

# Six Consequences of Roma Exclusion from Education

## Introduction

In many countries, especially across South East Europe, Roma remain excluded from education, despite numerous attempts to improve the situation. This exclusion is both direct, such as inappropriate assignment of Roma children to ‘special schools’ or discriminatory bullying, and indirect, such as struggling to access education due to a background of poverty or a lack of highly educated role models. As a result, Roma have on average significantly worse educational outcomes than their non-Roma peers, with many dropping out of school before completion and a significant proportion not gaining full literacy. Here we focus on six major consequences of this exclusion on the later lives of Roma and on society in general.

## Consequence 1: Reduced Roma Labour Market Success

The lack of education and qualifications of many Roma people undermines their human capital and makes them less competitive in the labour market, thereby increasing unemployment rates and decreasing wages in the Roma community. In Hungary, for instance, Roma men of age 22-23 are 13% less likely to be permanently employed than non-Roma men, while Roma women are 33% less likely to be permanently employed than their non-Roma counterparts, and monthly wages for Roma men and women are roughly 23% and 18% lower respectively than those of non-Roma.<sup>1</sup> The situation is similar or worse in other countries. In Romania, in the general population 66% of men and 53% of women were employed in 2011, while only 42% and 19% of Roma men and women respectively had jobs, and the wages of working-age Roma men and women were around 20% and 12% of those of the general population.<sup>2</sup> Some of the discrepancy in unemployment rates and wages can be put down to direct discrimination by potential employers against Roma seeking work, but it is estimated that at least the majority of the gap can be explained by the weaker educational outcomes of many members of the Roma community.<sup>3</sup> Improving Roma people’s access to

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1 TÁRKI Social Research Institute, ‘How Can Young Roma Achieve Success in Hungary?’, January 2015. [http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/young\\_roma\\_in\\_hungarian\\_secondary\\_schools\\_and\\_in\\_the\\_labor\\_market.pdf](http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/young_roma_in_hungarian_secondary_schools_and_in_the_labor_market.pdf)

2 The World Bank, ‘Diagnostics and Policy Advice for Supporting Roma Inclusion in Romania, Summary Report’, February 28, 2014. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/04/09/000442464\\_20140409140312/Rendered/PDF/866710WP0P14500ary0Report00English0.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/04/09/000442464_20140409140312/Rendered/PDF/866710WP0P14500ary0Report00English0.pdf)

3 TÁRKI Social Research Institute, ‘How Can Young Roma Achieve Success in Hungary?’, January 2015. [http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/young\\_roma\\_in\\_hungarian\\_secondary\\_schools\\_and\\_in\\_the\\_labor\\_market.pdf](http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/young_roma_in_hungarian_secondary_schools_and_in_the_labor_market.pdf)

education would therefore help them compete in the labour market, increasing wages and employment rates. This would likely also have a positive feedback effect on the success of future Roma children in education, as their parents would be more financially able to support their education.

## Consequence 2: Higher Proportion of Roma in Poverty

Largely as a result of consequence 1, the educational disadvantages of the Roma community contribute to a very much greater proportion of Roma than non-Roma being in poverty. For instance, in Croatia 92.3% of Roma live in relative poverty, while 9% live in absolute poverty. In Romania, 84% of Roma are at-risk-of-poverty, which is almost three times higher than non-Roma, and 90% of Roma households face severe material deprivation.<sup>4</sup> Similar rates can be observed in other countries. Poverty and a lack of education can form a vicious cycle, as children born into poverty are much more likely to have limited access to books and preschool education, which can make later participation in school difficult, and may suffer from malnutrition which can stunt physical and mental development.

## Consequence 3: Lowered Standard of Health

Due to a combination of limited information and a lack of financial resources, both of which can be traced back, at least in part, to educational exclusion, Roma communities often have significantly lower standards of health. For instance, in Croatia, only 1.4% of Roma adults are aged 65 or above, compared to 16.8% of the majority population, indicating a lower life expectancy, around 20% of Roma lack national health insurance, and 40% of Roma households are unable to afford a regular source of protein.<sup>5</sup> A lack of protein, especially in early childhood, can stunt growth and mental development. In Romania, Roma life expectancy is six years less than non-Roma peers, and by the time a Roma individual reaches the age of 55 there is a 54% chance that they will be suffering from a chronic illness.<sup>6</sup>

## Consequence 4: Increased Discrimination and Prejudice

Many of the discriminatory stereotypes about Roma focus on the ideas that Roma are stupid or lazy. Discriminatory attitudes against Roma are widespread; for instance, in Moldova, a recent survey found that 49% would not accept a Roma person as a neighbour, while a further

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4 The World Bank, 'Diagnostics and Policy Advice for Supporting Roma Inclusion in Romania, Summary Report', February 28, 2014. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/04/09/000442464\\_20140409140312/Rendered/PDF/866710WP0P14500ary0Report00English0.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/04/09/000442464_20140409140312/Rendered/PDF/866710WP0P14500ary0Report00English0.pdf)

5 UNICEF, OSF, REF, 'Roma Early Childhood Inclusion+ Croatia Report', 2015. [http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/reci\\_croatia\\_report\\_eng-final\\_web.pdf](http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/reci_croatia_report_eng-final_web.pdf)

6 The World Bank, 'Diagnostics and Policy Advice for Supporting Roma Inclusion in Romania, Summary Report', February 28, 2014. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/04/09/000442464\\_20140409140312/Rendered/PDF/866710WP0P14500ary0Report00English0.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/04/09/000442464_20140409140312/Rendered/PDF/866710WP0P14500ary0Report00English0.pdf)

16% would “probably not” accept a Roma neighbour.<sup>7</sup> If Roma are generally less educated as a result of their social exclusion and marginalisation, then they are more likely to be in poverty and to be less professionally capable, which can then reinforce discriminatory stereotypes if people mistakenly take the problems Roma face to be inherent to the Roma community. One of the clearest examples of this phenomenon is in education itself, in the inappropriate placement of Roma children in ‘special schools’, when Roma children who are perfectly capable of learning are inaccurately considered to have learning disabilities due to a combination of stereotyping and educative disadvantages of Roma, such as that they are less likely to have received preschool education. For instance, in the Czech Republic Roma children are 27 times more likely to be assigned to special schools than their non-Roma peers.<sup>8</sup> Again, therefore, there is the possibility of a vicious cycle of a lack of education and discrimination: lacking an education can reinforce discriminatory stereotypes which can then deepen social exclusion and segregation, further harming educational prospects.

## Consequence 5: Damage to Economic Growth of Society in General

Roma communities on average constitute a disproportionately large share of young people in countries across South East Europe, where many countries having aging populations with low overall birth-rates. As a result, Roma are likely to make up a steadily increasing proportion of the young, working-age population, and so their professional skills are extremely important to the future growth of countries with significant Roma populations: not only does improving Roma education help Roma people, but it is also a good economic investment as it increases the labour quality of the national workforce overall.<sup>9</sup> In Romania, for instance, almost 40% of the Roma population is aged 0-14 years, compared to just 15% of the general population, and the World Bank predicts that bringing Roma labour market earnings in line with those of non-Roma would result in economic benefits between €887 million and €2.9 billion annually, with correspondingly large increases in tax income.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> UN Women, OHCHR and UNDP Moldova, ‘Study on the Situation of Romani Women and Girls in the Republic of Moldova’, 2014. <http://www.md.undp.org/content/dam/moldova/docs/UN%20Reports/Study%20on%20the%20Situation%20of%20Romani%20women%20and%20girls%20in%20the%20Republic%20of%20Moldova.eng.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Roma Education Fund, ‘Making Desegregation Work! A Desegregation Toolkit’, 2015. [http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/desegregation\\_toolkit\\_\\_2015\\_web.pdf](http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/desegregation_toolkit__2015_web.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Fundación Secretariado Gitano, ‘Guide for Working with Roma Families towards Achieving the Success of their Children in School’, 2013. [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma\\_families\\_guide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_families_guide_en.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> The World Bank, ‘Diagnostics and Policy Advice for Supporting Roma Inclusion in Romania, Summary Report’, February 28, 2014. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/04/09/000442464\\_20140409140312/Rendered/PDF/866710WP0P14500ary0Report00English0.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/04/09/000442464_20140409140312/Rendered/PDF/866710WP0P14500ary0Report00English0.pdf)

## Consequence 6: Increased Disenfranchisement

Educational exclusion makes it extremely difficult for Roma to obtain power and influence. This state of disenfranchisement makes it very difficult for any individual Roma to gain the opportunities to combat the problems and negative stereotypes that their community face.<sup>11</sup> If young Roma were able to gain better access to education, then they would be better equipped to advocate for their community in the future. Relatedly, this absence of Roma in positions of power and influence results in a lack of high-status peer contacts, who can serve as positive role models for the value of education, for young Roma, which has been shown to dramatically increase school dropout rates: in Hungary, young Roma with 2 or more high-status peer contacts are 13% less likely to drop out of school than those with none.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> UNICEF, OSF, REF, 'Roma Early Childhood Inclusion+ Croatia Report', 2015.  
[http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/reci\\_croatia\\_report\\_eng-final\\_web.pdf](http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/reci_croatia_report_eng-final_web.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> TÁRKI Social Research Institute, 'How Can Young Roma Achieve Success in Hungary?', January 2015.  
[http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/young\\_roma\\_in\\_hungarian\\_secondary\\_schools\\_and\\_in\\_the\\_labor\\_market.pdf](http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/young_roma_in_hungarian_secondary_schools_and_in_the_labor_market.pdf)