

## **Education: The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States Summary**

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The Roma community, Europe's largest ethnic minority, face serious poverty and social exclusion. These problems lead to their exclusion from full, quality educations, which further damages their prospects. This paper reviews obstacles to Roma education and their potential solutions, using as its core dataset the results of the 2011 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) Roma survey, which surveyed 16,319 households, or 61,271 persons, across 11 EU Member States. There are three main focuses: preschool attendance, school attendance and educational outcomes and treatment within education.

Perhaps the largest problem in Roma education is the relatively low preschool attendance of Roma children, for the reason that preschool non-attendance commonly results in difficulties in early primary education and, as a result, greatly increased drop-out rates; in Hungary, for instance, 94% of Roma children currently attending compulsory schooling had preschool experience, compared to only 15% of those not attending. Therefore, it is a significant problem that only half the Roma children surveyed aged 4 up to compulsory school age attended preschool or kindergarten in 2010/2011. In Greece only 20% of Roma aged 6-15, and less than 50% in Portugal, Slovakia, Spain and the Czech Republic, had ever attended preschool, compared to 70-97% of non-Roma. As such, the FRA recommends targeted measures to offset structural discrimination against Roma, with marginalised communities being favoured in the allocation of preschool places and preschool provision extended generally, while also encouraging a publicity campaign advertising the benefits of preschool and programmes to more directly involve the family and community in preschool provision.

Compulsory school attendance, however, is relatively high, with nine out of ten Roma children aged 7-15 attending school. 14% of Roma children of compulsory school age surveyed were not in education, compared to 3% of the non-Roma children living in the same areas. Many of the drop-outs are the result of late-starts in education, or occur at the primary-secondary transition. However, very few Roma went on to complete upper secondary education, with 89% of Roma aged 18-24 having not received upper secondary qualifications of any sort, compared to just 38% of non-Roma living in the same areas. Similarly, Roma literacy remains poor, with around 20% of Roma aged sixteen or above being unable to read or write, compared to just 1% of non-Roma in the same areas. As such, the FRA recommends establishing monitoring systems to identify children at risk of dropping out, with tailored support offering mentoring and counselling to those identified as at risk, along with the provision of positive incentives such as scholarships for Roma education. It also encourages states to consider diversifying their vocational training to include more on-the-job training.

The final issue discussed is the need for equal treatment within the education system. Across the survey, one in ten Roma children had attended a special class or school intended specifically for Roma, and as many as 33% to 58% had been in such special education in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Greece. This sort of segregation is both illegal and damaging to social cohesion, let alone the educational prospects of Roma children. As such, the FRA recommends efforts to prevent segregation, including de facto segregation such as residential segregation or 'white flight', with the establishment of adequately resourced equality bodies to support desegregation, and encourages efforts to improve community interactions more generally as part of a broader inclusion agenda.