisions about other social security rights, except for those proscribed by this law (greater range of rights, creating their own social programmes)

126 Social Welfare and Social Security Law ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia," No.s36/91, 79/91, 33/93, 53/93, 67/93, 46/94, 48/94, 52/96, 29/01, 84/04, 101/05, 115/05).

127 Financial Support to Families with Children ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia," Nos.16/02, 115/05, which has been exercised since 1 January, 2006 and "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia," No.107/09).

128 "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia," No.18/2005.

129 This law was passed by the Government at its December session and it is expected to be passed by the Parliament in March 2011.

130 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011.

131 *Ibid.*

132 <http://www.zavodsz.gov.rs>.

133 This number varies between 4 and 6.

if financial resources have been provided in the local government. Poor families and individuals in Serbia have the right to two basic financial benefits: child allowance and material support.¹³⁴

Child allowance is an instrument of support for poor families with children. The right to child allowance can be granted to a maximum of four children in the family, on condition that they go to primary or secondary school. It has been indicated that this will change (see above). Children qualify for this right until they reach the age of 19 years (26 for children with developmental problems), if they are included in education programmes or work training. The child allowance is granted by municipal services, and disbursed from the state budget. Annual expenditures from the state budget for this purpose are low when compared to the EU countries. They amounted to only 0.3 per cent of GDP in 2009.¹³⁵

Family financial support (FFS, social welfare) is provided to citizens who, due to unemployment or temporary or permanent disability, are unable to secure a livelihood. This right is granted to individuals and families whose total monthly income is below that specified by law for the number of household members. FFS is financed from the state budget of the Republic of Serbia and generated by CSWs and to a lesser extent by local governments as a supplement to their on-going financial support. Annual expenditures for this purpose from the state budget are low when compared to the EU countries. They amount to merely 0.15 per cent of GDP.

Beneficiaries and their situation

The numbers in the adult population benefiting from the services of the centres for social work increased from 263,839 in 2008, to 279,333 in 2009. For children and adolescents, in 2009, this number was 186,600, compared to 172,381 in 2008.¹³⁶ The main characteristic of the users of the centre for social work services is financial deprivation. In the adult group, such deprivation can lead to disability, dysfunctional family relationships, and domestic violence, etc. In children and adolescents, after financial deprivation, the most common characteristics are dysfunctional family relationships, behavioural disorders, lack of parental care and developmental problems.¹³⁷

In the first eight months of 2010, FFS was used by an average of 66,664 families each month, that being 168,121 users. The number of families grew compared to the past two years, and the growth trend continued in 2010.¹³⁸ As far as child benefits are concerned, in 2010 an increase in the number of users was noticed although it was still smaller than in 2008.

In 2009, in the social security institutions there were 846 children without parental care, which is a great deal less than in 2008 (995 children).¹³⁹ At the same time, the number of children in foster care has increased. In 2009, 129 children were adopted (14 by people from abroad). This is considered a rather favourable trend.¹⁴⁰ There is no separate data on Roma children.

134 Strategy for advancement of the status of Roma people in the Republic of Serbia, 2009.

135 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011, p. 129.

136 Analysis of the work report of the centers for social work in Serbia for 2009 (report published in 2010), Social Welfare State Institute).

137 *Ibid.*

138 *Ibid.*

139 *Ibid.*

140 *Ibid.*

Since very few Roma are formally employed, only a small number are entitled to social insurance – old age and disability social pensions. In 2003, only 5.6 per cent of Roma people received an old age pension. The majority of them have been registered in the National Employment (NE) records, primarily so that they could be granted rights based on unemployment, because they belong to the category of unqualified and under-qualified workers.

A study entitled: Analysis of the Influence of the State Financial Support to the Poor¹⁴¹ defines different causes of insufficient social welfare coverage for the impoverished population. Only 10 per cent of the impoverished¹⁴² filed requests for FFS, because of their personal belief that they do not qualify and because of the complicated procedures for filing the request for FFS. According to the same study, there are significant flaws within the support system for the impoverished. The study refers to insufficient human resources and funding; lack of training; incomplete legal procedures; poor motivation for quality of work and so on. Another reason for the lack of support lies within the social workers' dispositions, i.e. within their discretionary powers over the assessment of missed earnings: a certain number of socially disadvantaged people are being rejected with the explanation that they are young, healthy and capable of earning their living if they wanted to do so.¹⁴³

Although FFS is the main form of social welfare received by socially vulnerable people there is no data referring specifically to the Roma population, neither to the number of Roma recipients of FFS or child benefits, nor to the measures and programmes focused on the Roma population.

Employment

Law, regulations and strategic documents

In May, 2009 two crucial laws were passed; the Law on Employment and Insurance in Case of Unemployment¹⁴⁴ and the Law on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities.¹⁴⁵ The National Action Plan for Employment (NAPE) is focused on active employment policies with emphasis on the categories of people who are difficult to employ and for whom the employment need is a priority.

Participants in providing employment services, institutions and relevant services

The NE functions through decentralized offices in 34 subsidiaries in the bigger cities and 141 branch offices throughout the Republic of Serbia.

Beneficiaries and their situation

The greater part of the past decade, with the exception of 2009, has been marked by relatively high economic growth and a permanent decline in the employment rate. From October 2008 to April 2010, the cumulative decline of gross product was 4.7 per cent, and employment rate fell by 12.6 per cent, i.e. every eighth job was lost. The

141 Matković and Mijatović, 2009.

142 According to the Living Standards Measurement Survey, 2007.

143 Matković and Mijatović, 2009, pp. 45–46.

144 Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No.36/09.

145 Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No.36/09.

unemployment rate has now reached the lowest point in decades.¹⁴⁶ An especially sensitive group on the labour market is that of unemployed Roma people. The position of Roma on the labour market is characterized by a high unemployment rate and low participation and employment rate. The National Employment Service (NES) records registered 13,731 Roma people, which represents 1.9 per cent of the total number of unemployed people registered in NES. According to Ministry of Health data from December 2010, out of the sample of 120,708 Roma, there were 71,740 Roma older than 19 of which 79.57 per cent were unemployed.¹⁴⁷

Measures and programmes

In relation to Decade of Roma Inclusion (DRI), the Strategy for the Improvement of the Position of Roma in the Republic of Serbia has been adopted, and the measures and activities in the area of employment taken into account upon creation of the NAPE for 2009, 2010 and 2011.

Most important measures¹⁴⁸

- Within the measures and activities for carrying out the Strategy for Improving the Position of Roma in the Republic of Serbia, in the employment area and in order to formalize the work-related legal status of Roma people, a new profession will be introduced, that of "secondary raw material collector" in the unique nomenclature of professions, which the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia carries out in accordance with international standards.
- For the purpose of encouraging employment of Roma people, in 2010, NES made special public calls for granting subsidies for self-employment as well as subsidies to employers for employing Roma. Both subsidies are disbursed as a lump sum of 160,000 Dinars. By October 31st 2010, subsidies for self-employment had been granted to 117 Roma, of which 38 were women. By granting subsidies to employers, 66 Roma people were employed, of which 30 were women. In 2010, there was increased interest by Roma people for inclusion in the measures of the active employment policy. Therefore, in the NES information system, from 1 January to 31 October 2010, there were 22,160 cases of uptake of some of the measures of the active employment policy.
- Public works programmes contributed to a positive change. Priority was given to projects which included Roma people in greater numbers, as well as to programmes proposed by Roma NGOs. In 2010, the organization of 355 public works projects was approved; of which 21 referred to the Roma population. Roma also participated in other public works, so that the total number of employed Roma people has increased to 487 people. In 2009, a total of 360 Roma were involved in public works.

146 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011, p. 84.

147 Dr. Saranović Račić, The Ministry of Health, March 2011.

148 *Ibid.*

Housing

Law, regulations and strategic documents

According to the Law on Housing (1992), the State shall solve residential problems of socially disadvantaged people. This is regulated by units of local self-government, and it primarily refers to providing residential care for the socially disadvantaged. However, local governments usually do not have sufficient resources to meet the residential needs of socially disadvantaged people on their own.

The Law on Social Housing (2009) defines social residence as “residence of appropriate standard administered with state support...to households that are not able to afford an apartment according to market standards based on social, economic or other grounds.” The criteria for the right to solve residential problems are determined according to: residential status; income; health condition; disability; number of household members; and assets. Additional criteria include belonging to a sensitive group affiliation. A National Strategy for Social Housing is currently being developed and subordinate legislation has also been provided by law.¹⁴⁹

Additional articles and an amendment to the Law on Refugees (2010) propose that the residential problems of refugees should be solved. Planned measures refer to the allotment of state property, appropriation of means for improving residential conditions and, the purchase of farmhouses to provide refugees with subsidized housing.

Current situation

According to data provided by the Household Budget Survey (HBS), in 2009, almost 40 per cent of families with six or more members¹⁵⁰ had less than 10m² of space per member of the household, and 30.5 per cent of these households had more than two people per room. Applying EU indicators of residential deprivation, slightly more than a half (51.1 per cent) of households below the poverty line have a toilet, 54.3 per cent of households have a bathroom within the apartment, and 57.7 per cent have a separate kitchen, compared to 90 per cent of the rest of the population who have these facilities.¹⁵¹

Since the majority of the Roma population live below the poverty line, it can be concluded that there is also a significant difference in residential conditions between Roma people and the general population. As previously described, the majority of Roma people lives in settlements, (70 per cent of which do not have an official residence and planning status, and around 44 per cent of which have the characteristics of unsanitary settlements and slums). The infrastructure of the settlements is usually inadequate, as is their access to institutions. Around 30 per cent do not have a water supply system, more than 60 per cent do not have a sewage system, and 35 per cent do not have electricity. For almost 50 per cent of the settlements the nearest school is more than 1 km away, as are health institutions for around 60 per cent of the settlements, and shops for almost 80 per cent of the settlements. Roma people seem to constitute a group exposed to greater risk in the process of returning to Serbia, based on the Re-admission Agreement, and upon arrival in Serbia, they usually end up in unsanitary settlements.¹⁵² Research by the NGO Group 484 indicates that deported people return to Serbia with no property, and no

149 *Ibid.*

150 Household Budget Survey, 2009.

151 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011.

152 *Ibid.*

secured accommodation or documents. They also face major obstacles while trying to find jobs and in securing their health and social entitlements.

Measures and programmes

To provide a strong factual basis for the preparation of the National Strategy for Social Housing, in early 2010, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning undertook the Elements for National Social Residence Strategy study.¹⁵³ The study underlines poverty and accommodation risks as the main criteria for gaining the right of social residence. Based on these criteria, social residence programmes should be dealt with in the first phase, and be aimed at recipients of the FFS and those needing child benefits who do not have an apartment, or who have a housing problem.¹⁵⁴

Actions, measures and outcomes – expected and unexpected¹⁵⁵

In accordance with Guidance for Improvement and Legalization of Informal Roma Settlements (2007), the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning and the Roma National Strategy Secretariat, started a town-planning scheme in 2008, for informal Roma settlements. Currently, plans are being made in eight municipalities for ten settlements.

Eight cities in Serbia have created local residential strategies and action plans within which measures and actions were proposed for solving the residential problems of Roma people, refugees and displaced persons. The poorest people are granted subsidies for payment of electricity and rent.

Using a specific programme, the city of Belgrade started to build apartments in 2003, of which 237 were allotted for a certain period of time to socially disadvantaged people. An open competition is in progress for another 80 apartments, and there are plans to build another 399. However, priority is given to those with the most years of employment and those who are employed in the more important positions, which automatically excludes the majority of Roma people. The Minority Rights Centre¹⁵⁶ prepared an initiative to evaluate the legal and constitutional basis of the City of Belgrade's decision to allot apartments to socially disadvantaged citizens. According to their opinion, the proposed criteria do not accord with the Constitution of Serbia, nor with the Discrimination Prohibition Law and the Social Housing Law, because the years of employment and "the importance of the position" do not present criteria for determining social and residential needs, nor are they prescribed by the Social Housing Law.

153 Government work report for 2009 – the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning.

154 *Ibid.*

155 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011.

156 <http://www.mrc.org.rs/>.

The Education System

Laws, regulations and strategic documents

The inclusion of children with developmental disabilities and children from marginalized groups is sanctioned by the Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System (2009)¹⁵⁷ (LOFES). This law introduces a series of regulations which promote inclusive education. All children have equal rights to education, without discrimination or the segregation of those from marginalized or sensitive social groups, or with developmental problems. (The law uses the terms “children and pupils with developmental problems and disabilities” and “children and pupils from socially sensitive groups”). The law extends the duration of the obligatory and free Preparatory Preschool Programme (PPP) from six to nine months. Results and standards of education have been introduced (except for preschool instruction and education)¹⁵⁸ and greater competencies for teaching staff and managerial structures have been prescribed. The role of students’ parliaments has been strengthened through their participation in the processes of self-evaluation and developmental planning, and the role of the parents’ council in school has been defined more clearly. Procedures for monitoring and protecting the rights of the child and the pupil have been strengthened. The school’s socialization role has also been strengthened through clear regulations on non-discrimination and the prohibition of violence, abuse and negligence.¹⁵⁹

LOFES contains new regulations by which a fairer enrolment policy will be practiced, which has specific implications for Roma children. All children must be enrolled in line with the regulations, and testing is carried out after enrolment. Testing can be done in the child’s mother tongue, using a translator. The school is obliged to provide an individual education plan for every child who has need of one. A special Serbian language programme has been introduced, for pupils of national minorities who do not speak the language in which classes are normally held. One especially important innovation is the possibility for the school to employ a temporary teaching assistant. The task of such a person would be to provide help and additional support for children in accordance with their specific needs, as well as to the teachers, instructors and expert associates, in order to improve the additional educational support by the school for these children.¹⁶⁰

The Law on Textbooks and Other Teaching Materials¹⁶¹ was also passed in 2009, and this law equalized the business conditions of the State with those of private publishers. The law proposed standards for the quality of school books and, in terms of their content, it prohibited discrimination on grounds of race; nationality; ethnicity; language; religious or political affiliation; gender; developmental problems; disability; physical and psychological traits; health; age; social and cultural background; property; and many other aspects. School books are in Serbian, as well as in national minority languages.¹⁶²

The Law on Preschool Education (LPE) was passed in March 2010. This law gives priority to children from sensitive groups, and allows for specialized alternative programmes. The programmes can be carried out in Serbian and foreign languages as well as in the languages of national minorities. The obligatory PPP is established as a separate part of the preschool programme, so as to provide children in their pre-school year, with the

157 LOFES, 2009.

158 Quality standards and self-evaluation system are currently being made.

159 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011.

160 LOFES, 2009, op. cit.

161 Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No.72/09.

162 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011, p. 102.

ability to gain the knowledge, skills and experiences needed for their further education and instruction. (see Chapter 3)

Two very important byelaws which support the employment of the LOFES are the Code of Practice for Determining Rights to an Individual Educational Plan, its application and evaluation and, the Code of Practice for the Work of the Commission, for the assessment of the needs for providing additional educational, health and social support to children and pupils who, because of being socially disadvantaged, or having developmental problems, disabilities, difficulties in studying or for other reasons, need additional support in education, health care or social security. Additional support refers to the rights and services that help the child to overcome physical and social obstacles towards unhindered performance of everyday activities significant for inclusion in the educational process, to life in community and to ensure successful progress. In accordance with this Code of Practice, the municipality should establish committees and name coordinators and permanent expert members.¹⁶³

The National Education Council (NEC) has generally adopted the directions of development for education in Serbia and the national education indicators. The Serbia 2020 Strategy defines Serbia's goals for education.

Structure of the education system

The Republic of Serbia has a network of 159 preschool institutions, 1,264 elementary schools,¹⁶⁴ 569 secondary schools and fourteen higher education institutions. Private educational institutions also exist: 5 universities, 54 kindergartens, 4 elementary and 21 accredited secondary schools.

The system of education in Serbia comprises four levels. Pre-primary education is for children aged 6 months to 6.5 years, and the obligatory period of the PPP is for children aged 5.5 to 6.5 years. Primary education is mandatory for a period of eight years for 6.5–14 year olds (up to 16 in the case of grade repetition). It is divided into two educational cycles as follows: grades 1 to 4 (mainly with one teacher), and grades 5 to 8 (courses and subjects with different teachers). Secondary education is provided through a four-year general secondary education (gymnasium) and two types of vocational schools: four-year courses for both university and employment tracks, and three-year vocational schools that lead exclusively to employment. Tertiary education is provided by higher education institutions, such as universities (including art colleges), academies of applied sciences and vocational education colleges.¹⁶⁵

In addition to the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), which is responsible for overall education policy, there are also bodies established by the Government of Serbia, such as the Institute for Advancement of Education and the Institute for Education Assessment. The National Education Council (NEC), the body elected by National Assembly for the period of 6 years, is the most important body for defining strategic guidelines and documents for improvement and development of education on all levels (from preschool to University level).

Members include the most prominent experts in the field of education and are often representatives of professional education associations, national minorities, religions

163 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011.

164 These numbers vary depending on the way the data were gathered. In 2009/2010 there were 2,364 schools, but a school can sometime comprise a number of buildings.

165 <http://www.mp.gov.rs/page.php?page=78>.

etc. The MES has departments related to different levels of education and assistant/ deputy ministers for each of them. Additional departments are the: Department for Education Development; International Education Cooperation; Department of Finance; and, the recently established Department for European Integrations (focusing on IPA¹⁶⁶ projects). The MES also has 18 Regional School Departments,¹⁶⁷ and each municipality has offices that cover issues in relation to education. In the central office of the MES, there is one employee/advisor of Roma origin, but each regional office also has one person working on issues relating to the education of Roma (it is one of the tasks in their job description).

The assessment and advancement of service quality is carried out as a self-evaluation and an external evaluation. By conducting self-evaluation, the institute assesses the quality of the education and instruction programme, its administration, professional improvement and development, and the working conditions and the levels of satisfaction of children and parents. Self-evaluation includes the participation of professional staff, the parents' council, director and employees. Separate fields undergo yearly self-evaluation, while the self-evaluation of the overall work is conducted once in five years. The report on the results is submitted by the director to the teachers' council, parents' council and managerial bodies. External evaluation is conducted by the Ministry, and also by the Institute for Evaluation of Education Quality, through the monitoring of professional standards and teaching methods. Inspection and monitoring¹⁶⁸ of education institutions is conducted by the Ministry. Municipal or city governments are responsible for the inspection. The Ministry of Education and Science performs the duty of municipal or city educational inspection, unless inspection and monitoring are organized within the unit of a local self-government.

The inspection and monitoring duties are performed by the inspector of education who is in charge of, among other things, the control over: enforcing the law and regulations on the protection of children's rights; the rights of pupils and their parents or carers; the rights of employees; realizing the rights and obligations of the employees, pupils and their parents or carers; providing protection for children, pupils and employees from discrimination, violence, abuse, neglect and party-related organizations and influences within the institution; and, the records kept by the institution. Inspection is carried out as regular, non-regular and control monitoring. A regular inspection of the institution is carried out at least once a year.

Professional and pedagogical monitoring is conducted by educational counsellors. The duties of the educational counsellor include being in charge of evaluating the quality of the institution's work, based on the set standards; the implementation of the developmental plan and the programme of education and instruction; providing help and support to the institutional self-evaluation; monitoring the application of general principles and the accomplishments of the education and instruction objectives; counselling and providing professional help to school and preschool teachers, expert associates and directors (for the purpose of improving the quality of their work and the work of the institution and meeting the achievement standards); and, counselling and providing professional help to the institution as regards the protection of children, pupils and employees from discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect within the institution. For the purposes of providing professional counselling help for school and preschool teachers and expert associates, and in order to secure higher quality education and instruction,

166 Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance i.e. the financial instrument for the EU pre-accession process for the period 2007–2013.

167 <http://www.mp.gov.rs>.

168 <http://www.mp.gov.rs/propisi/propis.php?id=19>.

the Ministry decides on a list of counsellors (i.e. external collaborators), the choice of which is made by the Minister.

The inspector of education, the educational counsellor and the counsellor are required to have a university degree, to have published professional papers (in international or national journals), authorized textbooks, handbooks or any other teaching resource. They are obliged to undergo continual professional improvement in order to be able to support and advance the work of those employed in educational institutions.

The development of the standards of professional competences for educational counsellors' is currently underway, together with those for inspectors of education dealing with the improvement of Roma education, the protection of children from discrimination and the prevention of segregated education. Two programmes have been created and implemented: the Support Plan and Training for Employees in School Management and Primary Schools and, the Support and Consulting for Employees in School Management. Both training programmes were focused on identifying the major obstacles to successful inclusion of the Roma children in PPP, on parents' motivation and on the development of plans for gradual inclusion of Roma children into existing preschool groups.¹⁶⁹

Beneficiaries and their situation

The number of children with preschool education and instruction increased in the previous period, 2009/2010, to 41.36 per cent.¹⁷⁰ The rate of total coverage increased due to the compulsory PPP one year before enrolling in primary school. The rate of coverage for children younger than 3 (15.03 per cent), 3 year-olds (34.80 per cent) and 4 year-olds (39.38 per cent) is quite low.¹⁷¹ The coverage of children attending the PPP in the school year 2009/2010 was 87.82 per cent (according to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 69,378 children). The number of children covered by primary education is on the decline, due to the fall in birth rate (approximately 12 per cent between the school years 2002/2003 to 2008/2009). During the same period, the number of Roma children increased by 14.5 per cent. Coverage by primary education for 7 year olds was 98.5 per cent in 2008/2009, while the rate of finishing primary school was over 99 per cent in the last three years.¹⁷² Table 2 shows the data on the coverage of children in the general population, compared to Roma children, by the type of preschool education and instruction, and the coverage by and completion of primary and secondary education.¹⁷³

169 <http://www.inkluzija.gov.rs/?p=4183>.

170 Statistical Office of RS, 2010.

171 Ivić, Pesikan, and Jankov, 2010.

172 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011.

173 Baucal and Stojanović, 2010, p. 76.

Table 2: Comparison of Coverage by education level of children and pupils in the general population compared to those from the Roma population.

	Children and pupils in general population	Children and pupils in general population	Roma children and pupils	Roma children and pupils
	Coverage	Number and rate of pupils finishing on time	Coverage	Number and rate of pupils finishing on time
Kindergartens (3–5 y/o)	38.1 per cent (2008)	Not applicable	No data	
Preparatory Preschool Programme	83 per cent – 99.6 per cent (2007/08)		45 per cent (2008)	No data
Primary school (total number of pupils from 1 st to 8 th grade)	598,108 290,660 (girls) (2008)	95.3 per cent 95.9 per cent (girls) (2006)	16,311	21 per cent – 37 per cent (2006)
Secondary school	79.8 per cent (2008)	99 per cent (2006)	15–20 per cent (2009)	6.2 per cent of 8.3 per cent enrolled* (2006)

Source; Baucal, Stojanović, 2010.

* which makes up 75.2 per cent of those who enrolled in secondary school.

There is a trend of improvement. Data indicate that the number of Roma children in the education system is on the rise. In the school year 2008/2009, PPP covered approximately 3,000 Roma children, while in 2010/2011, 38 per cent of primary schools in Serbia (463 schools) enrolled 31,417 children in 1st grade. Out of the total number of the enrolled children, the number of Roma children is 2,136 (7.41 per cent). The rate of the Roma children enrolled in 1st grade increased when compared to the last school year by approximately 9.87per cent.¹⁷⁴

According to data from the Ministry of Health, gathered on a sample of 120,708 Roma, out of the total of 24,241 school age children 21.95 per cent are not, or not fully, included in the education system. For children up to 10 years old, the figure is 2,365 (21.48 per cent).¹⁷⁵

Some 7.4 per cent of the pupils in a generation leave their regular primary schooling prematurely.¹⁷⁶ These are primarily children from the marginalized groups (Roma), and they either continue their education in schools for education of adults, or they do not continue their education at all. The highest rate of leaving is from 1st to 3rd grade (2.5 per cent) and during 7th and 8th grade (2.1 per cent).

According to the latest data provided in MICS 4, 91 per cent of Roma children were enrolled in primary education (92 per cent in urban and 89 per cent in rural areas). Net-intake rate¹⁷⁷ among children from Roma settlements is 91 per cent with lower rates among children whose mothers have no education (85 per cent) and the poorest

174 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011.

175 Dr. Saranović-Račić, the Ministry of Health, 2011.

176 According to the data of the Ministry of Education and Science (2010).

177 Net-intake in primary education is an indicator that measures number of children of school-entry age that entered the first grade of primary school in relation to the total number of children of school-entry age.

(76 per cent). School attendance in Serbia is as high as 99 per cent with lower attendance (96 per cent) among the poorest children. Primary school attendance ratio is lower for children from Roma settlements (88 per cent). Among them, attendance is lower for girls than for boys (86 and 90 per cent respectively) and decreases with age, especially for girls as they reach 14 years of age (66 per cent). Lower attendance is also correlated with wealth status (73 per cent among the poorest Roma girls) and level of mother's education (72 per cent of girls whose mothers had no education).

One of the indicators in MICS 4, "survival rate to last grade of primary school," is the proportion of children entering the first grade of primary school who eventually reach the 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).

The 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).

"...No differences in socio-demographic or professional characteristics are noticed between the teachers working with Roma children and those who don't, yet Roma children achieve markedly inferior results – so, the very same teacher offers different quality of tutoring to Roma and to non-Roma children!"

(Aleksandar Baucal, 2006)

As far as quality of education is concerned, the international comparative research of PISA and TIMSS undertaken in 2003 and in 2006 show that Serbian pupils obtained approximately 60–70 points less in mathematics and sciences than the average value for the pupils from the OECD countries, while in reading literacy they were lagging behind by as much as 100 points.¹⁷⁸

The testing in 2009 showed better results: in reading literacy, the number of functionally illiterate children decreased, with average results approximately 40 points higher than the 2006 results. According to the latest data, Roma children scored much lower in PISA testing: 87.5 per cent of Roma children did not achieve their age-level of functional mathematical literacy (42.6 per cent in general population); 90.7 per cent of Roma pupils did not achieve their age-level of functional reading literacy (51.7 per cent in general population); and 81.5 per cent of Roma pupils did not achieve the level of functional scientific literacy (38.5 per cent in general population).¹⁷⁹

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Available information on educational achievements of Roma students in Serbia, also points to their significantly lower school success compared to the majority.¹⁸⁰ During the one-off national testing of third grade primary school pupils (national testing) with a representative sample of schools (5,000 pupils in 113 schools), data on school grades

178 *Guide on the Law on the Fundamentals of Education and Instruction System*, 2009.

179 EU MAP Baucal, Stojanović, 2010, p. 79.

180 Baucal, 2005.

were collected for Roma and non-Roma pupils in mathematics and in the Serbian language. There is a significant difference in school achievements in these two subjects between Roma and non-Roma pupils. At the end of the school year, most Roma pupils had the lowest passing grade (2), while only 5–10 per cent of Roma pupils had an excellent mark (5), as opposed to more than 40 per cent of non-Roma pupils who received this mark during the first three grades for both subjects. Between 7 and 11 per cent of Roma pupils received an unsatisfactory mark (1) in Serbian language at the end of the school year and 10–14 per cent of Roma pupils received an unsatisfactory mark in mathematics, while less than 1 per cent of non-Roma pupils received unsatisfactory marks at the end of the school year.

Furthermore, standardized test results of the Roma pupils during the national testing show that after three years of education, 50 per cent of them failed to acquire even the basic knowledge of elementary terms in mathematics and were not capable of applying mathematical knowledge in simple situations. This was the situation in only 11 per cent of cases at the national level. 56 of Roma children failed to acquire the basic knowledge and skills in Serbian language, compared to only 14 per cent of cases at the national level. According to certain interpretations, this means that Roma pupils are lagging behind other pupils by 2.2 school years in maths, and by 2.6 school years in the Serbian language, after spending an average of three years in primary school.¹⁸¹

"You're a teacher or something, you have to commit yourself. This should only be your extra drive to teach 'em, what did you study for? But they just don't care what'll become of gipsy children, will they know how to write their name. He's already in 4th grade and he can't write his own name."

(A mother, focus group in Barajevo, June, 2010)

Such poor achievement by Roma pupils may be directly attributable to teachers' attitudes towards them and to different kinds of often implicit discrimination. Namely, teachers have low expectations of Roma children and thus they invest less effort in working with them (they check their homework less frequently, they rarely help them learn, rarely come to where Roma children are sitting in classes, etc.). Teachers perceive Roma pupils to be uninterested and poorly motivated to learn, thus unintentionally admitting to their personal failure in fulfilling one of their important professional roles – the role of motivator.¹⁸² The data from national testing of grade 3 students also showed that more than 40 per cent of Roma children are in classes with the lowest quality of teaching, while only 20 per cent of non-Roma children are in these classes. Participants in focus groups quoted the same problems and they believed them to be the main reason for the Roma children's poor success in school, and also the cause of these children leaving school.

181 *Ibid.*

182 Macura-Milovanović, 2006.

"I never saw his teacher showing him something in the books, not even a letter in his books or notebooks. The teacher never helped him with anything."

(A mother, focus group, Barajevo, June, 2010)

Special Education

Among the most important laws that protect children with developmental problems and disabilities are: the Law against Discrimination of Handicapped Persons (2007); the LOFES (2009); the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination (2009); and the LPE (2010). The Law on Textbooks and other Teaching Materials¹⁸³ defines the right of a pupil with disability or developmental problems to have a textbook whose format suits his/her educational needs. Based on the functional model of inclusive education, the Roadmap for Implementation of Inclusive Education was designed and the Ministry of Education and Science formed a Coordination Team and an Implementation Team for inclusive education to be implemented by all the structures, and at all levels, of the decision making process. The Regulation on the Entitlement to IEP, its Implementation and Assessment¹⁸⁴ was adopted, as well as the Regulation on Additional Educational, Health and Social Support to Child and Pupil (2010). Training on implementing inclusive education and individual education plans was given to 7,500 representatives of the expert teams for inclusive education and to all primary and secondary schools in Serbia.

Also now adopted is the Regulation on the Operation of the Committee for the Assessment of Needs for Additional Educational, Health and Social Support to Child and Pupil¹⁸⁵ in need of additional support in these fields due to social deprivation, developmental problems, disability, learning difficulty or other reasons. Additional support assumes the rights and services that enable the child to overcome physical and social barriers to the smooth performance of everyday activities relevant for their inclusion in the education process, in life in the community, and for their successful progress. In accordance with this Regulation, municipal and city governments should establish committees, and appoint Coordinators and professionals as permanent members. A Guide for the Operation of the Committees¹⁸⁶ and a Guide for Parents whose Child Needs Additional Support, have been completed and training for municipal committee members was organized for early 2011.

It is important also to note the Regulation on Detailed Conditions for the Performance of Health Care Services in Health Care Institutions and Other Forms of Health Services,¹⁸⁷ issued by the Ministry of Health, since it is essential for early diagnosis and identification of children in need of additional support. The regulation decrees that, if a municipality has at least 8,500 preschool children, then a developmental counselling service may be organized there, with the following staff members: one doctor, a specialist in paediatrics and one senior nurse/technician, together with a psychologist, a special education therapist (defectologist), a social worker and a teaching professional. Developmental Counselling Services often cooperate with

183 Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No.72/09.

184 Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No.76/10.

185 Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No.63/10.

186 The Guide for operation of intergovernmental committees for the assessment of needs related to additional educational, health and social support to children and pupils, (2010).

187 Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No.43/06.

preschool and primary school institutions in order to provide support to children, families and education professionals.

According to the new LPE preschool children with developmental problems and disability can obtain their right to preschool education in an instruction group; in an instruction group with additional support and individual instruction-education plan; and/or, in an instruction group based on individual instruction-education plans. An instruction group may not include more than two children with developmental problems, and the number of children prescribed as a norm has been decreased by 3.

A preschool institution which has enrolled a child with developmental problems and disability may identify the need for provision of additional educational, health or social support. Subsequently its request is sent to a chosen doctor in a health care centre, then to the intergovernmental committee, in order for the type and scope of the support to be assessed. Children with disabilities can be transferred from developmental to an instruction group, based on the monitoring of the child and when proposed by a pedagogical council and by a professional team for inclusive education. The LPE prescribes that the carers of children without parental care, and parents of children with developmental problems and disability, are exempt from paying a part of the costs associated with the child's stay in the kindergarten.

Before the adoption of LOFES, children of primary school age with developmental problems and disability were mainly educated in special schools – a particular type of school for the education of pupils with mental, physical and/or sensory impairments. These schools are concentrated in big towns and their capacities are limited, thus being unavailable to a considerable number of children with developmental problems. Special schools are most numerous in Belgrade and its vicinity (there are 16 of them). Another 51 special schools are distributed across 33 towns in Serbia, and some of these schools have accommodation or boarding facilities, so that children with developmental problems from rural and remote places are able to attend them.¹⁸⁸

Data on the number of Roma children in developmental groups in preschool institutions is unavailable, but the latest data on enrolment of Roma students in special schools¹⁸⁹ shows that out of the total number of students attending these schools in 2002/2003, Roma pupils constituted 26.7 per cent; while in 2008/2009 this rate rose to 31 per cent. This indicates over-representation of Roma children in this type of educational facility and is evidence of a type of segregation. In addition, 63 per cent of Roma parents think that their children would get a better education in the mainstream system and are aware of the negative influence of special education on their child's future, and 55 per cent considered that it would be easier to get employment if they finish "regular school".¹⁹⁰ However, despite these perceptions, Roma parents often opt for a special school because of certain benefits, but primarily because their children are safe, protected and happy, and they have increased chances of finishing their education there.¹⁹¹

188 Inclusive education: Roadmap, National Report Serbia, 2008.

189 Research: "Roma Children in Special Education System in Serbia, overrepresentation, low achievements and influence on life" (2010) Open Society Institute and Fund for an Open Society, Serbia.

190 *Ibid.*

191 *Ibid.*

“Children start going to school, they attend it for a while, then they 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 they don’t want to go anymore, they simply refuse to go, so their parents transfer them to a special school, where they also get benefits.”

(A health mediator, Novi Sad, June, 2010)

“It is easier for teachers in schools to say (about Roma children), that they don’t know anything and need to be sent to a special school. Teachers force them to go there, because it’s easier for them to say that they don’t know anything. Teachers should make an effort to try to teach those kids something, because they have the same brain as Serbian kids, or Bosnian, or Croatian, or any other kids. Nationality doesn’t have anything to do with it, they should try harder. If the mother tries, then try it yourself as a teacher, put extra effort into working with that kid. It seems that only rich and faculty kids (children of parents with university degrees) can go to regular school. It’s not the same with them, and with those that don’t know a single letter, where’s that teacher, that psychologist of hers.”

(A mother, focus group, Barajevo, June, 2010)

The decision for a child to attend a special school is, however, not really the “free choice of their parents,” but largely a consequence of teachers’ behaviour towards the child and the family, by frequent repeating of the same grade and the neglect of children in regular schools.

Segregation in education does not exist on the level of legislative documents or the strategic approach. As the main reasons for segregation, the schools state that Roma children are enrolled when the classes are already formed, that Roma children do not speak the language they are educated in, that they are older than other children and that the resistance of the non-Roma parents is fierce, so that the “white children” leave school.¹⁹² Segregation is practiced through the enrolment of Roma children into special schools, as well as in schools for the education of adults. A great number of Roma attend schools for adult education, although many of them are younger than 15, which means that they should be educated in regular schools.

Official data indicate that Roma make-up 75–80 per cent of the pupils in schools for adult education, and UNICEF also emphasises this problem. The Children’s Roma Centre states in their report that Roma make-up as much as 90 per cent of the total number of pupils in schools for adult education. Research by the Child Rights Centre and Save the Children indicates that, in three schools for adult education in the school year 2005/2006 Roma made-up 98 per cent of the total number of pupils. According to that research, 66 per cent

192 Minority Rights Centre, in EU MAP, 2007.

of the pupils finishing at those schools in 2004/2005 were Roma.¹⁹³ The data on segregated kindergartens and schools, and of the number of children in them, does not exist. There are data on the existence of preschool groups in special schools, but not on the number of children in them.

Data covering the period from 2008 to mid-2010¹⁹⁴ shows a rise in the number of children with developmental problems and disabilities enrolled in regular schools. First grade enrolment included 1,570 (5.44 per cent) children with developmental problems and disabilities; 258 (0.82 per cent) children with disability, and 1,312 (4.62 per cent) children with developmental problems (intellectual and communication problems). When compared to the previous school year, the number of such children enrolled in regular schools increased by approximately 6.57 per cent.

However, data on increased enrolment of Roma children in regular schools does not necessarily imply that the number in special schools has fallen, just as there is no guarantee that the practice of transferring children from regular to special schools would not endure in some way. In the last three school years, only 81 pupils from 21 special schools were transferred to regular schools, 31 of them being Roma pupils (referred from 10 special schools into regular schools). Four Roma pupils were transferred from the special classes into the regular ones (in three primary schools).¹⁹⁵

The Rapid Assessment of Implementation of Inclusive Education in Serbia¹⁹⁶ identified obstacles to the implementation of inclusive education, as well as risks and problems emerging in the course of implementation that require intervention by various actors. The major problems are: lack of appropriate information provided to key actors in the implementation process; pressing capacity building needs generated by the new regulations; a burning need for external professional support generated by the new regulations; low awareness of the major stakeholders (especially the parents of children without any special educational needs); inappropriate allocation of social allowances and benefits; weak local coordination causing weak local problem-solving capacity; insufficient investment in accessibility; uncertainty about the post-primary progression of children with special educational needs; and, over-regulation hampering co-operation and professional support.

As far as conditions for monitoring of the implementation process are concerned, they are missing. The two major shortcomings in this respect are: (i) insufficient capacity of the Regional School Administrations for monitoring; and (ii) the lack of reliable information provided either by the statistical system or by the education information system, which would allow for the use of hard evidence (indicators).

The same report states that one of the most alarming problems encountered is the sporadic discriminatory use of Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) on Roma children. Due to the lack of sufficient quality assurance, the external monitoring and signalling system applies double standards widely (i.e. lower standards for Roma children), which are easily institutionalized under the umbrella of “individualization” within the special education needs (SEN) inclusion provisions. For example, there are schools where the number of IEPs approved is identical to the number of Roma children. There are

193 Research on Roma children in special education in Serbia – over-representation, low achievements, influence on life (2010), Istraživanje Romska deca u specijalnom obrazovanju u Srbiji – prezastupljenost, niskapostignuća, uticaj na život (2010), Open Society Institute and Fund for an Open Society, Serbia.

194 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011.

195 Istraživanje Romska deca u specijalnom obrazovanju u Srbiji – prezastupljenost, niska postignuća, uticaj na život“ (2010), Institut za otvoreno društvo i Fond za otvoreno društvo Srbija., str. 13.

196 Rado, 2010, the Report made for the benefit of UNICEF, in print.

signs suggesting that IEPs could become instruments for institutionalized segregation of Roma children within the schools. The expectations for the potential role of Roma teacher assistants, Roma mentors and coordinators in preventing the misuse of IEPs, are rather unrealistic.¹⁹⁷

Measures and programmes¹⁹⁸

At present in Serbia, all relevant projects, programmes, measures and activities in the domain of education are being implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, or with its support.

An extremely important measure is the introduction of the free of charge PPP.

The **Preparatory Preschool Programme** lasts for nine months. The so-called 'zero grade' aims to secure an equal (or more equal) starting point for children from marginalized or deprived groups and environments at the beginning of their schooling, and to increase access to high quality education. For Roma children, it should help to overcome the language barrier, to increase enrolment in the first grade of primary school and to decrease enrolment in special schools. The programme is financed from the state budget, and in 2009/2010 approximately €215,000 were allocated for its implementation. Roma NGOs are involved in informing Roma parents about the programme. The greatest problems in implementing this measure are: insufficient capacity of preschool institutions to provide services to all children; lack of data on number of children who attend the programme; and, instances of obtaining certificates for primary school enrolment for some children who did not attend PPP. According to the data of the Serbian Ministry of Education and Science, Roma children who attended yearly PPP have shown better results for maturity in school testing and better adaptation to the school environment.¹⁹⁹ The city of Belgrade provides free English language teaching for all children in PPP.

74,000 free textbooks were distributed to first grade pupils in 2009/2010, and 74,305 sets to second grade pupils. The city of Belgrade distributes sets of textbooks to fifth grade pupils on their territory. Even though research indicates that provision of free textbooks has some positive effect on the poorest pupils, the poor pupils of other grades are not covered by this practice.

(The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in RS, 2010)

Free textbooks are provided as a support measure for the first and second grade pupils and their families, but there are no specially defined additional measures aimed at Roma

197 Rado, 2010, the Report made for the benefit of UNICEF, in print.

198 This section gives only the current projects, measures and programmes. On projects and programmes that gave good results, but were finished before the writing of this report see the following publications: "Indicators of Equal Accessibility of Quality Education," EU MAP 2010, and "Roma Children in the Special Education System in Serbia," OSI and FOSS 2010.

199 Baucał, Stojanović, 2010, pp. 193–194.

children or extremely poor children. A great number of activities were implemented as a part of the Common Action Plan for Roma Education.

The Guidebook for Supporting the Development of Anti-discriminatory Culture in Educational Institutions was developed, and staff are being trained for its implementation;

Prevention activities and procedures in dealing with violence were established in accordance with the *Special Protocol for the Protection of Students from Violence, Abuse and Neglect* and schools have been obliged to implement these since 2009;

A programme was developed for the children of Roma returnees to learn the Serbian language;

Grants are being received by 40 poor municipalities with a large number of Roma, to provide for systematic inclusion of Roma children in the education system;

A model was developed for the late registration of births as a part of a UNICEF project undertaken in 19 municipalities, where some 500 children identified to be without documents were enrolled in schools.

(The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction, 2010)

Programmes of affirmative action are being implemented to increase the availability of all levels of education to Roma children and youth. The LPE prescribes that children from marginalized and minority groups should be prioritized in preschool institution enrolment, while the Ministry recommends to all preschool institutions, when planning the number of children they take in, to make a projection that allows for the representation of Roma children. Where secondary and tertiary education is concerned, the affirmative action programme provides the basis for the National Council of the Roma National Minority, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science and the Department for Human and Minority Rights, to organize the enrolment of Roma students in secondary and tertiary education institutions. The affirmative action programme for the enrolment of Roma candidates in higher education institutions is implemented by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and the Roma National Strategy Secretariat, which send the Ministry of Education and Science a list of Roma candidates who have passed the qualifying exam, but who have not qualified for the list of government funded students. The latter Ministry sends decisions on the financing of Roma students to all the faculties and universities in Serbia, founded by the Republic.²⁰⁰ From 2003 to 2009 everything progressed well with the affirmative action programme, starting with 42 students in 2003 and reaching 200 students in 2008/2009.

200 <http://www.cpes.org.rs>.

In the period from 2003 to 2009, due to affirmative measures, 902 Roma pupils enrolled in secondary schools, while the number of Roma students that have enrolled in faculties since 2003 is lower than 500. This is proportionally a very small number, when compared to the number of enrolled children belonging to the general population, but it is still a huge step forward from the situation prior to the measures being implemented. In 2008/2009, the Ministry of Education and Science provided scholarships for successful Roma students, 117 of them attending high schools and 182 attending faculties.

However, problems occurred in 2010, and 2011 when 100 Roma students lost their scholarships, and some of the candidates were removed from the National Council's list, on the basis that they were not Roma. According to the Chairman of the National Council, the affirmative action totally failed.²⁰¹

In February 2011, the campaign: All off to School, Future for All, will commence.

The All off to School, Future for All campaign is organized in partnership with the Association of Teachers of the Republic of Serbia (ATRS), the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP) and the Centre for Education Policies (CEP), with the support of FOSS, and in cooperation with the team from the Provision of the Improved Services Locally – DILS project of the Ministry of Education and Science.

The campaign aims at the achievement of a high quality inclusive culture and practice for all boys and girls in Serbia through: developing awareness amongst professionals and the general public on the importance of inclusion; and, supporting all participants in the education process and through the implementation of the Law on the Fundamentals of the Education and Instruction System adopted in 2009.

In the course of the campaign, 100 panel discussions will be organized throughout Serbia, on quality educational and instructional practices harmonized with the principles of Education for All, with simultaneous media campaigns organized on the national and local levels, publication of a number of articles written by experts on the topic of inclusive education and production of 4,000 CDs for kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools.

Probably the most significant project being implemented in Serbia at the moment is the Provision of Improved Services Locally (DILS) which has the general aim of strengthening the capacity of institutions locally to provide a uniform quality of accessible services with an emphasis on the needs of vulnerable groups. The project is financed through a World Bank loan, with participation by the Ministries of Education, Health and Labour and Social Policy. All of the ministries involved have their own defined goals and grant schemes for the provision of services, tailored to the needs of beneficiaries and the stimulation of inter-governmental cooperation. Within DILS, in addition to the grant model for inclusion, there is a grant model for the integration of Roma, for which the Roma Education Fund

201 The *Politika* newspaper, 02.02.2011.

has created grant schemes to create the enabling conditions for implementation of new educational and anti-discriminatory policies. These grant schemes take into account the potential influence of the provisions in the new law on the development of education for the Roma in Serbia.²⁰²

Programme: Educational Inclusion of the Roma: The aim is to secure high quality education for all Roma children. The project covers seven different fields: the total coverage of Roma children; equal quality of education; prevention of leaving school; avoidance of segregation; solving of discrimination problems; introduction of the Romani language in the system of education; and, creation of local action plans for establishing conditions for optimal integration of Roma children into the education and instruction system. After signing an agreement between the DILS/REF project, the Ministry of Education and Science and 28 municipal mentors, by December 2010, 58 of the poorest municipalities in Serbia gained access to municipal mentors, as support to the process of developing educational inclusion for the Roma population.

Programme: Securing Healthy and Safe Environments for Children and Youth in Serbia – MES and UNICEF: The aim is easier access to education by creating an environment in which children would enrol in school, where they would receive high quality education in accordance with their needs and abilities, and would stay within the system.

Programme: Strengthening Schools for Inclusive Education: The aim is to develop the capacities of educational and instructional institutions to implement inclusive education, through a targeted training programme and the opportunity to apply for funding, i.e. grants for project proposals. The Ministry of Education and Science established the **Support Network for Teachers and Schools** (in school boards) to put inclusion into practice. This network includes school staff; experts from the Institute for the Improvement of Education and Teaching; the Office for Evaluation of Quality; and NGOs. The **Team for the Support to Regional Teams** was also established and consists of experts in the fields of: education of children with disabilities; education of Roma children; and, preparation of schools for working with children with different educational needs. There are now 231 schools that have been included, of which 162 began operation in September 2010.

Programme: Testing the Inclusion Programme in 25 Partner Institutions in Serbia: This programme will develop a service pack for training on capacity development in inclusive education. Out of 25 partner institutions selected in Serbia there are **7 preschool institutions, 15 primary schools and 3 secondary schools.**

Two projects financed by IPA funds are highly significant for Roma inclusion. The first, Education for All – Promoting Accessibility and Quality of Education for the Children of Marginalized Groups, was initiated in 2010 and will last until 2012; the other, the Promotion of Preschool Education in Serbia (IMPRES), began in 2011, and is elaborated in Chapter 3.

202 *The Development of Education for the Roma in Serbia, Assessment of the Situation in the Country and the Strategic Guidelines of the Roma Education Fund, REF, 2010.*

Within the project: Education for All – Promoting Accessibility and Quality of Education for Children from Marginalized Groups (which has a total budget of 1.8 million Euros from the EU IPA 2008 funds), the Ministry of Education and Science will further advance national policies related to inclusion and accessibility of high quality education to children from marginalized groups. It will do this by further developing a scheme originally established in an OSCE project.²⁰³ The aim is for teaching assistants to work in preschool institutions and primary schools. The second part of the project is dedicated to professional improvement of teachers and educators, through the organization of professional training and seminars. This initiative will enable them to address the demanding work of taking care of those children who require an inclusive approach to their needs. Besides developing individual education plans, instructors and teachers will develop models of cooperation with teaching assistants, to assist in achieving the most efficient working approaches and means, through the exchange of knowledge and experience. Instructors and teachers will also be supported in achieving better communication with parents and more successful cooperation with the local community. Bearing in mind that the activities in preschool institutions and primary schools are only the beginning of the full inclusion of marginalized children within the education system, and society in general, support for this project should be secured through cooperation with local communities and the DILS project in order to ensure the project's longer-term sustainability. In this way, some resource shortfalls and current social problems could be overcome, since exclusion of children from the education system is influenced considerably by such problems.²⁰⁴

Under this project, pedagogical assistants were employed in 49 preschool institutions and 126 primary schools. Their task is to help kindergartens and schools to create an inclusive environment and to enrich the ways and content of their work, and adapt them to children's needs. They also provide direct support to children and their families. For the time being, all the assistants are of Roma nationality. Initial training of the assistants has been completed and negotiations are underway on designing a module for formalizing the training requirements and on the choice of institutions to deliver it. A Rulebook on the Teaching Assistants' Operation was developed, and an internet site where examples of good practice can be found. In 2011, the financing of teaching assistants should be provided for within government budgets. School staff, representatives of the Ministry of education institutions, and of the NGO sector have assessed the introduction of teaching assistants to be the most efficient measure, not only for increasing the accessibility of education for Roma children and increasing the number of children who enrol and stay in the education system, but also for changing the attitude of educational institutions towards the parents and Roma community in general.

(Baucal, Stojanović, 2010)

203 In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Science started with the introduction of Roma pedagogic assistants to the primary schools in Serbia in cooperation with the OSCE and with professional aid of CIP – Centre for Interactive Pedagogy. You can find more on this subject in a publication of MES, EU, OSCE and CIP named "Roma Pedagogic Assistants as Agents of Change, 2010.

204 Info-book on Development Programmes.

In spring 2010, a number of large international organizations in Serbia such as REF, UNICEF and OSCE, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, initiated a campaign for the promotion of Roma children's enrolment in PPP and the first grade of primary school.²⁰⁵

The network of Regional school departments and other agencies joined the campaign, focusing on enrolment procedures (schools and kindergartens, health care centres, social work centres). The general aim of this international consortium is to make PPP services accessible to all Roma children in Serbia. REF and their partners work on the improved level of implementation of the new policies and regulations locally, in order to secure the availability of PPP to all children and to properly inform the Roma community of the new education regulations, as well as the Discrimination Prohibition Law.

Big international organizations invest considerable and, largely coordinated, efforts in Serbia to support the Ministry of Education and Science and other relevant ministries in implementing laws and strategies. Simultaneously, they provide unflagging support to the NGO sector in the monitoring of the present situation and creation of fresh solutions.

In 2010, Serbia continued its focus on implementing the Roma National Strategy with significant support from the **OSCE Mission**. The Roma Teaching Assistant²⁰⁶ pilot programme was successfully completed, and the position of a Teaching Assistant within the Serbian educational system was formally recognized under the 2010 Law on the Fundamentals of Education and Teaching. As a result, the Ministry of Education and Science will consider Teaching Assistants to be regular school staff as of January 2011. Serbia also expanded its system of Roma Health Mediators and began to consider the formalization of their positions within the Ministry of Health. State and local authorities continued their efforts towards the legalization of informal Roma settlements, utilizing a guide developed by the Mission to support authorities in becoming more efficient when addressing the questions of legalization.

The **Roma Education Fund** (REF) is very active in Serbia and puts a lot of emphasis on supporting the measurement of MES and on cooperation between influential international agencies, as well as with Governmental bodies. The most successful projects supported by REF in Serbia are: Creating models and standards for teaching and learning the Serbian language as a second language; Solutions for the future, which promotes inclusion and participation of Roma parents in school bodies (School councils, Parents councils etc.); Incorporating topics of Roma culture and tradition in regular primary school curriculum; Increasing access to preschool education for Roma children; Introducing innovative interdisciplinary educational and mentoring programmes for Roma students; and Inclusion of Roma students in secondary schooling in Vojvodina. The biggest REF programme is that providing financial and mentoring support to four generations of Roma secondary school students. During 2010 REF used new methodology in creating projects on Roma inclusion as a part of the DILS project –

continued on p. 82

205 <http://www.inkluzija.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Peti-bilten-o-socijalnom-ukljucivanju.pdf>.

206 Most of Roma Teaching Assistants are now pedagogical assistants.

introducing Roma coordinators at the level of Municipalities. More recently, REF started a new initiative in Serbia targeting displaced Roma from the Gazela settlement in Belgrade. In this project a Roma NGO and the Belgrade School Department are developing a model for an educational system more suitable for children coming from marginalized and deprived communities.

The Fund for an Open Society Serbia (FOSS) is currently focused on activities related to the achievement of equal access to high quality education for Roma. In this context, and in cooperation with the **Pestalozzi Foundation**, they implement a joint project named Equal Chances in Secondary Education, which has lasted for several years now, and which is aimed at developing a minimal educational intervention model for Roma pupils and, which contributes to the capacity of schools for inclusive education, and to improve the learning skills of Roma pupils for successful schooling. The Fund also undertakes, independently or in cooperation with other organizations, a number of research projects, which deal with the analysis of sensitive issues around Roma education, such as: the policy of enrolment in the first grade of primary school; schooling of Roma children in schools for children with disabilities; effects of implementing measures of affirmative action; and, indicators of equal accessibility to high quality education by Roma children. The focus of action for FOSS is also on monitoring and advocating for the fulfilment of the objectives of the DRI, through the activities of the League for the Decade. FOSS promotes, supports and participates in all campaigns for inclusive education.

UNICEF supports the Ministry of Education and Science in Serbia, as well as local authorities and professionals, through capacity building to ensure that the basic learning needs and potential of all children are met and sustained, so that they can improve their lives and transform their society. As part of the National Plan of Action, UNICEF supports the Government of Serbia and the Ministry of Education and Science in setting up policies with an integrative approach, in line with international standards and commitments to ensure equal access to quality education for all children. By establishing linkages between formal and non-formal education and awareness-raising campaigns, UNICEF promotes the equal right of all children to education and contributes to the development of national capacity to understand and respect children's rights. To support Roma education and social integration, a pilot programme including preparatory and catch-up classes in Development Education Centres was established in 9 municipalities in Serbia. UNICEF is preparing a comprehensive regional study in 2011 on the social exclusion of children, and plans to support Roma women's networks on education and parental involvement.

The Role of Local Governments

Local governments have executive authority (e.g. they institute the network of preschool institutions and primary schools and participate in managerial bodies of education institutions) yet they are not involved in the assessment of quality, relevance or equity; and they do not participate in the decision making process at the national level (e.g. they do not have representatives on the National Education Council). The data relevant to the planning of education at the local level are not forwarded to local governments. The whole field of preschool education, except for the wages of the educators that implement PPP, is under the authority of local governments. Primary and secondary education is also under the authority of the local governments. Local government is responsible for on-going maintenance costs and equipment provision for the institutions founded by the local governments, within their budget for capital investment, transport and professional training. Local government is also responsible for the enrolment and regular attendance of children in the PPP, including monitoring of enrolment in first grade; the regular attendance of classes; the procedure for the enrolment of children with developmental challenges and disabilities; record-keeping on the number of illiterates, people with incomplete education and children with disabilities, etc.

Since 2010, local governments have been able to apply for active employment measures at the national level, if they manage to secure half of the required funds from their own budget. The scope for cooperation between local governments and the NES is huge, especially in the creation of joint projects for employment; assessing local needs and characteristics; designing local action plans for employment; and in information exchange. However, there is still not enough cooperation between local governments and NES.

For provision of social care, local governments are authorized and responsible for constructing, equipping and modernizing social work centres, of which they are founders. Local governments are also responsible for the additional social work services in social work centres, as well as for the programmes of social care development.

Local governments have the right to establish health care centres, pharmacies, institutions for primary health care and hospital centres. Constructing, equipping and maintaining, as well as provision of medical and non-medical material and equipment, are also under the authority of local governments. Local governments are also authorized to monitor the health of citizens and the operation of the health-care service at the local level; to advocate for public health; implement measures for the advancement and protection of health; create the conditions for accessible, uniform primary health care; plan and execute programmes for preservation and protection of environmental health; testing food, drinking water, etc.

The joint on-going projects of a large number of civil society organizations are implemented in cooperation with state authorities, local governments and institutions in the field of development and protection of human rights and freedoms, and in the creation of a democratic, open and inclusive society. They are supported also by international organizations and foreign governments, as well as by international and foreign foundations.

CHAPTER 3

Education System for Children at an Early Age and the Situation of Roma Children

General Data about Children at an Early Age Including Roma Children

According to estimates from official statistics,²⁰⁷ there are 509,559 children aged 0–6 years in Serbia, which is 7 per cent of the total population. As shown in Table 2, the percentage of Roma children aged 0 to 6 years, in the general population, was 3.6 per cent in 2008, according to official estimates and 11.6 per cent according to unofficial estimates.²⁰⁸

Table 3. Percentage of Roma children in general population by age²⁰⁹

Age	General population	Female	Roma population	
0 to 3	213,986	103,624	8,061	<i>26,078</i>
3 to 6	292,201	141,898	10,424	<i>33,720</i>
6 years	74,772	36,408	2,525	<i>8,168</i>

Source: Baucal, Stojanović, 2010, p. 245.

Preschool Education and Its Organization within the Reducation System

Law and regulations

When LOFES was adopted in 2009, preschool education became part of an integral and unique education system for preschool, elementary and secondary education. Compulsory education begins at the age of 6.5 years and ends at the age of 15.²¹⁰

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

208 These differences are explained in detail in chapter 1.

209 The numbers in italics show the estimated number of Roma children based on the premise that there are 350,000 Roma who live in Serbia, that is, based on the premise that every year, 1.5 per cent more Roma children are born than the year before.

210 Education Gazette, 2010.

The Law on Preschool Education (2010) defines the objectives of preschool as support to: full development and well-being of the child of preschool age; providing conditions and encouragement to broaden their capacities, expand their experiences and build up knowledge about themselves, others and the world; the family's child-rearing function; further education and social inclusion; and, the development of a child's potential as a precondition for further development of society and its progress.

The principles of preschool education are:

- **Availability** – equal rights and availability of all forms of PE, without discrimination or separation.
- **Democracy** – respecting the needs and rights of children and families, including the right to an opinion, active participation, decision making and assuming of responsibility.
- **Openness** – building of relations with families, schools, community and local self-management.
- **Authenticity** – overall approach to children, acknowledgment of development specificities, differences, respect for cultural diversity.
- **Development** – development of various forms and programmes in accordance with the needs of children and families and the opportunities in the local community, improvement through value and self-evaluation and openness to teaching innovations.²¹¹

The new LPE has important positive implications for preschool education (PE) of Roma children, as well as for all children who come from marginalized and sensitive groups. New solutions proposed by this law support the perpetuation of the tendency to increase the number of preschool institutions and to rationalize the network, in order to provide as many children as possible with preschool education and to improve the efficiency and quality of education for children of preschool age. This law has transformed the uniform centralized system of preschool education into a decentralized, more diversified system, which will better suit the needs of different children.

This law governs: the use of language – Serbian is the main language for teaching, but, for minority children, it is possible to organize classes in their own first language if more than 50 per cent of parents agree (Article 3); non-discrimination, prohibition of neglect and violence against children (Article 5);²¹² enrolment policy, in the sense that children who come from marginalized groups have priority (Articles 13 and 14); individualization and an individualized approach – children have the right to supplementary aid and support, especially children who come from marginalized families, children with special needs, hospitalized children etc. (Article 16),²¹³ as well as the right to an individual education plan (Article 34)²¹⁴ and hiring of pedagogical assistants (Article 46). For the purpose of diversifying provision in preschool institutions (PI) and providing more children from sensitive groups with PE, the new law proposes the introduction of specialized and

211 Education Gazette, 2010.

212 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).

213 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 and Science, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

214 Determined by Rulebook "Detailed Instruction for Determining the Rights to Individual Education Plan, its Implementation and Assessment" Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 22 October, 2010.

special programmes adapted to the needs of children, parents and local communities (Article 18, Section 1). These programmes may include those which: encourage minority language and culture; provide support to families; provide recreation etc. (Article 19). In the case of children living in distant regions, where PI capacities are limited or non-existent, the law proposes programmes of “travelling kindergartens” and hiring a “travelling preschool teacher” (Article 21).

Preschool institutions

Preschool institutions (PI) are organized at municipal and city level, but only Belgrade has more than one preschool institution.²¹⁵ Each preschool institution has a central building and facilities within the territory of the municipality covered by the preschool institution. The programmes are carried out in these buildings. In Serbia, there is a network of 171 preschool institutions²¹⁶ established by local self-governments, and 47²¹⁷ private preschool institutions.²¹⁸ PE is carried out in 192 elementary schools where PPP is usually organized.²¹⁹

Unfortunately, the geographical distribution of preschool institutions is unfavourable. They tend to be concentrated in cities, which presents a problem for increasing national coverage of children at an early age, as well as for implementing the concept of compulsory PPP. Thus the location of facilities directly compromises access to education for children who come from sensitive groups, whose communities are mostly outside the cities, and for children from rural areas in general. Another problem is the fact that education statistics do not take into account the distance between the child’s place of residence and the preschool institution.²²⁰ Neither do they take into account the condition of buildings, infrastructure (water, electricity, heating, Internet) and equipment in preschool institution.²²¹ In earlier studies,²²² the conditions in the institutions, their equipment and the distance from the beneficiaries, have been cited as aspects of additional deprivation for already deprived groups.

The PI develop their plans and programmes with respect to these facts: data about the institution and its surroundings; and defined types of services and programmes for children and their duration (hours per day, days in a week, forms of cooperation with the family, the ways of accomplishing principles, educational and teaching goals, as well as ways of monitoring of the work of the PI and the plan for self-assessment).

The PIs are financed from the level of LSG (see chapter 3.12). From its budget, the Republic of Serbia only finances the activities of the PIs for accomplishing PPP and implementing the preschool programme for children with developmental problems, and hospitalized children. Children without parental care, children with developmental difficulties and children who come from financially constrained families are exempt from payment of the full price per child (parents pay 20 per cent of the full price, and the remainder is paid from the budget of the local self-government unit). The local self-government unit budgets also pay for transporting children and kindergarten staff to the facility, where PPP is implemented, if their residence is more than 2 km away.²²³

215 Belgrade has more than one preschool institution (16 because it is constituted of 16 municipalities).

216 Tijana Glušica, savetnik: Ministarstvo prosvete i nauke, Sektor za predškolsko i osnovno obrazovanje i vaspitanje – Group for preschool education – Analysis of territorial coverage by preschool institutions and coverage of children with special focus on children from vulnerable groups in 2010–2012 school year, Belgrade May 2011.

217 *Ibid.*

218 It is considered that there are many more of them, but that they are not reported and properly registered.

219 Information MP – IPA IMPRES project.

220 MICS 2011 will also contain data about distance from preschool institution, but expressed in minutes and type of vehicle.

221 Ivić, Pesikan and Jankov, 2010, p. 22.

222 EU MAP, 2007.

223 Education Gazette, 2010.

Beneficiaries and programmes

PE covers children from the age of 6 months to 6.5 years. The compulsory part of PE is the PPP, the year before school starts, when children are 5.5 to 6.5 years old. Preschool institutions are multifunctional and provide nutrition, care, health and social protection as well as education for children of preschool age.

Children aged 6 months to 3 years attend crèche and they are taught by nurses (with a preschool teacher specialization). Children aged 3 to 5.5 years attend kindergarten and kindergarten teachers work with them. PPP can be organized either in kindergartens or in schools, and both preschool teachers and primary school teachers can work with the children (although preschool teachers are preferred according to recommendations). The new LPE has brought a change as it states that children up to 2 years of age are to be taken care of by nurses, and children of 2 to 3 years of age by preschool teachers and nurses.

Groups are most often organized by age, although the law proposes the existence of mixed groups where there can be children of 3 to 6.5/7 years of age. The total number of kindergarten groups in the Republic of Serbia is 8,744, with 1,641 groups for children under 3 years old and 7,103 for children over 3 years-of-age.²²⁴ The number of children enrolled in a kindergarten group varies according to age, characteristics of the children, conditions of work and the programme to be implemented.

Table 4. Age of children and the normal child-staff ratio

Age of children	Number of children per group – per staff member
6 months to 1 year-old	7
1 to 2 years-old	12
2 to 3 years-old	16
3 to 4 years-old	20
4 years-old to school age	24
PPP	26
Hospitalized children	15
Developmental groups	4–6
Mixed groups	Depending on the age span, from 12–16 children
Bilingual groups (mixed languages)	10 per cent less than the proscribed norm

In the majority of cases, the norm for the child to staff ratio is not achieved, due to the limited capacities of preschool institutions on the one hand, and the growing needs of parents on the other. Preschool institutions enrol more children than proscribed, approximately 4.5 per cent more.²²⁵ This makes it harder for nurses and preschool teachers to do their job and it affects the quality of the programme, and in a large number of cases, the safety of children.

In preschool institutions there are programmes of different duration: full-day (9 to 12 hours a day, five days a week), half-day (4 or 6 hours a day, five days a week), half-day

224 Ivić, Pešikan, and Jankov, 2010.

225 *Ibid.*

(6 hours a day, three days a week), as well as programmes that last more than a day (longer than 24 hours, sometimes five days a week). Preschool institutions define and organise the operating scheme they want, and parents are given the chance to choose from this range of services. Half of the preschool institutions in Serbia are active 5 hours a day (51 per cent); 14.6 per cent work 5–8 hours a day; and one third works more than 8 hours a day (34 per cent). Three quarters (76 per cent) of children in Serbia, who are involved in programmes of different lengths, spend more than 5 hours a day in a preschool institution.

Children are enrolled in preschool institutions at the request of their parents. Where the PI has limited capacity to enrol children, various criteria are used and special committees choose which children to enrol. Although the newly introduced LPE envisaged that children from minority and marginalized groups would be prioritized by preschool institutions, the old practices are still present, and so it is mainly the children of employed parents who are enrolled.²²⁶

As has already been mentioned, children in preschool institutions are mainly taken care of by teachers and nurses specialized in child care. In daily programmes, two nurses, and two teachers work in each group in two shifts. Defectologists (specially trained teachers) work with groups of children with developmental challenges. The work of teachers, nurses and defectologists is supported by a professional service, which includes (depending on the number of groups in the PI) psychologists and teachers of physical education, music and art. Nurses and nutritionists look after children's health, while social protection is the responsibility of social workers. In this way, a basis is established for securing comprehensive services for children and their families, in the areas of health, social protection and education. As a rule, and in the best interests of children and their families, experts should cooperate with elementary schools, health care centres, and social welfare centres.

PE is provided in accordance with the General Fundamentals of the Preschool Education Programme, adopted by the National Education Council of the Republic of Serbia in accordance with the LPE. The programme fundamentals serve as a basis for the creation and development of the educational system at the preschool level – the nursery schools, kindergartens and preparation groups in preschools and primary schools, along with the creation and development of specialized programmes. Also specified in the fundamentals are the criteria for monitoring and assessing the quality of the teaching and the education in general, and for improving the institution's standards. Programme fundamentals contain the General Fundamentals of Care and Up-bringing, for working with children from the age of 6 months to 3 years, and from the age of three until the age necessary for entering PPP. The Bases of the Preparatory Preschool Programme are also included in the programme fundamentals document. The General Fundamentals of Preschool Education and Up-bringing and the Bases of the PPP are quite special, since they have been developed into two models – Model A and Model B that, in some respect, appear to be two different programmes. Model A is regarded as open, whereas Model B is a more cognitively structured, developmental programme.

PPP is also a part of the Rulebook on General Fundamentals of Preschool Programme. PPP is mandatory for children from 5.5 years of age until they enrol in school. All children from the territory of Serbia should be involved in this mandatory and free-of-charge programme, 4 hours a day, at least 9 months before the beginning of primary education, either as a half- or full-day activity. PPP should contribute to the programmatic and organizational connection between the preschool and the primary school educational

226 *Ibid.*

system, and it specifies the mutual responsibility of the teachers of the two systems. The objectives of the PPP are to secure conditions for the development of a child's potential and all aspects of its personality, to encourage curiosity; creative abilities; creativity; logical perception; and the acquisition of skills, values and experiences necessary for further education and development.²²⁷ The compensatory function of PPP is of great importance, but in the document, it is neither specified nor operationalized. On the contrary, some parts of the programme (introduction to mathematics, literacy, or introduction of certain school material) can cause a huge problem for children from environments of socio-cultural deprivation, when, for the first time, they get acquainted with an educational institution, when they enrol in PPP.²²⁸

Education and professional development of nurses and preschool teachers

The number of qualified preschool teachers in the Republic of Serbia is 11,087 (in Central Serbia, 7,828; in Vojvodina 3,259) and the number of nurse-preschool teachers is 3314.²²⁹ The educational structure of kindergarten teachers is good, as 96 per cent of them are qualified according to the national standards (EFA 2008, Teaching staff in preschool and primary education), which assume tertiary education up to ISCED level 5A, which is similar to that of many other European countries. The vast majority of employees in kindergartens are women, especially as preschool teachers (98 per cent) and nurse-preschool teachers (99.85 per cent).²³⁰

Nurses are educated at medical colleges in the department for child care and teaching. The subjects they have to pass cover medicine, pedagogy and psychology. In the senior year of high school, they undertake practical experience in PI and paediatric departments of hospitals.

Upon the completion of high school and the passing of the entrance exam, preschool teachers are educated in senior vocational schools (2 or 3 years, with the possibility of finishing with a fourth year of specialized vocational studies), and Faculties (3 years of graduate studies and an additional two years of master studies). Usually all students who apply get the chance to study, either on a regular basis, or in the form of part time studies, as the number of people interested is quite small. It therefore appears that there is no selection process whatsoever.

Education of preschool nurses and teachers is seen as providing general, theoretical knowledge. It involves little instruction on how to put this knowledge into practice and provides little opportunity to actually acquire knowledge, skills, or practical experience, in working with children who need additional education support. Many institutions for higher education have limited capacity to teach subjects dealing with inclusion, multiculturalism or inter-culturalism. They do very little on children from minority and underprivileged social groups, or specific issues in working with them and their families. Teachers are educated as if schools were mono-ethnic institutions with a uniform population of children and their parents. Although some changes do suggest progress and the development of a more inclusive discourse in the curricula of various institutions of higher education, these changes are still insufficient for comprehensive and adequate preparation for inclusive education.²³¹

227 Education Gazette, 2010.

228 Ivić and Pešikan, 2009, p. 9.

229 Annual report, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2010.

230 Ivić, Pešikan, and Jankov, 2010.

231 There are exceptions to this trend, as in the case of the Faculty for Teachers in Novi Sad, which offers three-year graduate studies for education of teachers in preschool institutions. The goal of the school is preparation of teachers who are reflective and practical, devoted to education of all children in the multi-ethnic and multicultural

All employees at preschool institutions are obliged to obtain a licence (work licence)²³² and to undertake on-going professional development. For professional development, the law envisages that all employees in the education sector attend at least 100 hours of professional development programmes in each five-year period. This professional development is accredited through a project proposals procedure organized by the national Institute for Educational Development. Approved programmes are published in a catalogue. The analysis of these catalogues in the last three school years has shown a slight increase in the number of programmes in areas related to work with children needing special support in education and children from minority and marginalized groups. However, the number of relevant programmes is still insufficient, and because these topics appear as a part of INSET and not of initial trainings, they seem like “additional” activities, rather than the core contents and methods of work that should be an integral part of everyday educational practice. INSET programmes offer little when it comes to additional training in establishing the cooperation and greater participation of Roma parents. The INSET programme catalogue for the 2009/2010 school year contains 840 professional development programmes. Having analysed the programme contents (goals and topics), we perceived a practically negligible number concerned with the topic of cooperation with parents and support for teachers working with children up to 3 years of age (5 programmes, or 0.006 per cent);²³³ support for teachers to work in PPP²³⁴ (7 programmes or 0.008 per cent); or work with Roma children (7 programmes, 3 of them being developed exclusively for preschool teachers²³⁵).

Other problems are the lack of authentic, intrinsic motivation for attending INSET programmes, and the lack of outside evaluation and supervision, which means there is no obligation to put the acquired knowledge into practice.²³⁶

Preschool Education in Serbia

In the Republic of Serbia, in 2009–2010, 41.36 per cent of children (39.09 per cent in Central Serbia, 47.65 per cent in Vojvodina)²³⁷ were covered by PE. The percentage for 3 year-old children was 34.80 per cent, while the coverage of 4 year-olds was 39.83 per cent.²³⁸

world, trained to critically approach problems in the educational system they work in (<http://www.vsov.rs>). Special characteristics of these schools, connected with its general multicultural approach, is that it includes the mother tongue in its curriculum, which can be Serbian, Hungarian, Russian and Slovakian, depending on the students' nationality. There are even 13 Roma students who go to this school, as a result of affirmative policy measures.

232 Half of the process of gaining the license includes familiarity with the laws and regulations in the area of education. The license can be taken away, if rules of conduct are not respected.

233 Programmes named: Encouraging Children's Self-respect through Cooperative Communication, Individualism-Response to the Needs and Possibilities of Children at Preschool Institutions, The Parents' Influence on the Encouragement of Speech Process among Children of Nursery Age, Nursery – A Place to Live and Develop, Start from the Beginning- Development of Stimulating Environment for Learning among Children up to 3 year-olds.

234 Programmes named: Training for Teachers Who Need to Teach Children How to Write, School Preparation, From Choice to Use of Workbooks, School in Sight – Serbian language in the preschool period, Methodology of Accomplishing PPP, How to Encourage the Sense for Language among children at preschool level, during the Preparation for Learning to Read, PPP Teacher Training.

235 Programmes named: Neither Black nor White – Development of inclusive Educational Strategies – Sensitization for the Needs of Children and Families from Minority or Marginalized Groups: Neither Black nor White – Programme for Children and Youth – Steps in Overcoming Prejudices, Gaining Tolerance and Enhancing Interculturalism, Teacher and Roma Assistants Training for work with Roma Children, Roma Children and School, Teaching Practice in Work with Roma Children, School of Romalogy: Roma People through Time.

236 Macura-Milovanović, Gera, Kovačević, 2010.

237 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2010.

238 Ivić, Pesikan, and Jankov, 2010.

There is some data available, although not so reliable, on the coverage of children with developmental challenges. The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia states that, of the number of children they have registered with developmental challenges, who are in preschool institutions (Table 5), 1.21 per cent attend regular kindergartens. As the number of children with developmental challenges in the population is usually larger than registered (by about 5 per cent), it is likely that a large number of children from this category is not covered by PE.²³⁹

Table 5: The number of children with disabilities and developmental problems covered by Preschool Education²⁴⁰

	Total		Up to 3 years		3 to 7 years	
	Total	Girls	Total	Girls	Total	Girls
The Republic of Serbia	2,228	825	99	33	2,129	792
Central Serbia	1,514	579	73	25	1,441	554
Vojvodina	714	246	26	8	688	238

There is no official data on the number of children with disabilities in Serbia²⁴¹ – the estimates range between two to ten per cent, i.e. 30,000 to 150,000. However, the entire system of social welfare provides services to 198,428 children of whom 13,648 are children with disabilities.

The situation is even more alarming in relation to data on Roma children in the PE System. Reliable data on the coverage of Roma children from 0–3 years of age or from 3–5.5 years does not exist. According to the study *Education against Poverty: Analysis of the Effect of Introducing a Preschool Preparation Programme in Serbia*,²⁴² there is a huge discrepancy in data from various reports and research on the percentage of Roma children in PE from 3–5 years. The only certainty is that the current coverage of Roma children is extremely low, i.e. between 4 per cent and 7 per cent.²⁴³ It is essential to point out that even these figures are probably over-estimations, as they often include services or projects provided by the NGO sector.²⁴⁴

As can be seen from Table 6 below, the coverage of children in the general population with PPP in 2007 was twice as high as that for Roma children (Baucal and Stojanović, 2010²⁴⁵).

239 Ivić, Pesikan, Jankov, 2010.

240 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2010.

241 Suzana Paunović, assistant Minister in Sector for Social Care (2011).

242 Pešikan, Ivić, 2009.

243 For instance, according to data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey-MICS, 4 per cent of Roma children 3–5 years old were included. According to the study “Roma and Education” (2003), 7 per cent of Roma children were included (Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma in Serbia, 2007, according to the study Needs Assessment (2004) among the children up to 6 y/o, 1.3 per cent to 2.6 per cent of Roma children attended NGO programmes; according to the project “Network of Supervisors of Roma Children’s Rights,” 2.9 per cent to 4.86 per cent of Roma children were included in regular school preparation programmes (Dejanović and Pejaković, 2006, based on Pesikan and Ivić, 2009).

244 EU MAP, 2007.

245 Baucal and Stojanović, 2010, p. 247.

Table 6. The coverage of the general population and Roma children with preschool services

Year	Age	Coverage of all Children (per cent)	Coverage of Roma children (per cent)
2002	0–3	9	M
2002	3–5	35	8
2002	PPP	51	M
2005	3–5	33.6	3.9
2008	3–5	38.1	M
2007/08	PPP	83 (LS 2007)	45 (LS 2007)
		99.6 (MES 2007/09)	

The latest results from MICS 4 show that in 2010, 44 per cent of children aged 36 to 59 months attended some form of early childhood education. The highest percentage of children attending early childhood education is observed among children from urban areas (57 per cent), whose mothers are highly educated (66 per cent) and belong to the richest strata of the population (72 per cent). Only 8 per cent of Roma children of the same age attended ECD programme. The percentage of children from Roma settlements who are 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.

According to the available data, it might be concluded that the coverage of children by PE is low both at the level of the general population, and for Roma children, i.e. the coverage is inversely proportional to age, and the coverage of the youngest children is the lowest.

There is much more research and data available that point out that the biggest problem in coverage of children by PPP, is actually the coverage of children from marginalized social groups and of children with disabilities and developmental problems. The coverage of children with disabilities is 5–10 per cent; of those from the poorest families, around 50 per cent; Roma children about 45 per cent (unreliable information); and children from rural areas (according to some estimations), around 75 per cent.²⁴⁶

Table 7: The coverage of children in the general population by compulsory PPP in the Republic of Serbia²⁴⁷

	Total number of children	Coverage of children per cent	Percentage of girls
The Republic of Serbia	69,378	87.82	87.90
Central Serbia	49,823	84.84	85.18
Vojvodina	19,555	96.43	95.79
Belgrade	13,883	85.47	86.93

There are no reliable data about the number of Roma children covered by PPP, even though it is believed that there has been a considerable increase, especially during the second year of the programme. According to the Life Standard Survey,²⁴⁸ the percentage of Roma children in PPP was 45 per cent, while preliminary results from the implementation and effects assessment for PPP indicate that PPP does not sufficiently cover those children whose parents are uneducated and impoverished, i.e. the groups that, as a rule, include Roma children.

According to preliminary data from the implementation and effects assessment for PPP, undertaken by the Institute for Educational Improvement, Roma children were included in only 20 per cent of the sample groups (compared to 74 per cent of educational groups with no Roma children) and the average number of Roma children in each preparatory group was 0.43 per cent.²⁴⁹ Part of the early-age Roma population is still not covered by PPP (the exact number is not certain) or often leave PPP or do not attend it regularly, and so only attend a shortened version of the programme.²⁵⁰

Results from the MICS 4 survey indicate that 78 per cent of children from Roma Settlements that started primary school attended PPP in the previous year (compared to 97 per cent in the general population in Serbia). Disparity in attendance for Roma children is visible among rural and urban areas (65 and 83 per cent respectively).

Causes of Low Coverage of Roma Children by Preschool Education

The causes of low coverage of the general population by PE are numerous. The inefficient network of preschool institutions and its uneven distribution have already been mentioned. Another reason is lack of understanding of the true function of preschool institutions. In Serbia, there is a common belief that the PE System is a support service for working parents, and so it is logical that children of working couples are prioritised in the enrolment procedures; that the majority of the institutions are situated in urban areas; and, that the full-day stay is the most common mode of operation (which is inconvenient for some families). Another reason is the lack of understanding of the significance of PE (especially for children from under-privileged social groups).

As for the reasons for not attending preschool, MICS 4 shows some interesting results. In the general population, the main reasons for non-attendance (59 per cent) is the opinion of parents that there is no need for a child to attend kindergarten as there is

247 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2009/2010.

248 LSS, 2008.

249 Institute for Educational Improvement, 2008, as quoted in Pesikan and Ivić, 2009, p. 21.

250 Pesikan and Ivić, 2009, p. 21.

someone at home who can provide care (for highly educated mothers and better off parents, this percentage grows to 68 and 79 per cent respectively). In 37 per cent issues of access are reported as an obstacle: within this group 13 per cent cite lack of organized transport, 8 per cent overcrowded preschool facilities and 12 per cent costs of preschool (this percentage grows to 25 per cent in the poorest quintile).

Among the Roma the main reasons for not enrolling children in kindergarten are again opinion of parents (54 per cent) i.e. someone at home who can take care of a child. On the other hand, access issues (43 per cent) were among the most commonly reported reasons for non-attendance. Cost of preschool (27 per cent) was cited frequently, this percentage grows up to 39 per cent for children of single mothers and among non-educated parents, and 44 per cent in the poorest quintile.

Roma parents who participated in focus groups for the RECI study listed different reasons for enrolling their children in the education system:

- Greater security and better conditions for children's development.
- Economic and social well-being for the children's future, and good preparation for school, along with creation of necessary conditions for abandoning a multi-generational chain of social exclusion and deprivation.
- Easier adjustment to the majority culture.
- Better career options for parents.

"To be literate, smart, well-mannered, to finish school and get a job, to do craftwork, instead of collecting cartons from containers, to have their own work."

"For children to integrate, those who send their children to kindergartens are already integrated people."

(Slavica Vasić, NGO Bibija)

"It is vital for children to fit into other environments, with non-Roma, as well, and to learn Serbian."

(Health mediator)

Possibilities for getting a job while the child is in the kindergarten: "I could work somewhere, too."

(Roma mother)

“I would be at peace if they went to kindergarten, instead of becoming some drug addicts, to have better education, because we have poor conditions here.”

“It would be good, they would become more polite, educated, and it would be better in many respects, not worse, because this community will not progress. This is a community of drug addicts, vagabonds. A child can meet people outside getting high on glue. They will do the same thing. There’s nothing you can do if you leave your child here.”

“If only he was somewhere he would be safe. I am scared that he might get hit by a car or a lorry.”

(Focus groups, Roma mothers)

The reasons stated show that Roma parents are fully aware of the significance of PE. Their reasons also illustrate the dreams they have for their children (e.g. to be properly accepted and be successful in life) and even themselves (e.g. to get a job, to feel secure and relaxed, and not have to worry about the security and future of their children).

“Nobody ever asked if we wanted to send our children to kindergarten, or whether we needed anything from social services.”

(Focus group mothers)

There were some additional reasons mentioned in focus groups for the low coverage of Roma children, along with the above mentioned reasons, which are related to the whole population. These can be divided into the following categories:

- Under-developed networks of preschool institutions and insufficiently diversified programmes. Network flaws have already been described. What is missing is the diversity of programmes that would take place outside the facilities, with diverse contents and of different length.
- Low interest of local government and state services for the inclusion of Roma children in the educational system.
- The lack of intersectoral cooperation among certain services: The REF project: Increased availability of preschool education for Roma children had a huge obstacle concerning poor cooperation with health care institutions. They prolonged the enrolment of children in PPP through strict procedures. Because the children were not immunised in time, their admission was rejected.
- Poverty of Roma parents: Available data from MICS 4 demonstrates that in 27 per cent of cases, Roma children do not go to preschool due to financial reasons compared to 12 per cent in the general population. This reason is often stated by parents and activists of Roma organizations, health care mediators and teaching assistants.

"I recently went to a kindergarten; they want a lot from us. They did not tell me the exact price. I should submit an application; some people told me that it costs over 4 or 5 thousand. I do not receive a social allowance, my husband earns only 12,000 a month, we don't have this amount of money. And a child can be accepted, only if both parents work."

(Roma settlement, Deponia, Belgrade, August 2010)

- Roma parents are not informed about their rights and obligations: Roma parents who are illiterate or have a low level of education are not aware of their rights, obligations and possibilities. They cannot access the necessary information, or assess the accuracy of what they hear.

"Girl, here's what we think: it has to be paid for, and then, we're Gypsies, they won't accept us. What's more, it's some kind of competition, as if we were models or something (laughter)."

(Roma mother, Deponija, 2010)

"They told us in the kindergarten that they have no available places, that their mothers were unemployed, and that our children had no right. I went there two or three times. They told me that they would call me back, if the situation changes. Eight months have passed, but nobody ever called me."

(Roma mother, Barajevo, Belgrade, June 2010)

- Lack of personal documentation of Roma children and parents: This issue is common for children from slums as well as for children of internally displaced persons from Kosovo.

"The documents are the biggest problem. In order to enjoy their rights, and to get what they need, they need a personal document, which is sometimes acceptable, but sometimes is not. It triggers a never-ending string of problems."

(Focus group, health mediator, May 2010)

- Discriminatory behaviour of some representatives of preschool institutions towards Roma parents and children is obvious in the rejection of Roma children from preschool institutions. The means used are subtle and not easily recognized. Parents are told that there are no available places, or they are sent to some other, often remote, locations.

“Kindergartens do not want to accept Roma children, and we have a problem with enrolling our children, as both parents need to be employed. Doors are slammed in your face, and I have to fight with them, move heaven and earth to succeed (in enrolling a child to kindergarten). I try to talk to those in charge, beg the people I know, look for some connections. This is what I do – looking for connections. I have a case of a child who went to PPP and then to first grade. A year later, his sister was rejected from that facility and then sent to another one, further away. She needs to go there by bus, because the first one is fancy and white as snow.”

(Interview with Milica Simić from the Roma Children Centre NGO, 20/6/2010)

- The feeling of inferiority in comparison with other parents, due to the low level of education, inadequate clothing, poverty.

“We don’t have money to pay. A child can’t go to kindergarten, unless he is clean and dressed properly. Who doesn’t like hygiene?! Some standards need to be respected. There are many rats, dirty smells, and that’s why our children are thin and ill.”

(Deponija, Belgrade, August 2010)

- Lack of knowledge of Serbian, both among children and parents, insecurity and problems in communication.
- Difficulties for children to adapt to the environment of preschool institutions as it is different from the one they live in.

“Some children cannot easily adapt. I know one who is 3 years old, and he always cried when he needed to go to kindergarten. He had a traumatic experience and went to hospital. He could not bear the situation in the kindergarten; he was used to staying at home with his brothers. Even doctors advised for him not to be sent to kindergarten. He got used to going from market to market with his parents, and then the winter came, so he couldn’t go with them any more. They sent him to kindergarten, but he could not put up with it.”

(Health care mediator, Novi Sad, June 2010)

The opinion of teachers about the low coverage of Roma children in preschool institutions (in this case PPP) was researched on a sample basis²⁵¹ in 2008/2009.²⁵² Teachers believe that Roma children are late to enrol in PPP and that they do not attend it regularly, because of the bad financial status of their families; inability to get the necessary work materials (workbooks, etc.); the lack of money for transportation; seasonal jobs of their parents outside the place of their residence; and insufficient knowledge of the Serbian language.

The Position of Roma Children in Preschool Institutions, Support Provided and Effects of Preschool Education

When Roma children enrol in kindergarten, according to the law, they should be placed in regular groups together with their peers of different nationalities. There is no official data about the segregation of Roma children in preschool institutions, especially in the light of their poor coverage by PE. Not even Roma NGOs have data about institutions where the majority or all children are Roma.²⁵³ However, in a research study entitled "Providing conditions for the realization of equal enrolment policy for the first grade of elementary school,"²⁵⁴ the preschool sample contained two groups with exclusively Roma children.

There are numerous ways of giving support to children from marginalized groups – from providing financial aid to giving psychosocial support to both the children and their families. They are occasionally given free meals and/or workbooks; they get involved in some cultural events or go on excursions free of charge.²⁵⁵ If the parents' income is extremely low (or they have no income at all) children do not pay for their stay in optional preschool.

Among the specific means of support, the teachers most often work extensively on teaching children the Serbian language. Some teachers enrich their daily practice with content that encourages the development of tolerance, self-respect and respect for diversity between Roma and the majority population children. Some of them even include topics that deal with the customs and tradition of Roma people.²⁵⁶

Within the scope of the REI project,²⁵⁷ the most crucial support for children was secured through child-centred methodology; integration of family culture in educational institutions; involvement of parents and representatives of the Roma community and acknowledgement of their suggestions and ideas; and through the involvement of Roma assistants. The role and significance of teaching assistants is discussed later in this chapter.

251 Research carried out in seven school districts: Sombor, Novi Sad, Belgrade, Valjevo, Kragujevac, Leskovac and Niš. There were 35 schools included, 22 PPP groups, as well as Roma parents' opinion in first and second grade. The publication that is to be printed represents a joint initiative of the Fund for an Open Society, Serbia and Decade of Roma Inclusion.

252 Simić and Skarep, 2010, in press.

253 EUMAP, 2007, p. 46.

254 Simić and Skarep, 2010, material in preparation for print.

255 *Ibid.*

256 *Ibid.*

257 Roma Education Initiative Programme project in Serbia, named Equal Chances, was realized between 2002 and 2006 in Niš and Kragujevac. It was supported by Open Society Institute (ESP Programme) and Fund for an Open Society. The main implementation partners were Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, Roma NGOs RIC, REC. At one point of the project implementation, support was given by UNICEF, SDC, NPA and Pestalozzi Foundation.

Individual support is provided through the development of Individual Educational Plans (IEP), with the support of defectologists and psychologists. (IEP, and the danger of its misuse, is described in the previous chapter).²⁵⁸

In kindergartens where no special support for children is being given, teachers justify their attitude by stating that all children are treated equally: *“All children attend regular PPP;” “All children are equally accepted”*,²⁵⁹ thus implicitly discriminating against Roma children by neglecting their starting point, which is not the same as for other children.

There are no recent studies available from Serbia on the effects of preschool services (i.e. education for children from 6 months-old, up to the start of PPP) on the subsequent education of Roma children and their later successes in life. As a result, policy makers very often have to rely on foreign research.

The range of effects on children’s school achievements from attending PPP cannot be strictly defined. On the one hand, in the opinion of PPP implementers, this programme has positive effects, as Roma children achieve better results in school placement tests; they adapt more quickly, and are more successful in keeping up with the curriculum. On the other hand, the results of the first individual analysis show that there is no significant statistical difference in the school maturity test between children who attended PPP, and those who did not.²⁶⁰

Position of Roma Parents in Preschool Institutions

Teachers and nurses are obliged to cooperate with the family, and to do so, annual and monthly plans are created. Preschool Institutions are also responsible for cooperation with the parents and involving them in boards (e.g. parents’ councils).

“Cooperation with the parents is not continuous and depends on the concept of the kindergarten as a whole. If they cooperate with the parents, then it is either one, or nobody. The concept is defined by the head of institution for all kindergartens, i.e. the head teacher. The institution creates the atmosphere, together with the director and his assistant. The Director’s concept is of huge importance, and there is a case where a former primary school director became director of a preschool institution. Her concept was inadequate for children of preschool age. It was a school concept, inappropriate both for their age, and needs.”

(Interview with Milica Cebić,
Professor at Belgrade Faculty of Teacher Training, May 2010)

However, ways of cooperation in the majority of preschools are very traditional (individual talks, counselling, shows, parents meetings, etc.) and an asymmetric relationship is what characterizes them the most (teachers have the knowledge and expertise about the needs and developmental potential of children) and their attitude towards parents is somewhat patronising (especially to those from minority groups). As far as Roma parents

258 UNICEF, unpublished research, Rado, 2010.

259 Simić and Skarep, unpublished research, 2010.

260 Janjević-Popović, Reports from case study, according to Pešikan and Ivić, 2008.

are concerned, there is no data suggesting that they have ever been represented through board members or Parent's councils in preschools.

As a general rule, Roma parents do not attend parents meetings, or they attend them quite rarely. Unpublished research carried out by the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP) showed that parents do not come to these meetings because: they are ashamed (old clothes, insufficient language skills, uneducated); they feel uncomfortable (somebody always complains about their children, they have nothing positive to hear); or, they have no time to attend (these meetings are usually organized during their work time). Preschool teachers consider this as disinterest for their children's education, neglect, and the expression of their disrespect for the teacher and the institution.

In some cases, however, Roma parents whose children had attended PPP, cooperated better with educational institutions, as they were more prepared for primary school.²⁶¹

Some teaching assistants believe that the level of acceptance of Roma parents in preschool institutions has a vast influence on the future education of a child and his/her attitude towards education.

"Parents should be first introduced to the institution, and shown its purpose, and what it really offers. Many parents still have little faith in education, but it does not mean that they should be completely ignored. On the contrary, as time passes, after being asked to participate in the work programme in many different ways, they will accept the cooperation, but only if somebody offers it to them."

(Teaching Assistant, Niš, January, 2011)

Attitudes Towards Roma Parents and Children

Discrimination and the reluctance of non-Roma parents to accept Roma children in kindergartens can be illustrated by the example of a kindergarten in Novi Sad. At one point, the work of this institution stopped due to the teacher's discrimination towards Roma children and the decision of non-Roma parents not to take their children to the kindergarten. Afterwards, Roma children were transferred to ten other kindergartens, which were quite far from their homes. Even though an official opinion regarding this matter was sought, the authorities gave no response.²⁶²

"The majority of the population does not accept the sort of diversity present in the Roma population. Special attention should be paid to developing tolerance among the general population."

(Milica Simić, DCR, May, 2010)

261 Simić and Skarep, 2010, unpublished research.

262 Pesikan and Ivić, pp. 23–24.

Of all the Roma children who entered preschool institutions, 30 per cent to 50 per cent were sent to premises with the worst conditions and a poor level of education.²⁶³ During the 2008/2009 school year, one third of Roma children in the study entitled "Providing conditions for the realization of equal enrolment policy in the first grade of elementary school"²⁶⁴ attended PPP in remote units of preschool institutions, situated in rural areas or in elementary school buildings. In the opinion of the authors, these circumstances indicate that these children had been isolated, and that they did not have all the resources at their disposal (equipment adjusted to age and infrastructure, special didactic methods and additional educational programmes, such as language acquisition, folklore dance, etc.). Thus, children from vulnerable groups were not placed in sufficiently stimulating conditions, meaning that the conditions provided for them are worse than those of their peers from the majority population.

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. The tendency will be altered with the increase of Roma children's representation, and the ground should be prepared by analysing negative issues that accompany the enrolment of a higher number of Roma children in primary schools, as well as by firm reliance on instances of good practice.

"I had no opportunity to notice the resistance of non-Roma parents, perhaps because the number of Roma children is still significantly lower than that of other children"

(Teaching Assistant, January 2011)

The implicit non-accepting attitude of teachers towards Roma children and their parents, is often justified on the basis of the belief that parents of Roma children are not interested in their education (described in 3.6). The study "Fight poverty through education: analysis of the influence of introducing PPP in Serbia",²⁶⁵ for example, states that the field informants (who consisted of professionals working with PPP) considered Roma parents to be insufficiently motivated to send their children to PPP services, and that the main reason for actually sending them was merely their legal obligation.²⁶⁶ This statement illustrates the way in which the majority of the population perceive problems concerning the education of Roma children. The general population evaluates the behaviour of Roma parents even though they have little knowledge about it and/or no understanding of it at all. It seems that these types of statements (which sound highly cynical, although that was not their original intention) depict, quite accurately, another reason that explains why Roma children give up their education and why Roma parents cooperate poorly with educational institutions. That is, the lack of essential understanding of the requirements of the life styles of people who live in extreme poverty, people whose priorities are to ensure basic survival and to satisfy elementary needs for food, clothing and footwear, and their children's physical safety in a hostile environment.

263 Data from Children's Roma Center (DRC) presented to League of DRI.

264 Simić and Skarep, 2010, op. cit.

265 Pešikan and Ivić, 2009.

266 *Ibid.*

For Roma people who live in extreme poverty, education is a luxury they cannot afford.

(Aleksandra Mitrovic,
Society for the Development of the Roma Settlements, May 2010)

The mono-cultural nature of educational institutions is not only reflected in the fact that the majority of medical nurses and preschool teachers are women, and that there are barely any Roma staff members, but also in the absence of minority cultures on a significant level; of the lack of sign boards in the Roma language; and the deficiency of topics dealing with customs, culture and the languages of a minority. This mono-cultural nature is also reflected at a symbolic level, through the perceptions of teachers and educators which influence their comprehension of the behaviour of Roma parents and their children: through hidden or explicit evaluation of the level of competence of Roma parents.

When it comes to applying the non-discrimination law in practice, teachers usually respond: *“No, I have had no such experience”* (focus group) or *“I believe that it is applied here in Subotica (the law). In case of any incidents, the school informs us about the events in writing.”*

“Cooperation between preschools and primary schools has always existed: joint celebrations, visits by preschool children to elementary schools, tours of the school, attending classes etc. But all this depends on the comprehension of tutors – if they think that school preparation above all means that a child needs to learn how to read and write, then all activities become part of the schooling scheme.”

(Milica Ćebić, the Teaching Faculty, Belgrade, June 2010)

“The cooperation is initiated by preschools, so that children can have an easier transition to primary schools.”

(Principal of PU, May 2010)

Transition from Preschool to Primary School and Cooperation Between These Institutions

Cooperation between preschools and primary schools manifests itself in mutual activities organized by schools and kindergartens, and in the expectations that primary schools have of preschools and of their role in preparing children for school (teach them how to be disciplined, how to develop working habits, and sometimes even basic math and literacy). Preschools are typically more motivated to cooperate than primary schools, and put in more effort to connect preschools and primary schools so that children can have an easier transition. It seems however, that the essence of these transitions is misunderstood. It is always about “how to prepare children for school,” rather than “how to prepare schools for children.” Teachers are getting help, in building and achieving cooperation between schools, from experts, working in teams in PIs. These teachers are usually the ones engaged in this collaboration along with preparation of meetings for

parents whose children are enrolling in primary school. Throughout this whole process, the expert teams in PI work with the expert teams in PS.

Until the LOFSF was ratified, the biggest issue about enrolment was testing. It did not favour children who belonged to minority groups and it made a significant number of Roma children enrol in special schools. These issues no longer exist (see Chapter 2).

Supporting PI and Preschool Teachers Who Enrol a Large Number of Roma Children

From 2010/2011, 49 pedagogical assistants started working in PI within this project. The effects of their work have not yet been evaluated, but it is expected that their efforts will, as for schools, result in better acceptance of Roma children, with children having a stronger sense of self-respect, faster integration etc.

(Roma teaching assistants, 2010 in the publication
Roma Teaching Assistants as Agents of Change)

For the PI that admit Roma children and/or has a majority of Roma children, there is support envisaged by the LPE. Besides additional training and support to IEP development, and additional health, social and educational support (see Chapter 2), there is also the involvement of teaching assistants within the IPA project, Education for all – improved access and quality of education for children from marginalized groups' (see 2.5.4 for more details).

The IPA project entitled **“Improvement of Preschool Education in Serbia” (IMPRES)** (see 2.5.4. for a brief description), is expected to aid the development of PI networks and to support relevant offices and institutions in defining the fundamentals of the new programmes and the self-evaluating systems for preschools. The project will be carried out in some of the most under-developed Serbian municipalities, with the goal of strengthening local governments and thus providing high-quality preschool programmes for all children, and especially for children from marginalized groups. This project will also include training modules for local government employees, as well as for all employees working in services related to the children of early years and their families. A compendium of diverse programmes for preschool-age children is also planned, and will integrate experience from the NGO sector. Additional training for tutors will be organized and the project will cooperate closely with the DILS project (see 2.5.4.). Almost all activities planned within this project are dedicated to children aged 3–6, with a special emphasis on children from PPP groups.

Programmes in Roma Settlements

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For more than ten years, the Serbian NGO sector, in cooperation with international organizations and quite often, with the MES, has been engaged in a number of activities. These include: working to create a model for improving the study environment; implementing new approaches to working with children and cooperating with parents; involving Roma NGOs and local government representatives; advancing cooperation between important supporters on local levels; promoting inter-ministerial cooperation; encouraging and strengthening professionals and families; altering the mono-cultural nature of preschools; creating a holistic and comprehensive approach to problem-solving;

and much more. Most of these programmes and projects developed simultaneously in Roma communities and preschool facilities.

Examples of successful programmes in Roma settlements

One of the models of support to preschools and teachers is defined in the REF project entitled: Expanding the Approach to Preschool Education for Roma Children, (term concluded in June 2009, its continuation is expected in cooperation with MES and UNICEF). Apart from nursery and other schools in which it was conducted, the project included local governments and Roma NGOs. Teachers received additional assistance from experts, as well as from Roma coordinators and local government representatives. Parents of Roma children received support in the form of organized transportation of children to/from kindergartens; clothing and its care; and free lunches and didactical materials.²⁶⁷

The programme: Improvement of Roma Education in Southern Serbia – Development and Education Centres, is being implemented, with the support of UNICEF, by the NGO, Society for the Improvement of Roma Settlements, in cooperation with the Ministry and local government. It is focused on highly deprived environments where a large number of Roma are excluded from the education system. The aim of the programme is the improved coverage of Roma children by the education system; improvement in their level of education; higher quality of education; longer stay of Roma within the system; and, the general improvement of the Roma population's education in Southern Serbia. Some of the most important results achieved through the project are: the full coverage of children by PPP in some municipalities; 92 per cent of children continuing their schooling after the 4th grade of primary school; a large percentage of children continuing to go to secondary schools; etc.²⁶⁸ Another important result of the project is the increased awareness in the Roma community of their rights, and ways to obtain them; competence of institutions to recognize cultural and social specificities of working with the Roma population; and, increased responsiveness of the local authorities to Roma rights, which is reflected in the allocation of funds from the municipal budget to maintain these programmes.

A particularly successful preschool programme was: Kindergarten as a Family Centre in Roma Settlements, initiated between 1997 and 2005, in 10 locations (18 nursery schools), with the help of the Open Society Institute, Fund for an Open Society in Serbia and for a period of time, Concern Worldwide. The starting point of this programme was to build-up capacity in local communities, in order to create stimulating conditions for a more prosperous standard of living for young children, through the active involvement of all relevant supporters in the process (parents, NGOs, Roma local community, local governments) and all relevant services (education, health care and social service). Children aged 3 to 7, took part in high quality educational programmes in preschools (using the Step by Step methodology). They were provided with health care and a stimulating, healthy environment; parents were encouraged to attend (enhancing their literacy skills and employment opportunities); and, the Roma local community acquired its community centre. The final external evaluation was conducted in a Roma settlement in Niš, in 1998/1999. It identified an extraordinary outcome: Roma children who went to nursery schools attended the classes regularly and they had high scores. Good achievements were not just due to the high quality education.

²⁶⁷ Baucal, Stojanović, 2010, p. 235.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

but also because of the engagement of parents, whose competences and expectations had grown, and to a change in the attitude of the community towards education. For the first time, Roma assistants were engaged in a programme and today, most of them work at nurseries and in schools, as teaching assistants. During 2005, most of the nursery schools were integrated within a regular preschool system. Unfortunately, the methodology, equipment and teachers were also integrated and thereby dispersed, and the children were lost track of. The project was implemented by the CIP and some Roma NGOs.

The project on Improvement of the Living Conditions in the Roma Settlement of Deponija was conducted by the NGO called Society for the Improvement of Roma Settlements, in cooperation with two other NGOs: Roma Heart, and Roma Woman Centre, both located in Bibija and supported financially by the European Commission, NOVIB and UNICEF. The project was implemented in the settlement of Deponija (Landfill), Belgrade which is one of the biggest Roma slums in Serbia. The main goal was to improve the quality of life and to help clarify the status of the residents and their integration into the city systems. This was a full scale, integrated project since it included several projects relating to education, residence, health and employment. The programmes included were: a preschool age programme for children; an educational support programme for children going to primary schools; a literacy programme for women; an employment and self-employment programme; an education upgrade programme for over-age children and youth; a women's programme; a programme for internally displaced people from Kosovo; a health programme; a settlement legalization programme; and, a programme for strengthening local communities.²⁶⁹ The experience gained from this project was later used in the above mentioned programme: Improvement of Roma Education in Southern Serbia – Development Education Centres.

"In order to increase the number of Roma children in the preschool system, we have concluded a long-term agreement on cooperation with a preschool institution "NasaRadost", where we will work together on the inclusion of Roma children in the educational system. All our activities are aimed at cooperation with institutions within the system, and in cases where the system provides no coverage; we initiate the process for coverage by the system. On our part, we hire Roma assistants in kindergartens. Our initiative aims to make the system more open and to support Roma communities. We represent outside support and we assume the role of mediator between institutions, the system and the Roma community. When communication is established between institutions and the Roma community then our direct support ceases, even though we are always present when our assistance is required. It is best to involve parents in cooperation through permanent contact and talks, and never to promise them something that can't be done."

(Stevan Nikolić, ECR, June 2010)

269 Macura and Vuksanović, 2003.

Inter-departmental cooperation and cooperation between NGOs and state institutions is also recognized in certain examples of good NGO practice. One of the reasons for starting the project called: Together – inclusion of Roma children in the educational system (by the NGO Roma Education Centre (ECR), Subotica), was the lack of connection between relevant actors engaged in Roma education. When the ECR was established, a Team for inclusion of Roma children was formed, members of which are: educational advisors; inspectors; primary and PI principals; representatives of local self-governments; Roma coordinators; representatives of Roma NGOs; the Regional Secretariat for Education; and, the Director of the Office for Roma Inclusion of Vojvodina. This Team has the task of securing continuous support for the inclusive education of Roma children within the territory of the Sombor School Administration.

Starting from the idea that every girl and boy in Serbia, regardless of their origins, abilities, health condition, residence, or social status, has the right to good quality early education and equal opportunities in life, a project was launched in May 2007, called: Begin at the Beginning – Promoting Importance of ECD through Community Based Initiatives. The project was initiated by a Dutch organization, the International Child Development Initiative and the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, in Belgrade, and was supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.” This project was implemented by 5 NGOs: Rainbow, in Ada; I have an idea, in Kraljevo; Roma Cultural Centre, in VranjskaBanja; Children’s Joy, in Zaječar; and Juca, in Bor. One of the activities of this project was to conduct mini projects, which were organized by the NGOs and their local associates. These mini projects: Be a Part of the Story, and I Can Draw Too, targeted Roma children. In the mini project Be a Part of the Story, the preschool institution in Ada organized a puppet show in a Roma settlement, with the Roma community. This mini project resulted in an increased number of children enrolling in preschool institutions, and created an informal programme model that can be applied by preschools. The other mini project, I Can Draw Too, consisted of art workshops for Roma and Serbian children, and their parents.

Within the project, Begin at the Beginning, two different models were created: the spider web model for the evaluation of informal programmes for working with children from deprived environments, and the Model 5P (gathering information; support and strengthening; integration and participation; taking action and contemplating; monitoring and evaluation which proved to be efficient in the process of inventing programmes and activities for marginalized children at early ages.

It is important to mention that all of these programmes (and most likely all others too) conducted in Roma communities, did not cover children aged 0 to 3 years. Comprehensive programmes and projects no longer exist, and the ones that are left are focused on preparing children for school and supporting their learning process. The established trend in education at an early age has prevailed, as has the belief that Roma children essentially need specific knowledge. The wider aspects of preparation for primary school have been forgotten and are no longer seen as relevant.

However, opinions on these programmes have been quite diverse. At a conference in June, 2009, on the Right to Education for Every Child, one part of the Roma community representatives had a rather negative attitude toward these programmes, considering them to be targeted services which cannot guarantee high quality, and could even contribute to further segregation of Roma people. Others believe that they do have many advantages.

"I think that work in the local community should be conducted with children aged between 0 and 5 years; to start from birth, both with parents and children. By the time for PPP, Roma children would then be ready for school as with any other non-Roma child and parent. I think that this would be, from a financial point of view, much cheaper. This would involve a global approach to Roma families and the Roma community, by forming multi-functional centres in Roma settlements, where the work would be conducted with parents and children aged between 0 and 5 years. After five to ten years, results would become very visible, as the first generation would be ready for school and would achieve success in primary and secondary schools. Roma families are traditional, they place exceptional importance on children, but I think that we are still not sensitized enough to education. Exceptionally great love is exhibited inside Roma families, but little emphasis is placed on the preparation of children for school."²⁷⁰

The Importance and Responsibilities of Local Government in PE

According to the Preschool Institution Network Regulation, a local government can establish a preschool institution for at least five, and at most, a hundred, instruction groups. The local self-government unit is additionally obliged to support it financially and to develop it by forming new groups, establishing new objectives, and developing new programmes. Within its regulations, financial and development plans and strategies, the local government has an obligation to define priorities in the field of preschool instruction and education (PIE), the coverage of children, and the type and quality of the programme. It also has the freedom to establish bodies and structures in order to satisfy the needs of citizens, but the majority of local self-governments have neither bodies nor structures directly related to children and/or education, and therefore none related to PE. The exceptions are Belgrade, Novi Sad and two other cities, which have formed an Education Secretariat. Financial means for maintaining preschool institutions are provided by social policy implementation funds, which a significant number of local governments do not have. This means that most of the local governments have no separate funds allocated for PE. In order for preschool institutions to function, local governments need to secure 70–80 per cent of the economic costs per child. These resources need to cover staff salaries, management and maintenance costs. The funds do not cover food or other expenses such as acquiring didactic and expendable materials, which are covered by parents.

Some local units use funds from their budgets and manage to provide subsidies for the most underprivileged and for children at risk, and/or for the third or fourth child (as part of population policy), some provide funds for equipment (furniture, toys, didactic materials) etc. These policies depend more on currently governing political coalitions

270 Interview with Stevan Nikolić, NGO Education Roma Centre, Subotica.

than on the national policies oriented towards children, education or family. The fact that local self-government units actually do not own their territory but just hold the right to utilize it, is quite paradoxical and makes the process of development planning extremely hard and complicated. Additionally, vast numbers of local governments do not even have a citizen database, thus they are unable to present data about children, particularly when the data needs to be classified by certain criteria, for example, how many children have no personal documents, or place of residence, or have not been entered into the birth register etc. This is of the utmost importance for Roma people who migrate (due to seasonal jobs for example) or for children from socially at risk groups, children with chronic diseases, or children with developmental problems etc.

In some local government units, Local Action Plans for children (LAP) were drawn-up with the support of UNICEF. The main purpose of LAPs is to put children on the agenda of local government units, in particular, children from marginalized groups. The LAPs contribute to the development of educational, health, social, and cultural services for the children. One of the priorities set by LAPs for these local governments is to increase the number of children with access to PE, including both formal and informal education programmes. It is unfortunate, therefore, that only a small number of local self-government units have allocated resources to support the LAPs.

Informal programmes for children and families have been initiated by the NGO sector and include activities such as playgroups, library activities, travelling theatres, and schools for parents etc. Regrettably, over the last 5 years, even these practices have declined dramatically. Local government units have insufficient funds, which means that impoverished parents must bear additional expenses and cost.

For the vast majority, if not all, of the local units, preschool institutions are first and foremost support institutions for employed parents, therefore they attribute a care function to them. It is quite possible that this attitude towards PIs could influence the quality of their work and contribute to maintaining the established general opinion that Preschool Instruction and Education (PIE) is not of great significance, especially when the mother is unemployed. Because of this attitude, some quality policies, established at a national level, could easily be forgotten and fall out of use.

CHAPTER 4

Prioritized Challenges and Problems for Roma Early Childhood Inclusion

On the basis of what has so far been presented, it is clear that the Republic of Serbia has made extensive efforts to adopt legislation and to issue strategic documents that promote the position of the Roma population. It is also clear that the state has the necessary support from the EU/EC (through various programmes such as Progress, EIDHR, IPA, and Cards), and of the World Bank, as well as other large international agencies and organizations: UNICEF, REF, FOSS, OSCE, etc. However, throughout the process, the NGO²⁷¹ sector, due to its disunity, has had problems in influencing the State in a substantial and systematic way. This is despite the NGO sector being very much engaged in creating models for implementation of the planned laws and measures, as well as in the monitoring process.

If we assume that at the level of policy in the relevant domains (education, health care and social protection) everything is more or less fine, then the question is – why is it so hard to ensure the availability of quality services to Roma children at an early age, and to their families, and thus to provide them with the conditions for the optimal and full development of their personality and potential?

Some of the possible answers are presented below:

Challenge 1: Insufficient understanding of the critical importance of the early childhood period

The progress made by Serbia in creating democratic institutions includes significant steps in building an infrastructure for protection of children's rights, such as establishing the Deputy Ombudsman's Office (2008), the National Children's Rights Council (2002) and the Parliament's Working Groups for Children's Rights (2008). The legislative framework is to a large extent synchronized with International Human Rights Standards.²⁷² A comprehensive Law on Children, as recommended by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, is currently underway, and so is the passing of the umbrella act which is expected to be adopted in the first half of 2011. The establishment of the Law on Child Ombudsman, which will strengthen the protection of children's rights, is also underway. The Children's Rights Law will be the first law proposed by the institution of Ombudsmen

271 Received a legal framework, Law on Organizations, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia No.51/2009.

272 UNICEF, Revised programme document, Serbia, 2011–2015.

of the Republic of Serbia and, at the same time, the first law to unite all legal regulations and norms for this area.

The National Action Plan (NAP) for Children was adopted in 2004 by the Children's Rights Council of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. Its main goal was to provide equal use, availability, quality and efficiency of all public services for children, especially in the field of health, education, social care and culture, and legal and judicial protection. An evaluation carried out in 2009 found the NAP for Children to have had a substantial influence on the development of crucial policies. In particular, policies concerning child protection had been developed and, in selected municipalities, the NAP was successfully translated into Local Action Plans (LAP) for Children, in order to develop planning methods concerning children, local authorities and civil society organizations.²⁷³ However if we take a look at some other indicators, apart from those already mentioned in the areas of education, health and social care, we get a different impression. Even today, Roma children in Serbia do not receive enough messages that they are welcome and that they are equal members of society. Children's playgrounds either do not exist or are neglected and unsafe. The appropriate cultural learning material for children of this age is also insufficient, especially in smaller or rural areas.²⁷⁴ The state television channels and local television in particular, offer insufficient content designed for small children. The print media dedicate only 3 per cent of their content to children, and television programmes dedicate just 7.6 per cent.²⁷⁵ The increasing presence of children in the media is, however, evident during political election campaigns, after which it seems that everybody again forgets about children. Children aged between 0 and 6 years are faced with a much greater risk of poverty than any other age group. Their poverty index rises considerably above average year after year.²⁷⁶ Children who live in poverty do not have the quality nourishment (no fruit, meat, or even milk) necessary for normal development. They grow up without toys and books, and they do not have the conditions for maintaining personal hygiene. They wear old and worn out clothes and they do not have enough money for snacks. Their parents make maximum sacrifices to provide them with the most basic things. Numbering about 120,000 these children form more than a fifth of the poor in Serbia.²⁷⁷ Considering the level of poverty found in the Roma population (ten times more than the majority population), it can be undoubtedly concluded that this figure refers primarily to Roma children, who, in many cases, are near starvation and live in cardboard and sheet metal houses at city landfills, with nothing to play with and in high-risk conditions. (MICS, 2010)

"We need a kindergarten and a playground for children...someone to take this garbage away... this garbage is terrible and it smells terrible."

(Roma Mother, focus group Deponija, August 2010)

The unacceptability of the conditions in which little Roma boys and girls grow up has been pointed out on numerous occasions in focus groups.

273 UNICEF, Revised programme document, Serbia, 2011–2015.

274 Start from the beginning, the beginning is important, 2010.

275 Children Rights Centre CRC, Report 2008.

276 Matković et al., 2010.

277 Matković, B92, 2011.

If we look at the present legislation, we will find that no document focuses on children per se. The issues that are in focus are the service-providing facilities and institutions. When children are mentioned, it is only those children with documents, children in preschool institutions and elementary schools. Therefore, one gets the impression that the state is primarily concerned with children within the system, which automatically puts Roma children at a disadvantage because, in most cases, they are outside the system.

In Serbia, an understanding of the importance of a child's early development (0–6 years of age), as a crucial element in building the country's social capital, is just beginning to emerge, as well as the first indications that a child's early development should be a priority issue.²⁷⁸ The services for children's early development have yet to be integrated into the system, although LOFES, for example, states that PE (which constitutes a part of the educational system), shall start when a child is 6 months old. In the system's interventions, parenthood is still mostly ignored, which results in parents having quite limited knowledge about how to support the development of very young children. (MICS, 2010)

What probably represents the fundamental problem is incomprehension of the importance of the early years, and early interventions, in all areas relevant for a child's development. This incomprehension is present at the level of policymakers and implementers, and even in the NGO sector.²⁷⁹ If children of an early age, and their families in general, are in some way misplaced in the State agenda, then the Roma children and families are in an even graver position. In the health and social care domain, this can best be seen in the lack of integrated care for pregnant women and mothers of new-borns, combined with neglect of the fact that mother's health and psychological status affects the condition of the other offspring and the new-born child. In education, it can be seen in the small number of children to whom PE is available. For the entire population, the level is 41.36 per cent in total: 15.03 per cent of crèche age; 34.80 per cent of three-year-olds; and 39.83 per cent of four-year-olds. Data for Roma children is mostly limited. Children aged 0–3 years are not mentioned, nor do they appear in the planned and initialized projects such as DILS, IPA IMPRES and IPA Education for All. Where measures exist, the area of focus is mainly health, because children of the earliest age are only observed through that particular prism. Comprehension of the children's holistic development is also absent, which is why a child is observed in a disjointed manner as different aspects are addressed in isolation from one another, and not as the whole make-up of the child over their period of development.

New laws regarding children's rights and the Child Ombudsman could be used to contribute to an understanding of the importance of the inclusion of children at an early age (including children up to 3 years of age, especially those from sensitive groups) in high quality holistic and comprehensive support programmes. They could also enable the introduction of a special body that would deal only with children of the earliest age, and their families, with a special emphasis on children from deprived areas (including Roma children).

If the situation remains as it is, and if we pay attention to children only when it is time for them to start PPP and primary school, it will be too late. It will be particularly late for Roma children who grow up in extreme poverty, without sufficient early stimulation in

278 UNICEF, Revised programme document, Serbia, 2011–2015.

279 The situation is somewhat changing; with the support of UNICEF in 2010, the Network of Civil Society Organizations for the Children of Serbia – NOC was founded, which consists of 42 NGO organizations. This network, among other things, deals with promoting the importance of the early years and in both the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy there are persons in charge of the cooperation with NOC. The Child Rights Centre also plays a great role in the area of the protection of children's rights.

the family environment (MICS, 2010). In order for change to happen, policy documents are not enough; there is a need to revise the prevailing understanding of the services children and families should be provided with and the places where those services should be available. It is also necessary to change the image people have of the child, parents and professionals.²⁸⁰

Challenge 2: Insufficient attention in the Roma community to factors holding back progress

“We don’t even need ‘big shots’ (...in the sense of leaders...) now. What we need is a lot of ‘busy bees’: modern leaders who will manage current processes more efficiently.”

(Osman Balić, Coordinator of the Roma Decade League in Serbia and expert on minority and minority policy affairs for the Council of Europe, 2004)

This is a particularly sensitive issue, which has to be treated with special attention. It is evident that in the Roma community, which has been considerably strengthened by a series of development programmes and increased political participation of its members, there are still a great number of problems that slow down its development and progress, and which directly affect the position of Roma children of early age and their families (especially mothers). Most of these problems are not for the Government, institutions of the system or majority community to solve, because their solutions could incorporate additional discrimination and segregation of the Roma community. They should be partners with representatives of Roma community, but the Roma community needs to lead the process.

As stated in Chapter 1, the number of Roma NGOs and associations in Serbia is high (over 1000) and they deal with different issues.²⁸¹ As far as Roma political parties are concerned, 18 of them are registered, but the Roma Union of Serbia and the Roma Party are the most active. In 2007, great success was achieved because these parties joined the Parliament for the first time.²⁸² Within the Roma community, this success has raised awareness of the importance of political action and increased the understanding that political space is the most important place to deal with poverty and ghettoization, in addition to being the place where decisions are made on the position of minorities and ethnic equality, as well as the State in general.²⁸³ Unfortunately, in the 2008 elections, this success was not repeated.

Challenges to the Roma intellectual and political elite are great, and the decisions made have direct effects on the inclusion in education of Roma children of an early age:

- **The position of women – abandoning unacceptable practices:** As described in Chapter 1, Roma women constitute the most at-risk grouping within the already jeopardized Roma population. What we call the “traditions of Roma communities” largely define their position, and it also indirectly defines the position of children of

280 Begin at the beginning, Beginning is important, 2010.

281 RIC, 2008.

282 Owing to Article 81 of the Law on the Election of Members of the Parliament of the Republic of Serbia which reduced the census for national minorities.

283 Gavrilović, 2009.

an early age. Although Serbia is the only DIR country that has identified specially selected measures for the improvement of the position of young women (especially in the area of education) their position is still grave. The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights sees Roma associations and the National Council as the key strategic partners for accomplishing planned measures.²⁸⁴ Gender-sensitive analyses carried out to date show that gender inequality – in the sense of unequal distribution of power between men and women – is especially pronounced in the Roma population, and has an impact on life, health and welfare. Roma women suffer the burden of a twofold discrimination – on grounds of race and of gender – and that is why health care, employment and education are less available to them. A Roma woman very often does not have the right to her own opinion, since it is usually the man who makes decisions about her life, about the number of children, abortions, visits to the doctor, contraception, schooling and so on.²⁸⁵ The same goes for educational policies: most often, Roma girls quit school because of early and arranged marriages. Sometimes they also quit school because educating girls is not valued. Various research studies in Serbia show that Roma girls, when they do have the opportunity for education, achieve better results in studying than do Roma boys, because this is how they can free themselves from the gender role assigned to them in their community.²⁸⁶ In this and many other situations, Roma tradition is used as an excuse for not taking action. Tradition is idealized and presented in a mythical way. At the same time some traditions are lost. What is still present is the model according to which Roma boys and girls are programmed, traditional gender roles, and relationships between man and woman. It is necessary to find a balance between Roma culture and the protection of human rights.²⁸⁷

“As far as Roma parents are concerned, it is important that they develop discipline in their children, because children need to have an anchor in order to get by in the world of non-Roma people. The loss of this anchorage does not only mean the loss of loyalty towards the community they belong to, but also the loss of the one and only possible focal point in life, because on the ‘outside’ there are people who will not be pleasant to them. This is why Roma parents bring up their children in a manner which requires the acceptance of the norms of the cultural community they belong to.”

(Stevan Nikolić, ERC, 2010)

The most vulnerable Roma women do not even have the strength or support to make the changes they see as needed to successfully assume the role of a mother and a wife. They are often depressed and stressed by the conditions in which they live and the impossibility of providing their children with all they would like to. Their depression affects the overall health of the child, especially the brain development, and with it, the ability to learn. (MICS, 2010)

284 Petar Antić, Assistant Minister in the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, at the Roma Women Education Workshop, Belgrade, October, 2010; OSCE mission within their Roma Support Program, financed by the European Union.

285 Women’s Initiative Association (2006), Gender Barometer: social position and the quality of life for women and men in Serbia, research abridgement, <http://www.awin.org.yu/images/pdf/RodniBarometer.pdf>.

286 Svenka Savić at Roma Women Education Workshop, 2010.

287 Nicoleta Bițu, coordinator of the NGO Romani Criss at Roma Women Education Workshop, 2010.

According to MICS 4, only 28 per cent of women from Roma settlements believe that their life has improved during the last year and 81 per cent are still optimistic about future improvements (compared to 47 and 83 per cent of women in Serbia respectively). As for the perception of a better life in general, defined as the percentage of respondents who believe that the life has both improved during the last year and who expect further improvements after one year, 43 per cent of women in Serbia and 36 per cent of men believe so. Among the respondents from Roma settlements, only 26 per cent of both women and men share this belief.

- **The impact on prevailing attitudes towards education, health, social and financial security:** In the previous chapters, we have stated that the attitude of a large part of the Roma community towards education, health, social and financial security, is marked by extreme poverty and immensely difficult living conditions. The results of focus groups and interviews showed that, in the Roma population, there is awareness about the importance of education, health care (especially when children are concerned), and the ability to become financially independent. However, above all, there is knowledge that poverty limits the current living possibilities and access to guaranteed rights, and hence the low level of aspirations, as if there was no future and no time to wait.

The model of raising preschool children in Roma families, according to Roma activist Stevan Nikolić, is different compared to the one of the majority population, because the family is aligned to traditional values “which places exceptional emphasis on children.” “I think that we are still not sensitized enough to education, towards the need for education. Great love is exhibited inside Roma families, while exceptionally small emphasis is placed on the preparation of children for school. In order to see certain changes in a community one should wait for 30 to 80 years. Roma families are marginalized, we can’t expect them to change their way of thinking overnight, as they must become aware and conscious, and this takes time.”

Building trust in long-term investments and the effects of long-term processes presents a great challenge. For example, it is hard for those concerned to truly believe that, in 15 to 20 years, the inclusion of the child below 3 years of age in PE will result in employment and better living conditions for that child, as well as for the Roma community in general. Unemployment (together with poverty) forces parents in the Roma community to make choices which are not always best for their children.

“Preschool (PPP) is mandatory, and kindergarten, that is not mandatory and it costs, few Roma have a permanent job with a regular income, everything would be different if parents were employed.”

(Focus group, health mediators, Novi Sad, 2010)

- **Internalized oppression:** Internalized oppression is very present. Confronted with the system and its representatives, Roma parents do not try hard to get their guaranteed rights. They give up without a fight. According to statements in focus groups, they harbour feelings of shame and a prevailing sense of helplessness,

reconciliation with destiny, accepting the inferior, marginal position and its hopelessness. The impoverished state income support analysis study²⁸⁸ shows that the requests for improvement of Family Financial Assistance were filed by a mere 10 per cent of the eligible poor²⁸⁹ because of the personal belief that they do not qualify and the complicated procedures for filing a request.

- To deal only with problems of the Roma community, or to get involved in all the political processes that are currently underway in Serbia and to have a direct impact on the policies concerning children at an early age: If Roma people really want to solve their chronic socio economic problems and enable their own development in a sustainable way, they need to strengthen their inner capacities and get involved in solving relevant problems by creating the conditions necessary for Roma children to enjoy the same rights and possibilities as do all other children. The area of focus would be not only the Roma-targeting policies, but all the proposed policies that deal with aspects referring to the problems of the Roma community, with a special emphasis on young children and their families.

This challenge is discussed not to additionally burden the Roma community, to blame victims or deny extreme poverty and hard life conditions. On the contrary its purpose is to empower the Roma community and stress domains in which each and all members can make a difference. The Roma do not need to become members of the majority community, to merge with them and fit in the existing system, but to construct a new identity and new practices which will benefit the Roma community and society in general.

Challenge 3: The gap between legislative aspirations and implementation on the ground

Chapter 2 gives a thorough overview of existing laws and by-laws, relevant strategies, programmes and measures, the majority of which have been harmonized with international standards and are considered to be of high-quality and progressive for the Republic of Serbia. The International Report²⁹⁰ on the influence of state policies on four priority areas of DRI indicates that, among the DRI countries, Serbia comes first in the field of employment, and second in the field of education. Positive developments in accessibility to health care by vulnerable groups of citizens are evident within the Roma population. According to the estimates by the Decade Watch NGO,²⁹¹ when compared to neighbouring countries, Serbia is in second place in relation to the index of Roma integration development in the last five years. The analysis of the influence of policy measures created and implemented by the Ministry of Health, in the field of Roma health care, indicates that the measures implemented were efficient and profitable and the analysis recommended that implementation of the measures should continue.²⁹²

The changes underway in Serbia to integrate the Roma, over the last five years, have been assessed as extremely good. However, the integration level is still very low and the discrimination level is still high.²⁹³ Results from focus groups indicate that the regulations guarantee a much higher level of services than actually occurs in practice.

288 Matković and Mijatović, 2009.

289 According to the Living Standards Measurement Survey, 2007.

290 Decade Watch, Results of the 2009 survey (September 2010), Roma Initiatives, Open Society Institute.

291 Decade Watch (2009): Results of the survey 2009.

292 The team of the Deputy Prime Minister for implementation of the Strategy for poverty reduction (2009): Analysis of the impact of the health care policy measures on the accessibility of health care to the Roma population, Belgrade.

293 *Ibid.*

The biggest problems seem to occur in putting policy into practice and in establishing procedures and information flow between local and national levels. Real obstacles occur when policy implementation starts, because systems are often created without analysing the practical conditions and capacity to implement them, and the different actors in education lack support for the proposed new roles that await them, following legislative change.²⁹⁴ Although education is cited as an example here, there are identical problems in social care and health care.

The study "Analysis of the Influence of State Financial Support to the Poor"²⁹⁵ indicates that there are considerable weaknesses within the system of support to the poor, related to insufficient human and material resources, lack of training, incomplete legal procedures, and poor motivation for high-quality work.

"In every legal document and subordinate acts the mechanism to exercise rights has to be recognized, and in every executive procedure of the mechanism one has to recognize responsibility, define material and human resources and secure the mechanism for monitoring and reporting, in order to define a chain of responsibility and evaluation... This has to be valid at all levels – from the national level to the level of local self-government... But this is usually not so... Bodies are founded but they do not get the funds... Responsibilities are delegated but there is no obligation to implement them... Nor are there any sanctions for what is not done..."

(Dragana Koruga, Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, coordinator of the programme School without Violence, UNICEF, January 2011)

Within focus groups and via interviews, the following challenges/problems were identified:

- **Priorities (needs) approach vs. rights-based approach and financial limits:**
Almost every strategic document begins with the sentence: "Financing measures and activities established by the action plan, the financing of which is stipulated by budgetary resources, will be realized according to budgetary possibilities and priorities determined..." which leaves much flexibility for whether something will be done or not. This is of vital importance for the inclusion of young Roma children and their families, because there is no guarantee that they will be prioritized. For example, PE below the age of 5.5 years is not obligatory, so there is a possibility this will not be recognized as important, and especially PE for children under the age of 3. The following factors do not give reason for optimism: the current economic situation in Serbia, its low GDP, and low allocations. Comparative analysis of GDP allocations using the EU methodology indicate that the percentage allocated to education in Serbia is close to the average EU27 level and amounts to 5.3 per cent. However, in absolute terms, these allocations are distinctly lower due to lower GDP; the share for material support in the 2007 budget was 0.52 per cent, while the share for child benefits in the same year was 1.32 per cent, and both values had a declining trend.²⁹⁶ In addition, in the post-war years and due to financial crisis, the first budgetary restrictions made were on health care, education and social care.

294 Baucal and Stojanović, 2010.

295 Matković and Mijatović, 2009.

296 *Ibid.*

The majority of the current programmes, projects and measures intended to implement policy to improve the position of young Roma children and those of primary school age are financed by IPA funds, the World Bank (DILS Project) and other donors (REF, FOSS, OSI, UNICEF, OSCE). The real question is – what will happen when the projects conclude, especially when the DRI ends in 2015? Will there be high awareness of the need to prioritize a solution to the issues of social inclusion and poverty reduction? Will the state supply the needed funds from its own resources? Will there be a budgetary allocation targeting Roma health improvement?

The next and even more complex issue is that of maintaining the results accomplished so far, i.e. securing their sustainability. Can funds be earmarked for continuation of quality measures, when external financing stops? The situation with teaching assistants serves as a warning. Although they are recognized by law, and their results and the value of their work are fully recognized, the State has a real problem in securing budgetary funds for their salaries. This fact puts their existence within the system in significant danger and presents a potentially big loss for Roma children and their parents, for the Roma community, and for the education system as a whole.

Finally, there is the issue of the financial capacities of local self-governments: can they earmark funds and how much would be taken from their reserves to fulfil their duties according to law, especially because the poorest population (including Roma) live in the poorest units of local government? Are there alternative ways to earmark funds? Can services be paid via tax exemption or special vouchers, as is done in some EU countries?²⁹⁷ In order to improve the inclusion of Roma children at an early age, and their families, it is vital to improve existing services (e.g. material family support, children's allowances, securing social housing, etc.), and also to introduce new, more diversified services, adapted to suit the needs of the groups for whom they are intended.

- **Political will:** political will is represented at the level of documents created (much more on the national than on the local level), but in practice it appears not to be genuine political will. This is evident in the words used, such as “We will help Roma children...;” “We will give child allowances;” “We will earmark funds, build a kindergarten for them;” “We will get them in it;” “We will vaccinate them;” all of which indicates that the Roma population appears not to be accepted as citizens with rights equal to the rest of population, but as people for whom favours are done. Political will can best be judged through the implementation of the laws throughout all levels of society. (See the section on discrimination).
- **Human resources:** much attention is paid to human resources to carry out the adopted policies. This is the result of focus groups and interview feedback that “radically new policies,” such as inclusion, cannot be carried out by “existing staff” without sufficient support through additional training and continuing development.

“The public-health nurse did not come at all when I got home from maternity hospital with my baby. So I went to the health centre, and they told me that I should bring my baby there, because the nurse was afraid of dogs in the settlement and would not come for a visit.”

(A mother, focus group, Deponija, August 2010)

297 Penn, 2009.

Experience with female health mediators and teaching assistants indicates how a different approach to work and new working principles (orientation towards the Roma community, and working within the Roma community) yield good results. Although a large part of their accomplishments (described in Chapter 2) are attributed to their ethnicity (they are Roma men and women), we believe that this is not the only reason for their success. If we see how they work, and on what, we get the image of professionals who are educated to work with marginalized groups on their social and educational inclusion; whose work is based on forming long-lasting close relationships with the users; who work in a person's own living space (on their ground); whose task is to strengthen individuals and groups to fight and cope with problems of life; and, whose basic aim is to build up trust towards the community and individuals with whom they work. Maybe this is a description of a new profession,²⁹⁸ or a model which can be transferred to existing services in order to make them more available for the Roma community?

- **Too many new laws and by-laws:** which lead to misunderstanding and a lack of information and which results in potential mis-information to users of the services. Some cases have been described in previous sections of this report and they refer to the giving of wrong information about what documents are needed to enrol children in preschool institutions and primary schools; getting material family support and children's allowances; and, their state of health. An efficient way of informing people about new laws and by-laws, and the opportunities arising from them is missing. Sometimes there are complicated procedures for obtaining the right ones: for example, to receive a child's allowance 15 documents are required, which is a formidable obstacle for Roma parents.

- **Inter-departmental cooperation:** problems faced by Roma children are generally addressed in isolation from the context in which they live. There is no holistic approach to a child and its family connecting to the environment they live in. An assessment of the influence of a child's living conditions (health, housing, social and education conditions) on their development is not carried out. The current state of services for preschool children is characterized by the bureaucratic insistence of civil services that Roma parents fulfil their obligations, that there should be control and "re-education" instead of a humane approach which would mean building trust with the Roma community, parents and children. Even though the State creates a new atmosphere with laws and strategies, to meet the needs of marginalized groups and individuals, the implementing institutions are, in practice, unable to apply them to solve problems in an efficient way. There is not enough coordination and cooperation among different experts and services so that it is often unclear which expert or service is concerned with a particular Roma child or its family. This "vacuum" between the fields of expertise leads to especially vulnerable groups and individuals being dealt with by everyone, or by no one in particular. In situations when it is necessary to solve some very concrete problems of Roma children and their parents, there can be "organized chaos."²⁹⁹ There is no clear allocation of responsibility, so responsibility for certain tasks is shifted from one field of expertise to another – from teachers to educationalists (or Roma assistants); from educationalists to defectologists; from defectologists to social workers; from social workers to psychologists; from psychiatrists and defectologists (or health-care mediators), etc. Shifting responsibility is particularly noticeable when providing direct help in the field,

298 This description suits most the position of asocial pedagogue. This profession exists in the Scandinavian countries, Slovenia, Germany, Austria, Croatia, Bulgaria.

299 Macura-Milovanović, S., (2010), *The profession of a social educationalist – looking for answers to the problem of socially excluded groups in Serbia*. In Macura-Milovanović, S. (editor): *Social Pedagogy in the Making – Looking for Answers to the Problem of Socially Excluded Groups*. Pedagogical Faculty in Jagodina. The Town of Jagodina.

or in mediation between individuals and the system's institutions.³⁰⁰ For example, requests by health mediators have been denied in the Centre for Social Work, even with all necessary documents submitted; mediators' requests to register children for primary school without all the necessary documents were also not accepted; the lead services do not exchange information on the number of Roma children of preschool or primary school age or those not participating in the obligatory education system programmes. In some cases, problems that occur with inter-departmental cooperation are solved only when the ministries in charge intervene directly.

"A health-care mediator must collect all documentation so that Roma people can get social care and children's allowances and he/she must take it to the Centre for Social Work. At the beginning of my work, the Centre for Social Work did not want to cooperate. I called the Ministry of Health and the woman in charge called the Social Care branch within that municipality. After that call I had all the doors open, I got everything I needed right away."

(Health-care Mediator, June 2010)

All this results in the Roma's loss of motivation, trust and goodwill in the state's ability to provide necessary help and support.

- **Monitoring policy implementation and evaluation:** problems regarding monitoring and reporting on policy implementation and their quality are the reasons why one cannot conclude for certain what measures are successful and have been implemented in the right way, and which measures might have been utilized in a way that made the existing problems worse. It is not rare to have good solutions becoming a cause for new problems and leading to the additional distancing of the Roma population from the majority population. For example, teaching assistants and health-care mediators have accomplished significant results and have benefited Roma children's integration into education, health-care and social care systems, as well as in exercising their own rights. However, all this led to the belief of some of the employees in education, in health care and in social care sectors, that they need not work with Roma any more, and that what needs to be done can be handled by the teaching assistants, the Roma coordinators and the health mediators. So, the existence of the teaching assistants and mediators can be used by others as an excuse for displacing responsibility.

Focus group participants have drawn attention to the importance of how the measured effects are monitored, i.e. what a monitoring unit should be. Generalized trends create a "picture of higher accomplishments" more so than when the situation is monitored in practice at the level of a particular Roma community. There is a need to know in what way a certain measure influences all aspects of the quality of life for young Roma children in an unhygienic settlement. The general impression is that there are no monitoring mechanisms and that there is no review or appropriate adjustment of measures and practices based on monitoring. Hence, re-occurrence of externally imposed solutions is very likely, including copying from other contexts. This leads to solutions which do not really "fit the needs of the Roma community." It has been emphasized that the NGO sector should take a bigger role in evaluation and

300 *Ibid.*

monitoring and that more research is needed to indicate the beneficial effects of early holistic interventions for Roma early-age children.

- **The lack of data:** As early as the 1980s official statistics agencies no longer collected data regarding ethnic backgrounds. As a result, it is now very hard to specify the exact number of Roma children in Serbia, especially the number included in measures taken by the State and local communities. The usefulness of estimates depends on who made them, in what way and for what purpose. There are many reasons for this. Sometimes nationality is hidden for the purpose of protection from discrimination,³⁰¹ and sometimes there is a lack of genuine interest by the State in collecting precise data.³⁰²

“The Roma population do not declare themselves as Roma for fear of a hostile environment. Those who have been integrated into society do not declare themselves because they are afraid they will not find a job, nor do they enrol their children in kindergartens and schools, and they are most afraid of the hostile environment.”

(Slavica Vasić, NGO Bibija, Belgrade, 2010)

When data exists, it is often not comparable, because every organization collects data in their own way. There are no harmonized and standardized procedures of data collection. For example, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia keeps records on schools and preschool institutions in terms of number of buildings; the Ministry of Education and Science keeps the records in terms of number of buildings and facilities in an institution. In the domain of health care there are still big differences in indicators of health conditions and living conditions relating to the health of vulnerable population groups, especially Roma, and the general population. The problem in supplying reliable and comparable data on indicators is still unresolved, although a data base on the status of Roma visited by the Roma health mediators have been established within the Ministry of Health. For children in the general population the data is aggregated which means that it cannot then be used to monitor Roma children's inclusion or to compare them to the general population.

There is also no data exchange at either local or national level. For example, centres for social care who own data on Roma children not included in the education system, do not give this data to schools, due to the lack of mutual cooperation.³⁰³ Quite often, institutions do not submit data promptly to the services and ministries in charge of the inclusion of the Roma population.³⁰⁴ This is primarily because of a lack of understanding of the importance of the data and of developing practices based on this data (i.e. evidence-based practice). In order to solve this problem, the Ministry of Education and Science has adopted the Rulebook on Education Records (2010), and by-laws regulating obligations in

301 Baucal, Stojanović, 2010 – this publication deals with the indicators of the accessibility of quality education to the Roma, there is much data on reasons why the Roma do not declare themselves as Roma.

302 The Situation is changing – As a part of preparation for the 2011 census, a publication in the Romani language “The Roma in census has been prepared.

303 Baucal, Stojanović, 2010, pp. 20–25.

304 As early as 2002 the Ministry of Education and Science 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, and now there has been a transfer to the Central Education Information System which is to fully start operating in 2011/12.

data provision and their input into a new information system.³⁰⁵ What is definitely missing is research work dealing with children from age 0 to 6, to monitor the effects of existing practices on Roma children (recording the initial condition), as well as the effects of measures being introduced. At the moment (in the education domain) the only research is that on school age and PPP children.

Challenge 4: Widespread discriminatory attitudes and practices toward Roma by the majority population

The greatest part of this report deals with problems faced by the poorest and the most deprived part of the Roma population. This kind of approach is valuable because it emphasizes the depth of the problems the Roma population deals with, however, it also represents a potential risk or trap, because it sends a message that the *Roma population is homogeneous* and that *the solution to the problem is universal*. The idea of homogeneity also implies that all Roma children, and their families, are the same; that they have the same needs and that they should be treated in the same way. As stated in Chapter 1, the Roma population in Serbia is very heterogeneous, Roma people differ from one another just as non-Roma people do. They differ in particular by language, religion, origin, economic status, and level of education. One thing that is in common to all members of the Roma population is that, regardless of the level of education and economic status, they suffer discrimination and have less freedom of choice than the members of the majority population.

The “glass box” phenomenon illustrates that the most educated Roma people most often end up working on Roma issues, few are working in other areas, or if they do, they do not declare themselves as Roma people, out of fear of stigmatization or, regardless of qualifications, they are disqualified by ethnic affiliation.

(Discussions with representatives of Roma NGOs)

According to the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, Nevena Petrušić (2010) although Serbia has a good legal framework against discrimination, research shows that discrimination is still widespread and that Roma people constitute the most vulnerable groups.³⁰⁶ The most common problems concerning discrimination against Roma people are: removal of slums; entries into registry books for the issue of personal documents, without which it is difficult to qualify for many legally regulated rights including especially re-admission of Roma people from the EU; and, expressions of hatred and intolerance, some cases of which have led to prosecution. One of the biggest problems is the low level of health care provided to the Roma population. The most common violations of rights to health care, as indicated by case studies in Belgrade and Novi Sad, are the lack of response by doctors when called to help Roma women in labour; non-responses to calls to emergency services; encountering discrimination when visiting health care centres; stigmatization; insults on the grounds of ethnicity; charging fees for deliveries to Roma women who did not have health cards; for internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija, without health cards or certificates, not stamping medical letters of reference stating their right to healthcare for internally displaced persons etc.³⁰⁷ Some of

305 Baucal and Stojanović, 2010.

306 B92, February, 2011.

307 Antić 2005; Jovanović, 2005.

the above mentioned forms of violation of Roma rights to healthcare were also reported in focus groups with Roma women in the Deponija settlement in Belgrade. The majority of those women did not have the obligatory five visits from the public-health nurses during the postnatal period. The Ministry of Health, through the work of health mediators, tries to overcome the lack of postnatal visits, and similar problems. The mediators inform nurses of cases where women give birth in their homes, and draw attention to cases where the visits are not made.

Focus groups and interviews pointed to the power of civil servants attitudes toward Roma people. In policy planning, the importance of this element is often overlooked and minimized, and in practice, it becomes visible and has enormous impact on their implementation and effect. What we forget is that civil servants are in most cases members of the majority population and that, therefore, they share the majority's beliefs and attitudes, i.e., they behave according to the prevailing discourse and "truth" regimes³⁰⁸ in a state which greatly dehumanizes Roma people and which implicitly justifies all kinds of behaviours toward them. According to the members of the focus groups, the discriminatory behaviour toward Roma people by the representatives of different civil services is most often manifested through the denial of services; giving untrue or incomplete information; and, the breaking of established laws. In addition, Roma are often ignored, undermined, ridiculed and shown a complete lack of acceptance of responsibility from officials, for correcting the consequential effects of discrimination. According to our interlocutor, as far as Roma people are concerned, "*civil services fail to do their job*" (Roma coordinator, June, 2010).

The head of an elementary school rejected the request of health mediators to enrol Roma children without personal documents.

A Roma woman from the settlement, who tried to enrol her child in the kindergarten, described the reactions of the persons in charge in these words: "*As soon as they see black (skin) colour, (they say) good bye!*"

(A mother, focus group, June 2010)

"Discrimination is present on a grand scale, when they see that the parent is Roma, the child can be both clean and intelligent, and they don't pay any attention to him/her."

(Health Mediator, June 2010).

The already mentioned, the Impoverished State Income Support Analysis study³⁰⁹ shows that there are significant flaws in the attitudes of the social workers within the system of support to the impoverished. It is within the prerogative of these social workers to

308 Foucault, M. (1977): *Discipline and Punish*. Allen Lane: London.

309 Matković and Mijatović, 2009.

estimate the income support and a number of socially disadvantaged people are rejected with the explanation that they are young, healthy and capable of earning their living if they wanted to do so.³¹⁰

Roma women from the settlement in Deponija (August, 2010) in Belgrade were informed by the Centre for Social Work in Palilula municipality that they cannot apply for social support, unless they are single mothers or invalids: *“They told us: you’re young, you’re healthy, go find a job and work.”*

“Whether or not Roma people receive social help also depends on the good will of the social worker. The social worker will give it to whoever he likes. In practice, it happened that people wanted to complain about the head of the Centre for Social Work; she is simply like that, she provokes, and insults people; we filed a petition, but no use, social workers protect each other.”

(Health mediator, focus group, June 2010)

Where housing is concerned, one flagrant example of the unequal treatment of Roma people was the process of displacement of the illegal and unhygienic Roma settlement underneath Gazela Bridge (Belgrade, 2009), which violated a series of rights. Their rights to private and family life were violated, as well as their right to effective legal remedy and their entitlement to private property.³¹¹ The treatment which members of the Roma minority received in some of the documented cases could bring into question the respect given to the human dignity of these people. What is particularly worrying in this example is the fact that no other illegal settlement problems are solved in this way, only those of Roma settlements. Different types of discrimination, which go unnoticed, or unsanctioned, not only result in the additional retreat and self-isolation of Roma communities and their loss of trust in the majority community and Serbian Government, but also the strengthening of the majority population’s belief that all actions toward Roma people are acceptable. The atmosphere of intolerance toward Roma communities was worsened by media reports and official statements. Such acts, in which the basic rights of these communities are denied, can be qualified as hate speech which encourages and deepens intolerance towards Roma people and creates an atmosphere in which Roma people feel insecure and vulnerable.

“People need work, they promised that if we accept living in the containers, they will find us jobs, but here we are, a year without work. When the European Union comes, they open these competitions, we apply, they say that they are full, that there are no more vacancies. And then it looks like Roma people won’t work. There were only two positions available in waste management, but on the condition that they passed elementary school, but there are no such people here.”

(Focus group, Barajevo, June 2010)

310 Matković and Mijatović, 2009, pp. 45–46.

311 Vodinelić and Gajin, 2009.

The good thing is that owing to these laws and by-laws the discrimination becomes more visible and thus, there is more opportunity to react to it.³¹²

At the level of education, a number of investigations have been carried out which show that discrimination exists and that it also occurs at the level of educational workers, children, and their parents from the non-Roma population. The research at the level of PE exists, but it is most often conducted on very small samples and mainly on the attitudes of the majority parents and children.

Focus groups pointed to another type of discrimination manifested through “culturalization of inequality.”³¹³ This discrimination occurs where the non-action and disrespect of Roma community rights is explained by their cultural and ethnic specificities, which absolves civil servants from the violation of Roma rights.

Challenge 5: An under-estimation of the potential of the preschool system

We have singled out the PE system because we believe that it has the capacity to act as a resource centre for other services, which are important for the inclusion of Roma children and their families primarily due to the multifunctional nature of preschool institutions (education, health and social care) and the diversity of staff working in them (teachers/instructors, nurses, social workers, defectologists, psychologists, etc.). The new laws, LOFES and LPE, do provide major changes in PE in terms of increased accessibility and coverage, as well as provision of high quality diversified³¹⁴ services to children from different communities, all of which were elaborated in detail in Chapter 3. The current projects DILS, IMPRES and EFA (also described in chapter three) have as one of their important goals, the stimulation of inter-sectoral cooperation in the best interest of Roma children and their families. Despite a good legal basis and the models being created (or already existing), there are problems and challenges that still endure and prevent the fulfilment and utilization of the full potential of PI's and PE's:

- **Early age from 0 to 3 years:** regarding the situation of Roma children, there is a striking focus on “compensation” for missed opportunities (and compensation for the unfavourable influences of growing up in a deprived environment), such as preparation for school enrolment and schooling in general. Appropriate attention to children at an earlier age (3–5 years old, and also 0–3 years old) and their families is lacking and opportunities for action are being missed that could and should have been taken when the time is right.
- **Low coverage of children at the level of the general population, and especially of children from marginalized groups:** possible coverage is being calculated based only on the existing facilities and norms, while other possibilities are very rarely taken into account. In the domain of education, the National Millennium Development Goals establish that, by 2015, 70 per cent of children in Serbia, aged 3–7, should be covered by PE, with a special emphasis on the population of socially excluded children. The NAP for children emphasizes that the number of PI should be doubled, and that their uniform geographical distribution should be taken into account. New preschool facilities have to be built in those places where highly vulnerable Roma children live, or else some other space suitable for the introduction of PE programmes has to be

312 Here, there are exceptionally active CSOs such as Coalition Against Discrimination <http://www.cups.rs> and Minority Rights Centre <http://www.mrc.org.rs>.

313 Vandenbroek, 2007.

314 One of the committees founded by the MES is the Committee for the Development of Rulebook on Special Programmes.

secured (i.e. through adapting empty school buildings, or teachers apartments, and the change of use of some abandoned buildings, etc.).³¹⁵

- **Change in the conception of PE's function and of the programmes implemented within PE:** The current dominant opinion that PE and PIs serve to provide support to employed parents, implicitly defines their social function as being dominant; compensation, socialization and developmental functions are neglected. This leads to the occurrence of the phenomenon called the "PI paradox"; meaning that the PI (which is probably the social institution with the greatest potential to stimulate the social inclusion of children from poorer families as early as possible) in practice, actually decelerates social cohesion. Since they are attended predominantly by children who are anyway better-off and they deliver supposedly quality service, the kindergartens logically stimulate the psychosocial, cognitive and emotional development of the better-off children and thus expand the gap between the better-off children and the children from poorer backgrounds, making it even more difficult to overcome at a later age.³¹⁶ Research in Serbia indicates, that PIE is used by 64.1 per cent of children from well-off families but by only 7.4 per cent of children from poor families.³¹⁷
- **Understanding inclusion:** When considering the inclusion of Roma children in the PE system, the authorities usually try to think of ways to fit the children into the existing system, and not to change the system to fit the children.
- **"Desk Approach" focusing on the children within the formal system, and not on all children in the community:** There is a lack of programmes and content outside the PI facilities. Programmes are required that "follow children and try to come nearer to them," and are specifically directed towards the Roma community and provided within the community.
- **Rearranging PE, and especially PPP to resemble schools:** The problem indicated by the data gathered in many of the case studies is the phenomenon of making the work with preschool children more school-like. For instance, using contents and teaching methods more suitable for schools than for preschools such as: teaching reading and writing; sitting continuously for 30 minutes; making demands that resemble those made by teachers in schools; and even introducing homework.³¹⁸ According to data provided by the MES, the choice of programmatic model (model A or model B), from the General Bases of a Preschool Programme, is not essential for the quality of the work of teachers in PPP. What is much more important is the experience and the working competence of the teacher/instructor. In any case, PPP has been found to be one of the best measures introduced, and needs to be utilized in the best possible way.
- **The price of free programmes:** when Roma children are enrolled in non-compulsory PE (younger than 5.5 years) and in PPP (which is free) this entails additional financial demands that Roma parents cannot provide for (e.g. slippers, clothes, workbooks).

315 The Serbian Government has just sent for adoption the Decision on the Criteria for the Issuance of the Network of Preschool Institutions Act, and the Network of School Institutions Act (MES RS, 2010).

316 Begin at the beginning, beginig isimportant, 2010.

317 The First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, 2011.

318 Report on the Case Studies, 2008, as quoted in Pesikan and Ivić, 2009, p. 27.

- **Mono-culturality of PIs and PE:** It is very difficult for Roma children to feel accepted in an environment which does not value the community that they come from. This relates to the problems of initial education of the nurses and preschool teachers.
- **Quality of PE:** Recent studies of the quality of programmes implemented with children aged 0–6 years were not available to us, but an analysis of the effects of PPP conducted by Ivic and Pesikan (2009) indicated that one of the key factors for the quality of PPP is the qualifications and aptitude of the teaching staff. According to the opinions of experts for preschool instruction and education, this appears to be the weakest point of PPP, as no systematic training for working in PPP has yet been provided. The problem is more prominent in environments where PPP is provided by primary school teachers, since preschool teachers/instructors are better prepared in the course of their basic education to provide PPP. Another problem is that PPP is usually provided by young teachers/instructors who do not possess sufficient experience, knowledge or additional training to create a high quality programme, or to adjust it to different children. In practice, PPP is often provided by young teachers/instructors, because the PPP working hours cover only 75 per cent of the time of a regular job, which implies lower wages, and so is often avoided by experienced teachers/instructors.³¹⁹ The research quoted in Chapter 3³²⁰ shows that Roma children in PPP were placed in facilities of an inferior quality, with less equipment. The IPA IMPRES project will create the necessary conditions for quality, while the Institute for Evaluation of Education Quality will work on the development of standards for self-evaluation.
- **Reactions of the parents from the majority population to the enrolment of Roma children:** As already described, except in some isolated cases there have not yet been situations, in which the hostility of parents from the majority population has surfaced, probably due to the fact that there are not many Roma children in PIs. This does not mean that this will always be the case, and that PIs should not prepare and profit from the experiences of primary schools.
- **Insufficient support to Roma parents and their inclusion in PI bodies:** Chapter 3 describes the participation of parents largely based on the traditional model. The major problem for Roma parents is gaining trust in PIs, as well as to feel accepted and welcome there.
- **Diversification of service:** Specific and special programmes currently being implemented within PE are mainly confined to learning a foreign language,³²¹ folk and modern dance, karate, art workshops and the like, during summer and winter holidays. What they all have in common is that they are all accessible mainly only to the children of well-off families, because they have to be paid for. In diversifying the services, PIs could be supported by privately owned providers, as well as NGOs whose knowledge and expertise have never been utilized to their full extent. The introduction of diversified forms of work raises questions of financing, standards of quality, professional support by the relevant institutions and agencies, and of the professional staff's motivation to review their customary working practice.
- **Capacities and resources of local governments to implement the activities in education for which they are responsible:** This raises the question of support that PIs have to receive in order to implement the activities within their authority. A particularly important issue is that of constant monitoring at the local level, and the

319 Pesikan and Ivić, 2009.

320 Simic and Skarep, 2010, unpublished.

321 In Belgrade, free-of-charge English language classes were introduced into PPP as a support measure.

keeping of records on children outside the education system, who need additional support, in cooperation with educational institutions, school management bodies and systems of health care, social care and PE.

Two very sensitive, complex and topical issues have been left until the end of this report. These two issues provoke diverse opinions and have brought about divisions in professional, and in Roma, communities. They are:

- **Organizing programmes for young Roma children in Roma settlements:**

One of the reasons for representatives of the Roma community to be against targeted services is the possible segregation of children, as well as the fear of further ghettoization which prevents, postpones or slows down inclusion. On the other hand, there is a section of the Roma community that believes the existence of such programmes is a good thing, and that it may contribute to the additional strengthening of Roma children before their inclusion in desegregated programmes. The experiences of some NGOs, both Roma and non-Roma, in the implementation of programmes in Roma settlements (e.g. Development and Education Centres, Kindergarten as a Family Centre), has shown that such interventions may positively influence the children's development, their sense of security, self-respect and general readiness for school. These are holistic programmes which, apart from being easily accessible, provide high quality educational work for Roma children, as well as the participation of their parents. The success at school of children who attended the programmes in their settlements depends, however, more on the quality of teaching and the extent to which the school is inclusive.

Acceptance of segregated education groups/classes/schools – or desegregation always and at any cost (planned redistribution of Roma children to different primary

schools and PIs in order for them to be with the majority population including transporting children to different education institutions): We consider that, in relation to segregated groups in PIs and PSs (PIs and schools with a large number of Roma pupils, located in the vicinity of Roma settlements, or those from which the majority children have withdrawn), the emphasis is, somewhat unduly, put on the percentage of Roma children in a class/PI/school, instead of on the quality of work/education provided to the children. The attitudes diverge: on the one hand there is an opinion that children should not be moved to other schools, but the high quality of service for the schools with a large number of Roma children has to be secured; others think that children have to be systematically redistributed to other schools/preschools in order to be with their peers in mixed groups. The solution is yet to be found.

In any case, these issues constitute a serious argument, and their resolution should involve all interested parties (including children and their parents), so that the solutions adopted can be in the best interests of the children.

“Roma schools exist, because Roma children have no other place to go to. If we are to scatter them all over the place to other schools, we won't get any educated Roma people, because the integration that we create is an artificial one and it cannot be sustained. Nothing will be achieved in that way, although it may be a European trend to integrate, it won't do any good, since the child is isolated from his/her group and cannot deal with the pressure.”

(Milica Simić, the Roma Child Centre)

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Recommendations³²²

Taking the challenges mentioned in this report as the starting point, together with the results of the consultation held in Belgrade on 15 March, 2011 and in the context of human rights, especially as they apply to women and children, the recommendations from this report are set out below.

Recommendations for promoting the importance of early age quality interventions, and especially for young Roma children

1. Organize a national campaign to promote the importance of early age quality interventions for all children, and especially for children from deprived environments such as Roma.

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and Ministry of Health (for these activities support can be provided by international organizations such as UNICEF, Open Society Foundations, and REF).

Deadline: 2012.

2. Undertake an analysis of the “new challenges of childhood”³²³ faced by young children in Serbia, especially children from deprived environments. Publish the results and organize forums with parents, teachers, paediatricians and social workers.

Responsibility: This activity could be implemented through cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, and the Ministry of Health (each from their own perspective).

Deadline: 2012–2013.

3. Translate into Serbian and Romani, the most relevant and recent research on the importance of early child development, the recommendations for improving the

322 The recommendations were made based on the consultations held in Belgrade on 15 March, 2011, organized by Open Society Foundations, REF and UNICEF.

323 The original term Newly Emerging Needs of young children – NEN Nico van Oudenhoven (e.g. HIV-AIDS, drug abuse, objectionable content on TV in the TV shows watched by children, an increase in violence among children, access to information even at an early age through the Internet, etc.).

overall situation of children (e.g. recommendations of the European Commission³²⁴ from 2011), and the research findings of the impact of poverty on all aspects of child development. Upload this translated information to relevant websites so that they are available to professionals and the general public.

Responsibility: SIPRU. This team can be responsible because, through its activities it already has significant experience in the area, and could therefore be engaged in cooperation with the relevant ministries.

Deadline: On-going.

4. Organize a national campaign to inform the public about the effects of poverty on young children and the ways to mitigate its consequences.

Responsibility: This activity could be initiated by the team of the Deputy Minister for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction, in collaboration with the relevant ministries and with the Council for Improvement of the Status of Roma and the Implementation of the DRI of the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

Deadline: 2012.

5. Produce a brochure for parents and organize forums in which parents could be informed about the possibilities of joining and/or forming formal and informal groups. Also invite Roma parents to the meetings, and if necessary, organize these meetings within the settlements. Encourage parents to come together in order to influence decision making (including impacts of policy development and resolving specific situations). This is especially important for Roma children and their parents on behalf of whom the actions are being taken and who rarely have the opportunity to be heard on how they think some problems can be solved.

Responsibility: This could be an initiative of the NGO sector with the support of the Centre for the Development of the Non-profit Sector.

Proposed deadline: 2011–2012.

6. Within the indicators for monitoring social inclusion and poverty reduction, group and incorporate indicators that will reveal the condition of young children of early age (at the level of the entire population and at the level of the Roma population).

Responsibility: SIPRU.

Deadline: 2012.

7. Within the Strategy for the Development of Education, which is in preparation, a special emphasis should be placed on early education and children's healthy growth and development (focus on age from conception to 8 years) as well as on the effects of quality PIE on later success in school and life (not only PPP) especially when it comes to children from deprived environments (Roma children).

Responsibility: This initiative could be launched by the Ministry of Education and Science in cooperation with the National Council on Education and with the support of the Council for Improvement of the Status of Roma and Implementation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion of the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

Proposed deadline: 2011.

324 Representatives from Serbia, Roma Education Centre, representatives of Network of Organizations for Children, CIP – Centre for Interactive Pedagogy... have also participated in creating these recommendations.

Recommendations for overcoming problems in the Roma community that affect its development

1. Develop a strategy at the level of the National Council of the Roma National Minority (NCRNM) for promoting the Roma community in order to present Roma men and women as equal citizens of Serbia – de-construct the stereotypical image of the Roma in relation to their attitude toward children and family, women, knowledge, skills.

Within this recommendation, the following activities may be of importance:
Create video clips, movies, brochures, publications which will:

- Promote the knowledge, skills and accomplishments of Roma men and women.
- Promote educated Roma men and women and the way in which Roma families provide support to children in school (as opposed to the belief that Roma do not value education).
- Promote the status of children in the Roma family and community, knowledge and skills fostered in children which enable them to survive the situation they are in, and refer to independence, solving life's problems, caring about their own safety and the safety of their siblings, etc. (as opposed to the belief that Roma do not care about their children).
- Promote the traditional and creative skills of Roma for their children.
- Present aspirations and "dreams" that Roma have for their children and problems they are faced with in their realization, as well as the way in which they solve them.
- Promote the capacities of the Roma community to contribute to society as a whole. Abandon the "deficit model" (a constant specifying of flaws and weaknesses that exist in the Roma community, areas in which children and parents are unsuccessful, etc.) and focus on the potentials and strengths that lie in the Roma community, especially when it comes to young children.

Responsibility: NCRNM.

Deadline: Start work immediately.

2. From the level of NCRNM, issue a statement on discriminatory behaviours toward girls, women and young women within every Roma community that cannot be tolerated and that are against the law, in order to improve the status of Roma females, and thus the status of Roma children.

Responsibility: NCRNM.

Deadline: Start immediately.

3. Build a support network for women and mothers within Roma settlements (in collaboration with the police) whose representatives they would be able to contact when they have questions to which they do not know the answers or when they are exposed to violence or any kind of violation of their rights, both in the Roma community and outside of it. One of the network's activities should also be the literacy of mothers and fathers, as well as the strengthening of their parental competencies.

Responsibility: NCRNM, League for the Decade of Roma.

Deadline: March, 2012.

4. At the level of Roma community, develop and implement programmes of "self-development" – micro credits, self-employment, etc. Special attention needs to be paid to the possibilities of financial independence of Roma women.

Responsibility: NCRNM.

Deadline: Start work immediately.

5. Develop networks for mutual support for Roma NGOs that deal with the questions of growth, development and education of young Roma children, mothers and families and within them, organize further strengthening of the activists, as well as mobilization of new members. Within the network, collect and present examples of good practice (programmes for children, women, families, health improvement, education of adults) which emerged on the initiative of the Roma community and work in Roma community and require that they become part of the decisions rendered at the level of local self-government and the state.

Responsibility: Roma NGO sector in collaboration with NCRNM and local self-governments.

Proposed deadline: Start work immediately.

6. Make a plan of participation of Roma men and women representatives of NCRNM, especially from the relevant boards, civil society organizations/League for the Decade of Roma Inclusion for developing policies which refer to children's rights, education, health and social protection in order to represent the rights of Roma children and women.

Responsibility: NCRNM.

Deadline: End of 2011.

7. At the level of the Roma community, organize consultations with parents on implementation of policies related to them, which should contribute to solving the specific significant problems for improvement of the status of Roma children and family.

Responsibility: Roma NGOs and NCRNM.

Deadline: Start work immediately.

All these activities and initiatives launched by the Roma community should be provided with support by state institutions and relevant ministries, as well as by the team of the Deputy Minister for the Implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and by international organizations (UNICEF, REF, Fund for an Open Society, Serbia (FOSS), OSCE, etc.)

Recommendations for a more successful implementation of laws

1. Make a detailed analysis of compliance with existing policies (especially in the domains of health, social protection and education), and not only at the level of legal documents, but also at the level of implementation, and make recommendations for overcoming existing discrepancies. Within the analysis, define further directions for development of inter-agency cooperation in order to provide integrated and quality services to young children and their families (with special attention to the Roma population and its needs). The relevant ministries should designate their representatives who would deal with this issue.

Responsibility: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Deadline: 2012.

2. Regulations and recommendations must clearly define the mechanisms for the realization of rights; recognize responsibilities; define both material and human resource needs for implementing the law; and provide mechanisms for monitoring and reporting in order to determine the chain of responsibilities. This regulation needs to exist at all levels from the national level to the level of the local self-government

and individual institutions. Make graphic presentations in the form of brochures and/or posters so that they would be completely available and understandable to the uneducated or poorly educated citizens.

Responsibility: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Deadline: 2012.

3. Provide continuous support to local self-governments in the form of strengthening human resources and providing financial support from the state level. Support may be provided through mentoring experts, exchange of good practice between local self-governments, etc. For the least developed municipalities in which the number of young Roma children (but also all other children) provided with quality services is the smallest, it is necessary to provide financial resources through transfers from the state level from the National Investment Fund, through soft credits and loans, donations, projects or in some other way.

Responsibility: The Government of the Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Deadline: 2013.

4. Establish inter-agency bodies/councils which would work together with the representatives of social and health institutions, as well as representatives of local self-governments, civil society organizations, professional and parents' associations which would deal with developing, implementing and evaluating policies for the early development of children at the local level with a special focus on Roma children. Improve monitoring and evaluation of quality, of the scope and effects of the implemented measures and activities for children and family in order to inform, above all, the preparation of strategic documents and policies. In this way, create the conditions for review and improvement of existing practices.

Responsibility: The Government of the Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Deadline: 2012.

5. Organize and carry out various research studies in order to identify the needs of children and parents (with a special focus on the Roma population) and monitoring the effects of measures and policies related to children and family. Give special focus to the effects of quality integrated interventions at an early age on later school education and success in life. Research needs to be organized so as not to deal with Roma issues in an isolated way, but which provides comparable data. Include universities in the research, encourage students to do term-papers, master and doctoral work on topics related to the described issue. Organize round table discussions, scientific meetings, topical lectures for professors and students from the Faculty of Teacher Education and majors in teaching (methodology).

Responsibility: The Government of the Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Deadline: Start immediately and work continuously on this issue.

6. Provide relevant, quality and reliable data; establish mechanisms and common procedures for collecting data, coordinate data collection with EU standards so that comparisons are possible; define the indicators for monitoring the effects in implementing policies; monitor and collect data separately for vulnerable groups, including Roma children. Provide a networking system and a vertical (within a system)

and horizontal (between different systems eg education, health and social protection institutions) availability of data, as well as the exchange of data between the local and national level.

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Deadline: 2011 – make use of the opportunities opened up by the new census data.

7. Include the Roma community in the process of creating all policies, and not only those that refer to Roma and in this way, guarantee that a certain policy has the benefit of Roma perspectives; the decisions made are likely to be more legitimate. Re-design the existing system of participation of Roma in the process of creating policies and monitoring their implementation – apart from Roma NGOs and legitimate representatives of the Roma community, include also the informal representatives of the Roma community, e.g. parents.

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in cooperation with NCRNM, Council for Improvement of the Status of Roma and Implementation of the Decade of Roma Inclusion of the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

Deadline: Start immediately.

Recommendations with respect to overcoming prejudice and preventing discriminatory practices

1. All relevant institutions (education, health and social protection institutions) should include in their work plans, as well as in the development plans, specific measures to increase inclusiveness (how to include and keep children from marginalized groups, with a special emphasis on Roma children) and prevention of discrimination, as well as the anticipated sanctions for unacceptable behaviours and practices. For these purposes, a list should be made of indicators of discriminatory behaviour as a basis for monitoring in an institution. Include the school board in the planning process, as well as the parents' council (in the educational institutions), representatives of service users, inspectorates (in education, educational inspectors and councillors), representatives of the local self-governments.

Responsibility: The Government of the Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Deadline: September, 2011.

2. Make brochures with a list of behaviours that can be considered discriminatory and inform service users, as well as service providers about them. Brochures should be presented through the media.

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Health,

Deadline: September, 2011

3. Provide education against prejudice and discrimination for employees in institutions from national to the local level (including the inspection and advisory services, directors, patients' rights defenders, employees in the ministries), about the legal regulation and its application in practice; users' rights; establishing the adequate practices and professional behaviour. The training should include the Ombudsman of the Republic of Serbia, Commissioner for Equality of the RS, and provincial ombudsman. Ministries should provide recommendations for mandatory

professional training programmes, as well as the number of hours needed for training in this area.

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Health.

Deadline: 2013.

4. Organize a continuous monitoring of the behaviour of employees in public services.

Responsibility: Directors of PI, relevant Ministries.

Deadline: Start immediately.

Specifically for Education

5. The standards for external evaluation and self-evaluation of preschool institutions must incorporate indicators of inclusiveness, respect for diversity and democracy.

Responsibility: Institute for the Assessment of Education Quality in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science.

Deadline: March, 2012.

6. In defining the competencies of the employees in education (including inspectors and advisors and representatives of schools), special attention needs to be paid to the competencies referring to work in the intercultural context, monitoring discrimination and preventing segregation in education.

Responsibility: Institute for the Assessment of Education Quality in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science.

Deadline: March, 2012.

7. Collect examples of good practice from elementary schools, including the measures and activities taken to prevent discriminatory behaviours, and compile these for publishing in print or on the website of the Ministry of Education and Science.

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Science through local school departments.

Deadline: September, 2011.

8. Use the Roma language in communication with children and parents, in the texts and information given to the parents.

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Science.

Deadline: Immediately.

Recommendations related to preschool instruction and education

1. Develop and improve the PI network, provide conditions for opening-up PI and implementation of PIE in environments where the network is underdeveloped. Upon adopting the Decision on the Criteria for the Implementation of the Act on the Network of Preschool Institutions and the Act on the Network of Elementary Schools³²⁵ they should be implemented in order to create smaller and more flexible preschool institutions.

325 MPS, 2010.

While undertaking this activity, attention should be paid to:

- Particularities of the local environment.
- Solutions that already exist at the local level.
- The needs of the parents and the local community.

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Science.

Deadline: 3 years.

2. At the level of Roma local self-government, organize an information service on ways to exercise the right to PE, with special emphasis on PPP and affirmative action for enrolment of Roma children in PI before starting PPP.

Responsibility: Roma local self-governments in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science.

Deadline: 2011.

3. Organize a public discussion in order to improve and change the current basics of preschool instruction and education programme.

In the process of improving the basics of the programme, attention should be paid to the following questions:

- In defining PI, how can one balance the different functions: educational, socialization, compensatory, and the function of caring for children?
- In defining a particular part of the basics of the programme, and in accordance with the age of children, can one provide recognition of continuity and holistic development of the child?
- Which model, A or B, meets the needs of Roma children to the greatest extent; which one provides the greatest inclusiveness, individualization, parent and child participation; which one puts a greater emphasis on the holistic approach to the child's development; and, which one most promotes the values of family culture and the community the child is from; which one has the greatest respect for the knowledge, skills and life experiences of children?
- How can the bilingual needs of children be respected and integrated, and how can conditions be created to respect and encourage use of the mother tongue of Roma children?
- How can one stop the issues of culture, interculturality, inclusion and respect for differences being introduced as an "additional element" in the regular work with children? In what ways can these topics be integrated in every day work with children?
- How can one deal with issues of Roma culture and identity in a modern, dynamic, present-oriented way in order to prevent Roma children from being trapped in the past and being presented in a way that is often based on stereotypes?
- How can one improve the concept of PPP, and the established understanding of the preparation for starting school, how does it happen, when does it start and what does it mean? In what ways can further scholarization of PPP be prevented and the development of a child's capacity be made the first priority, instead of having to compensate for the missed opportunity, especially for Roma children? How can it be made clear that the preparation for school is more than practicing for school and adapting to its requirements?

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Science.

Deadline: 2012.

4. In adopting the standards for conditions for implementing special programmes in PI and for drawing up the regulations for the implementation of special programmes, it is important also to envisage the programmes (and form of work), that would guarantee greater inclusion of children from marginalized groups (especially Roma children). In developing standards and regulations it is therefore important to ensure that:
 - The opportunities provided by the Law on Preschool Education be utilized and that all legally prescribed programmes (and forms of work), enriched by the experience of the NGO sector, be represented and developed. For the inclusion of Roma children the following is recommended: travelling kindergarten, travelling playgrounds, toy libraries; kindergarten as a resource centre; weekend schools and/or summer schools on parenting; programmes for fathers and mothers; visits to families and work on improving the home environment for studying and development; home crèches; etc.
 - The possibility of inter-sectoral cooperation in the implementation of the programme be taken into consideration: organize programmes for children in libraries, health care institutions, centres for social work, and playgrounds – where children and parents are to be found together.
 - The quality of the programme be monitored and controlled.
 - The proposals within diversified programmes be followed by analysis of expenses and recommendations to the Government and to local self-governments in relation to the programmes and forms of work that are most cost effective.

Responsibility: Institute for the Assessment of Education Quality, in cooperation with Ministry of Education and Science.

Deadline: May 2011 for the Standards, for the regulations, the beginning of 2012.

5. For the youngest Roma children, open kindergartens and organize programmes (for children aged 6 months to starting PPP) as a part of the formal PIE in the settlements in which they live. Kindergartens opened in Roma settlements, should be:
 - Multifunctional, that is, provide children and parents with the possibility of getting information and to obtain their rights from the domain of education, social and health protection, though inter-agency cooperation at the local level.
 - Places where parents will be given the opportunity to educate themselves and to educate their children, this refers especially to Roma mothers.
 - Places from which people will be organized to work on improving the conditions for studying and development in the familial environment.
 - Places where mothers and fathers could be employed, according to their level of education.
 - Able to contribute to the improvement of the environment in which children grow up.
 - Able to offer employees from PIs a financial and/or some other stimulation if they work in the settlements.
 - Capable of organizing work, such that the positive experiences from successful projects undertaken in the Roma settlements is taken into consideration.
 - Able to provide the children and parents who use these kindergartens with constant contact with the majority community, through visits between kindergartens and groups within the same PI, common actions; etc.
 - Able to conduct good quality control of the instruction and education work.

Responsibility: Local self-government, in cooperation with Ministry of Education and Science and representatives of the Roma community.

Deadline: Start immediately with exploration of possibilities for organizing this kind of work.

6. Provide children from the Roma community with additional support in the form of free snacks, the necessary equipment for work, adequate clothing and shoes, hygiene, mandatory health controls (not in the form of social welfare, but in support for creating the conditions for inclusion in the PIE in a way that will not stigmatize children and in conditions for their healthy development). Pay special attention to the compensatory “price of free programmes”

Responsibility: Local self-government in collaboration with Roma NGOs.

Deadline: Immediately.

7. Provide high quality instruction and education work, because this work is of the greatest importance when it comes to children from the Roma community (as well as other vulnerable groups); complete the quality standards for external evaluation; introduce quality principles, agreed on a national level, and then adjusted to the local level and the level of each PI. The quality principles should be built together with parents and children, and the practice of collecting examples of good practice in self-evaluation of schools needs to be continued and these made accessible to all PIs.

Responsibility: Institute for the Assessment of Education Quality, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science and local school departments.

Deadline: 2012.

8. Plans of work and developmental plans for PI should include various ways for Roma parents to participate. Parents should be included systematically in the executive board and parents’ council, and in the drawing-up of the institution’s developmental plans.

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Science.

Deadline: Immediately.

9. Introduce at least 2 years of mandatory PPP for all children and especially for children from the socially excluded groups (Roma children).

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Science and the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Parliament.

Deadline: 2012.

10. In their programmes of work and developmental plans, PIs and PSs should, independently and in cooperation, include the activities and measures directed toward the period of transition (e.g. from the family to PIE, from crèches to kindergarten, and/or from kindergarten in the Roma settlement in the PIs; from PIs to PSs) and in this way create a support network for Roma children and parents, in order to prevent their “exclusion from the system”

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Science (local school departments), Directors and associates of PIs, education counsellors.

Deadline: Immediately.

11. Develop a communications pack (a set of brochures) for promoting the role of quality PE for children from deprived environments, especially for Roma children, with advice on how to encourage a child’s development and create a stimulating environment at home, and how to enrol the child in a PI. This action should include paediatricians,

health visitors, social workers, teaching assistants and health mediators. Pay special attention to children up to the age of 3.

Responsibility: Local self-governments in collaboration with relevant Ministries.

Deadline: Immediately.

12. Introduce quality monitoring of children and collection of relevant data about the youngest children through cooperation between health, education and social protection institutions.

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Health, Local self-government in cooperation with relevant Institutes.

Deadline: Immediately.

13. Complete the design of the training programme for Teaching Assistants as soon as possible (creating modules and choosing the institution that will take over the programmes).

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Science and partners.

Deadline: September 2011.

14. Reform the initial education of nurses, educators and other professionals: introduce topics and content focused on the quality of PIE (teaching strategies; quality of interactions; including parents and communities; individualization; monitoring and observing the individual progress of children; respect for differences; inclusion; justice and equality; a reflective approach to teaching and practice; building communities that learn); education on what kind of support individual children need, as well as children from different groups, and how to accomplish it; familiarization with the newest research related to brain development, studying and further development; enable students to learn from educators when on an internship; introduce work with marginalized children, e.g. children from Roma settlements, as part of internship.

Responsibility: Ministry of Education and Science, together with relevant Institutions for higher Education.

Deadline: 2013.

15. Encourage the creation of in-service (INSET) programmes in which educators, assistants and nurses will all participate, together with the representatives of the local community, Roma community, Roma parents and other parents, as well as representatives of other services (centre for social work, health care institutions, etc.) and learn with them and about them through mutual work.

Responsibility: Institute for Improvement of Education in collaboration with Ministry of Education and Science.

Deadline: The next deadline for accreditation, by the end of 2011.

16. Create a system for monitoring the effects of INSET programmes and prepare educational inspectors and educational advisors for evaluation of the INSET programmes.

Responsibility: Relevant Institutes.

Deadline: 2012.

Recent Developments

This report was completed and prepared for publication in early 2011. In the interim some changes have occurred; some of the most important ones that relate to young children and their families are described below.

Data

- According to the data provided by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the coverage of children by preschool education has increased on the territory of the Republic of Serbia: 48.6 per cent (in Central Serbia 84,708 children, i.e. 42.62 per cent, in Vojvodina 53,452 children, i.e. 51.29 per cent and in Belgrade 52,456 children, i.e. 58.56 per cent).³²⁶

Percentage of children covered			
Aged 1–3	Aged 3–5.5	Aged 5.5–6.5	Total
21.70	47.71	88.26	46.80

As far as Roma children are concerned, the situation continues to be of concern.

	Total number of enrolled children	Roma children	Per cent of Roma children
Aged 1–3	29,969	334	1.11
Aged 3–5.5	84,923	658	0.78
Aged 5.5–6.5	68,609	2,641	3.85
Total	183501	3650	1.99

- In 2011, about 700,000 people live below the poverty line, and social welfare benefits are paid to more than 185,000 people; the number of the unemployed has reached 760,000.
- A negative population growth rate has been recorded in as many as 130 municipalities in Serbia; in certain municipalities the number of inhabitants has been halved.
- In 2011 every eighth child lives below the poverty line (in 2008 every 14th child lived below the poverty line).
- Of 48,000 people using soup kitchens, as many as 6,221 are children.³²⁷

Laws and by-laws

- Significant changes have been made in two Laws related to health care – the Law on Health Care and the Law on Health Insurance. In the Official Gazette of RS no.

³²⁶ Data provided by: Ms. Tijana Glušica, Advisor at the Ministry of Education and Science, Department for Preschool and Primary School Education – Group for Preschool Education – Analysis of territorial coverage by institutional preschool education and coverage of children, with a special focus on children from vulnerable groups, in the school year 2010–2011, Belgrade, May 2011.

³²⁷ Minister of Labour and Social Policy Rasim Ljajić: (2011).

57/2011, dated 01 August 2011, on page 36 are published the amendments to the Law on Health Care (Official Gazette of RS, No.107/05 and No.72/09, No.88/10 and No.99/10), whereby a range of important changes have been introduced in this area (in 48 Articles), such as:

- The Directorate for Screening Programmes will start operating on 1 January 2013, and until that time this function will be performed by the Ministry.
 - Within the social care for the health of the population, the provision of health care services has been expanded to a few more population groups – children up to the age of 18 (instead of up to the age of 15, as has been the case thus far), victims of domestic violence and human trafficking victims, as well as persons suffering from rare illnesses.
 - The right to inspect medical dossiers has also been granted to children who have turned 15 and who are capable of sound judgement, i.e. capable of making decisions by themselves (under the envisaged terms), as well as the right to the confidentiality of data stated in medical dossiers (in case there is a serious danger to the life and health of the child, the responsible health worker is obliged to inform the parents, the guardian, or the legal advisor about the child's health condition).
 - Introduced (for the first time) – A patient's right to respect for his/her time.
- The new Law on Social Welfare, effective as of April 2011 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No.24/2011), has been adopted and it envisages the following:
 - Increase in the number of social welfare beneficiaries.
 - Higher benefits for the poorest citizens.
 - Development of social welfare services at the local level – municipalities and towns will obtain special budget resources intended for opening day care centres for children with disabilities, senior citizens' homes, as well as the development of home assistance services.
 - Higher benefits for households with many members, households with members who are all incapable of work, as well as single parents.
 - Social welfare institutions may also be opened by private individuals, upon their obtaining appropriate licences, and the quality of their services is to be regularly controlled.
 - Further development and stimulation of foster care so that as many children without parental care as possible are able to leave the institutions.
 - For persons with disabilities and their families – creation of equal opportunities for independent living and stimulation of social inclusion.
 - Organizations of persons with disabilities may become licensed providers of certain services in the local community.
 - The Rulebook on detailed criteria for recognising forms of discrimination by an employee, a student, or a third party in an educational institution is due to be adopted shortly (It will be adopted jointly – pursuant to Article 44, paragraph 4 of the Law on the Elements of the Education System (Official Gazette of RS, No.72/09 and No.52/11) – by the Minister of Education and Science, the Minister of Human and Minority Rights, public administration and local governments.

Documents

Action plans under the Strategy for improving the position of Roma in the Republic of Serbia during the Decade of Roma Inclusion are being revised. Priorities for the period 2012–2014, are being established. Some recommendations from the Serbian RECI report and from Roma Good Start Initiative expert meeting held on 01/11/2011 were adopted and set as priorities.

In the revisited action plan for education:

- One of the highest priorities is to provide support to children under the age of 5.5 years (when the obligatory preschool programme starts) and their families.
- Providing parenting programmes, with special focus on mothers of children under the age of three, enhancing parenting skills and improving the home learning environment.
- Providing high-quality programmes for children aged from 3 to 5.5 which are diversified and adjusted to the needs of parents and capacities of local communities and local governments.
- Developing brochures for parents with the most relevant information on their rights and obligations, but also on how to exercise their rights.
- More professional development for pedagogical assistants, as well as training for NGOs and teachers in how to work with Roma parents.
- Introducing Roma parents to school boards and parents' councils in schools,

Projects

- The implementation of the Linking Project will continue (Linking is a project implemented through the partnership of the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and Telenor aimed at providing support to health mediators). Owing to the fact that this project is implemented in partnership, the number of health mediators has increased to 75 and they now work in 60 municipalities. They have also been joined by outreach nurses who visit the settlements together with them.³²⁸
- A methodology of research in the application of the state programme of Roma integration has been developed (Dr Božidar Jakšić, Belgrade, March 2011), and its aim is to provide an efficient gathering, analysis and evaluation of normative and factual data based on which the Ombudsman will take measures within his/her area of competence, whose aim is to build the capacities of public services to carry out the obligations undertaken in keeping with the Strategy for improving the position of Roma and the plans of action of the Government of the Republic of Serbia.
- The Ministry of Education has initiated – in partnership with the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP) and the Open Society Fund – implementation of a Programme called Parents Must Also Have Their Say. The aim of this programme is to create opportunities for parents to participate in a more active and higher-quality manner in the making of decisions concerning the operation of preschool and school institutions, and thus to contribute to the welfare of all children. One of the ways to achieve this goal will be to establish a body, on the local community level, which will be responsible for dealing with these issues and for providing assistance in the networking and linking of parents, schools, local communities, and the Ministry.³²⁹

328 <http://www.unicef.rs/novosti/predstavljeni-godisnji-rezultati-povezivanja.html>.

329 <http://www.mprn.gov.rs/sajt/aktuelnosti.php?id=5210>.

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ANNEX 1. The World Bank Argument for Investing in Roma Children

Roma Inclusion: An Economic Opportunity for Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania and Serbia, World Bank, 2010

Roma Inclusion: An Economic Opportunity for Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania and Serbia explores the question: “what is the economic argument for Roma inclusion?” The analysis is based on quantitative data from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania, and Serbia, and information from interviews with 222 stakeholders – government and non-government officials and Roma and non-Roma. Seven household surveys for these four countries provided sufficiently rich information to make the economic calculations. The four countries represent more than two-thirds of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

The report argues that Roma inclusion is smart economics, increasing GDPs by more than 3 per cent and government budgets by more than 4 per cent annually now – numbers that are increasing sharply given current population trends. The focus of the report is on the economic benefits of Roma integration. In particular, it asks the question: *How much larger would the economies be, and how much higher would government revenue be, if Roma enjoyed the same labour market opportunities as the majority populations?*

The current labour market integration of Roma is poor. Equal labour market opportunities would generate more economic productivity and provide fiscal benefits in terms of lower government payments for social assistance such as guaranteed minimum income programmes, and increased revenue from income taxes. Even lower bound estimates show that there are large economic and fiscal benefits. For the four countries, we estimate the economic benefits to be at least €2 billion annually and the fiscal benefits to be at least €700 million annually. These are lower bound estimates that rely on official population estimates, some from the 2001/2002 national censuses, which put the combined Roma population across these four countries at 1.1 million compared with 3.1 million according to commonly used estimates (e.g. UNDP, 2006). The latter population figures would suggest that the economic benefits from inclusion are at least €5.5 billion annually and fiscal benefits at least €1.8 billion annually for the four countries. This corresponds to productivity losses of €2,412 for each working age Roma in Bulgaria, €7,344 in the Czech Republic, €2,596 in Romania, and €3,458 in Serbia. Further, estimates for Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans region as a whole are €3.4 to 9.9 billion annually in economic gains and €1.2 to 3.5 billion annually in fiscal gains. These figures unequivocally support the words of one of the 222 stakeholders interviewed: “[the Roma] represent an opportunity, not a burden.”

For the full Policy Note see:

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTROMA/Resources/Policy_Note.pdf.

ANNEX 2. Economic Benefits of Early Childhood Programmes

Early Childhood Programming for Minority Groups

The work of four research professors – two American: Jacqueline Jordan Irvine and John Ogbu; one European, Michel Vandebroeck; and, one Canadian, Jessica Ball – bring interesting insights into how education and early childhood programming for minority groups can be approached. These contributions provide a balance of perspectives. Jacqueline Jordan Irvine focuses on the questions that need to be asked when segregated, racialised education has been the tradition. John Ogbu lists the following factors to explain the continuing education gap between white and black students in the United States: being a “*caste-like, involuntary minority* affects motivation and achievement; *negative school climate*, in the form of teacher expectation and student-parent-staff relationship, reinforces among students the effects of socioeconomic status and race; in turn, academic success may be considered to be *acting white*, in particular among adolescents; and schools generally consider *Afro-American vernacular English* as unacceptable. The third contribution by Michel Vandebroeck is situated in the Belgian context of high immigration. Vandebroeck comments on the difficulties for young immigrant children to succeed within the current practice of the early childhood services founded by the majority culture. The final perspective from Jessica Ball, a Canadian expert on First Nations education, outlines “guiding principles” in dealing with a minority cultural group that fear for their identity and continued existence.

1. The Contribution of Jacqueline Jordan Irvine

The recent election of Barack Obama as President of the United States has brought home to many Europeans that EU countries may seriously lag behind in diversity policies and attitudes. Although much progress has been made in the nomination of ethnic minority ministers, most European countries are far away from the election of minority politicians (or bankers) to leadership positions in their fields. A similar delay may exist with regard to European educational research on diversity and inter-cultural education. Already, in 1991, Jacqueline Jordan Irvine³³⁰ had published her ground-breaking *Black Students and School Failure: Policies, Practices, and Prescriptions*, which received the Outstanding Writing Award from the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, and was selected as an Outstanding Academic Book by the American Association of College and University Research Librarians. In her book, Irvine points to the failure of the American education systems to upgrade the educational experience and performance of the fastest growing segment of the American school population, which is blacks and other minorities. According to Irvine, “the country’s survival and strength will ultimately depend on the quality of education given to this important group that has been systematically and effectively excluded from the benefits of educational opportunity.” Without education, blacks and other minorities will never achieve economic independence, and the self-perpetuating cycle of poor school achievement, poverty, and teen parenthood will grind on relentlessly.

330 Jacqueline Jordan Irvine is Charles Howard Candler Professor of Urban Education in the Division of Educational Studies at Emory University. Professor Irvine’s specialization is in multicultural education and urban teacher education, particularly the education of African American students. Her books include *Black Students and School Failure* (Greenwood); *Growing Up African American in Catholic Schools* (Teachers College Press); *Critical Knowledge for Diverse Students* (AACTE); *Culturally Responsive Lesson Planning for Elementary and Middle Grades* (McGraw-Hill); *In Search of Wholeness: African American Teachers and their Culturally Specific Pedagogy* (Palgrave Publishers); and *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Seeing with the Cultural Eye* (Teachers College Press).

Over 20 years ago, Irvine raised (and answered cogently), the questions that we are asking today as if for the first time:

- Should school integration be compulsory? (In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court declared segregation illegal) Should parents be compelled by law to send their children to integrated schools? Should school integration be a national educational priority?
- Should taxpayers in more affluent communities be required to share their wealth by supporting schools in poor communities?
- Should parents receive free vouchers to send their children to private schools? Does giving parents this choice of schools serve the public interest?
- Does tracking create educational inequality? Is state mandated, high stakes testing beneficial to minority students? A disproportionate number of minority students are being denied grade promotion and graduation based on mandated standardized tests. Should these tests be increased or decreased?
- Does separating students by ability exaggerate differences and lead to mediocre schooling for those in the middle and lower tracks?
- Is bilingual education politically and pedagogically sound? Does it lead to national disunity?
- Does the focus on multicultural education in schools stress the differences among groups and erode common values?
- Should immigrant and minority children be taught in their native languages? Should schools adopt an English-only policy?
- Should all children be taught by majority and minority teachers? (Minority teachers are more likely to understand the language, personal style and presentation of minority students and exhibit a teaching style that attends to cultural differences in perceptions of authority, instructional delivery and teacher performance, and in their use of culturally familiar speech and events. Their presence among majority students helps to break down negative stereotypes and persuade students that they live in a multicultural society.)
- Is mainstreaming beneficial to handicapped students? Public Law 94–142 gives handicapped students in the States the right to learn in the least restrictive learning environment. What are the pros and cons?
- Do schools discriminate against minority boys?
- Should schools that serve low-income students receive more money from taxpayers?

Irvine argues that black children are subject to school failure because of their culture, race, and social class. In particular, the majority teachers whom they meet hold low expectations about their learning abilities and eventual outcomes. She points out that not all black children are equally at risk, as consideration must be given to regional, class, and gender variations. However, race remains a salient factor that contributes to unequal school treatment and later, to unequal levels of employment and participation in society. She attributes the cause of the problem to failures in cultural synchronization (failure of white school districts and teachers to recognise and acknowledge positively the norms of black community culture), teacher training and pedagogical process, all of which have a deep impact on the school achievement of black students. The author suggests interventions, such as inter-cultural and anti-bias teacher training, more teachers from minority communities and the use of cultural pedagogy. In this regard, she describes competencies that can be developed in teacher training and staff development programmes. Acknowledging that there are no quick and simple solutions, no single programme or packaged intervention, Irvine suggests that the U.S. needs to develop a long-term, visionary national policy, implemented in the field by caring teachers who are supportive, properly trained, and not afraid of, resentful, or hostile to black children.

2. The Contribution of John Ogbu

John Uzo Ogbu (deceased, 2003) was a Nigerian-American anthropologist and professor known for his theories on observed phenomena involving race and intelligence, especially how race and ethnic differences played out in educational and economic achievement. He suggested that being a “caste-like minority” affects motivation and achievement, depressing IQ scores. He also concluded that some students did poorly because high achievement was considered “acting white” among their peers. Ogbu was also involved in the 1996 controversy surrounding the teaching of African American Vernacular English in public schools in Oakland, California. The 2000 book *Eminent Educators: Studies in Intellectual Influence* focused on him as one of “four intellectual giants of the 20th century.” (extracted from *Wikipedia*, 28 February, 2009).

School climate, in the form of teacher expectation, preparation, staff entente, student-parent-staff relationship, has been found to mediate the effects of socioeconomic status and race in academic success (Jussim et al. 1996; Christensen et al. 1992; Comer 1980). The perception of students, parents, and teachers of a positive school climate has also been found to increase academic success and lessen disciplinary problems (Brookover et al. 1978; West 1980; Esposito 1999). Despite the obvious influence of school climate, little research has been carried out to examine the impact of a school’s racial climate on overall academic achievement.

A school’s racial climate includes student perceptions of racial fairness, cultural sensitivity, equitable school policies and practices. Students’ perceptions of a school’s racial climate were found to be related to goal commitment for white students and to social experiences for African American students (Cabrera et al., 1999). It has been suggested that if students perceive the structure of the school as unequal or providing them with little return for their efforts, the students then become disengaged leading to academic failure (Mickelson, 1990; Ogbu, 1978). Another explanation put forward is that of societal stereotypes. Studies on the achievement gap which highlight the academic inferiority of African American students may in fact lead to the conclusion that they are inferior because of their race. It has been shown that African American students’ test performance may suffer because of their own perception and belief of this stereotype, and because of the school’s (teachers and peers) perception and belief of the stereotype (Aronson et al., 1998; Steele and Aronson, 1995).

Involuntary minorities

Ogbu observed that in some cases groups of people of the same race but located in different countries manifested different ability and/or achievement levels according to some measures. He studied how, why and to what degree this might be so. He concluded that U.S. Americans could be divided into “voluntary minorities” (groups of immigrants who chose to come to the United States, and their descendants) versus “involuntary” or “caste-like” minorities (descendants of groups of persons who found themselves in the United States, or under United States jurisdiction, against their will).

In *Minority Education and Caste* (1978), Ogbu argued that “involuntary minorities” often adopted an “oppositional identity” to the mainstream culture in response to a glass ceiling imposed or maintained by white society on the job-success of their parents and others in their communities. Therefore, he reasoned, some non-whites “failed to observe the link between educational achievement and access to jobs.”⁽¹¹⁾

Acting white

In 1986 Ogbu co-authored, along with Signithia Fordham, a study which concluded that some African American students in a Washington, D.C., high school did not live up to their academic potential because of the fear of being accused of “acting white,” findings echoed in his 2003 book *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement*. He concluded that these students’ cultural attitudes hindered their own academic achievement and that these attitudes are too often neglected by parents, educators and/or policymakers.

Though the study’s conclusions gained a popular foothold, a later study obtained different results. In 2003, Karolyn Tyson, a sociologist, and William Darity Jr, an economist, both at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, directed an 18 month study at eleven North Carolinian schools which found that white and black students have essentially the same attitudes about scholastic achievement; students in both groups want to succeed in school and show higher levels of self-esteem when they do better in school. The results of this study have been published in a book by Stanford sociologist Prudence Carter.^[2]

A 2006 study titled *An Empirical Analysis of “Acting White”* by Roland G. Fryer, Jr. at Harvard University and Paul Torelli suggested that the phenomenon has a significant effect on black student achievement, especially in schools with high inter-racial contact and among high achieving students, but little or no effect in predominantly black or private schools.^[3]

African American Vernacular English

In 1996, Ogbu played a prominent role in the debate about the utility of African American Vernacular English. As a member of a task force on African American education in Oakland, California he noted that “standard” or “proper” English required in the classroom differed from black vernacular English spoken at home and outside school. Ogbu encouraged teachers to become familiar with and to make use of this vernacular (christened “ebonics”) in helping African American students transition to traditional English.

3. The Contribution of Michel Vandebroek

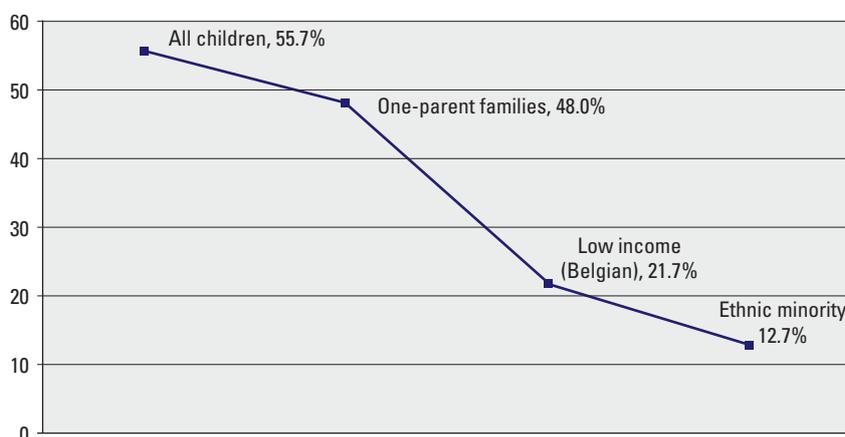
Michel Vandebroek is a professor of sociology at the University of Ghent in Flanders. He has long experience of working across two cultures (French and Flemish) and with socially disadvantaged children from immigrant backgrounds through the Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training network in Flanders. One of his very useful insights into diversity is his perception that societies tend to label and “culturalise” poverty or exclusion (Vandebroek, 2007). For example, if the children of ethnic groups are not accessing children’s services, a well-known response is to attribute this to cultural preference: “Mothers of such-and-such a group prefer to rear their children themselves!” While it is true that certain cultural factors can play a role (often having little to do with women’s choices, e.g. male traditions and perceptions that prevent women from seeking work outside the home), other equally plausible explanations of low enrolments may be overlooked by government and policy analysts, e.g.

- Ethnic or immigrant mothers may have great difficulty in finding work outside the home, due to a number of factors, e.g. no work available in their neighbourhoods; low

- language or educational levels; prejudice against foreigners and foreign dress, etc.
- The hidden costs of services may be too great for very poor families to afford.
- Although there may be more children in the poorer neighbourhoods, fewer early childhood services are made available than in affluent ones (confirmed by the OECD reviews).
- Services are organised in such a way as to virtually exclude parents, particularly in education services.
- Mono-cultural services and organisation predominate, that is, only the values and norms of mainstream society are reflected in the available services.³³¹

In sum, it is far too easy to “culturalise” what are perceived as negative attitudes of minority populations toward state services and society. A more objective analysis demands attention to the family situation and the needs and expectations of excluded populations. This becomes clear from the figure below: whatever the ethnic belonging of the different groups, the children of disadvantaged families – who most need services – attend them least of all, which indicates that questions of class and income also enter into decisions about enrolling children in services.

Figure A. Use of childcare (0–3 years) by different groups in Flanders



Source: *The Child in Flanders. Kind en Gezin, 2008.*

In sum, the structural barriers and environmental constraints that prevent access to early childhood services need to be identified and assessed (see *Starting Strong II*, pages 74–77). For example, junior classes attached to primary schools often fail to meet

331 Vandebroek’s insights are corroborated in Roma experience by Katy Negrin from the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program, and senior editor of a recently released series of monitoring reports on *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma*, covering eight Central and South Eastern European countries. Negrin points out that:

- Many Roma parents are illiterate and cannot read the notifications sent to them to enrol their children in kindergarten or school.
- Many Roma families live in marginalised settlements, often illegal or unregulated, and their children are not included in the usual call for enrolment, that is, that Roma parents may not receive enrolment notifications.
- In many cases, even if their settlement is legal, just getting to school from a Roma settlement can be an obstacle: Roma settlements are often far from a local school, over bad roads, and do not have regular public transport.
- With poor access to health care, Roma children may not have the medical certificate required for registration in a kindergarten.
- Many Roma families are so poor that they do not have money to dress children appropriately for school. Especially in bad weather, they keep their children home rather than sending them out without shoes or a coat. Money for school supplies may also be an obstacle. In only a few countries are materials provided free of charge to students in need.

the needs of working parents as they generally open on a half-day basis and only during term-time. Services may be closed for summer, winter and spring breaks, and for teacher professional development days. Unless this service is augmented by after-school care or another wrap-around service, the situation forces many mothers of young children either to reduce their work to part-time or to drop out of employment for a number of years to care for their children at home. In addition, junior classes attached to primary schools are often unsuitable for very young children with special or additional learning needs because of large group sizes and lack of care and appropriate pedagogical approaches.

It is highly probable that such structural inequities play an important role in low-income, immigrant and Roma families' access to services. These include not only issues of affordability but also environmental constraints, e.g. mothers' working conditions, general health and education levels in the family, the accessibility of services; the openness of services to diversity etc. More subtle power relations need also be taken into account, including the disconnect between local families and preschool staff or the relationship between local administrations and non-voting populations.

Importantly, early childhood centres need to be perceived by excluded groups as welcoming and culturally affirmative. All parents wish to feel that they are respected as the first educators of their children, and that their children will not feel alienated in a strange institution. Many centres and educators go to great lengths to provide this assurance, but the experience of the Roma and other indigenous children has not been a happy one. Frequently, in history, these children were forcibly taken away from parents and placed in state sponsored orphanages or special schools to be acculturated into "superior" values and practices. In many instances, it is now necessary to build up trust again, through an acknowledgment of the valuable contribution each culture can bring to society. If possible, for example, mother tongue support should be provided in centres to young children with an immigrant or Roma mother tongue. This is not only an expression of respect for Roma culture, but also a sound educational principle. The development of the mother tongue is important for concept formation in young children and for the acquisition of a second language.

There is a need therefore to expressly "de-culturalise" perceived negative aspects of group behaviour and to "culturalise" pedagogy and educational outcomes. Often, as mentioned previously, lack of attendance at early childhood services, or the failure of children to reach pre-defined goals, are attributed to cultural factors, e.g. "Roma mothers do not wish to send their children to services before the age of 5 years" or "Roma children start with such disadvantages that they will never catch up." We need to "de-culturalise" such phenomena and learn through local research why Roma children are not being enrolled or why they are not doing so well in schools. In similar fashion, the goals and routines of early childhood centres may need to be "culturalised". Roma or any minority children can reach goals important for themselves and their future learning, within the standards of their own culture. At first, they may not attend the centre every day or may wish to sleep at times different from the usual sleeping period, but open communication between the educators and parents can solve most differences and bring routines and learning goals more into conformity with the realities of the children involved.

Outreach to and consultation with families and communities: All this implies a continual co-construction and reconstruction of the daily practice of kindergartens and an endless negotiation with the stakeholders involved (children, families, local communities and policymakers). Neither children nor parents can be construed simply as clients of an existing centre that knows what is right and will not change. For this reason, effective early education services will develop community involvement in the preschool years, not only for providing expanded services and referrals where necessary, but also as a space for partnership and the democratic participation of parents. This position is confirmed by

a central insight of the post-modernists, viz. that external discourses about quality and goals must be supplemented by community/parental participation and meaning-making. When opportune, communities and education authorities will also provide support to parents to improve their skills and participation in preschool affairs, through adult education, information, services and community-building activities.

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. Early childhood staff should be trained to listen to parents. They will encourage parents to support the learning of young children, and will share with families the values upon which early childhood services are based, including participation and respect for diversity. Staff will engage parents in centre activities. They will promote positive attitudes toward children's learning, provide parents with information and referrals to other services, and include parents in centre committees and management. Efforts will be made to ensure equitable representation and participation of families from diverse backgrounds.

4. The Contribution of Jessica Ball

Jessica Ball is a professor in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria, Canada where she is Co-Coordinator and Principal Investigator on Early Childhood Intercultural Partnerships. She has worked extensively in innovative programmes to sustain cultural diversity, early childhood development and community development, in particular among minority First Nations groups in Canada. The following are "guiding principles" that she has learned from working with these groups. In some regards, similarities with the Open Society Foundations insights gained from working with Roma groups can be seen:

- *Participation and Roma human resources' development:* Adopting a participatory approach, by involving Roma communities in project design and implementation and Roma employees throughout project phases.
- *Integration:* Integrating Roma and non-Roma generally, as well as in specific areas of public service responsibility: housing, education, health care and employment.
- *Anti-discrimination:* Taking care to avoid all forms of unjustified discrimination and requirements, conditions, or criteria that might lead to the exclusion or arbitrary treatment of Roma and other vulnerable groups. At the same time, OSI reiterates its strong support for affirmative actions meant to reduce the existing socio-economic gap between Roma and the majority populations.
- *Desegregation:* Working toward eliminating the isolation between Roma and non-Roma, by facilitating access to major social, political and economic institutions such as local governance, employment, housing, education and health for Roma communities.
- *Capacity Development:* Supporting the ability of Roma and non Roma to identify problems of Roma Inclusion and to articulate solutions within an EU-financed development framework.
- *Sustainability:* Encouraging affordable and achievable solutions, which do not require constant subsidies and which could win the support of majority populations.

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Roma

Early

Childhood

Inclusion