

## VICIOUS CIRCLE OF INEQUALITY: WHERE ARE THE ROMANI GIRLS IN EDUCATION?

The existing reports on Romani children education show extreme poverty, non-existence of valid documents on child birth, frequent change of residence, lack of awareness on importance of education of children and especially discrimination in educational system, as well as violence and inefficient existing mechanisms for inclusion of Romani children into the system of education. The available data indicate a very small number of secondary school and university students, and also that the attitude of local self-governance bodies towards education of Romani is usually very bad. The problem is even more complex for the Romani girls. Education is the most significant need for the Romani women, who most often leave education after primary school. Although the education is included in the education action plans, Romani women are insufficiently involved in creation of these action plans and there are no appropriate measures to improve the education of Romani women. Education has a very important impact to the overall improvement of the position of Romani women, since Romani women are not educated, have low qualification, making it impossible to find employment and to be included into economic strengthening programmes. Lack of education results by unemployment, lack of entitlements, economic dependence, violence and a number of other problems. This makes the "vicious circle", and in consequence problems arising one from another.

**Key points**

- ❖ Significant number of the Romani women is deprived from primary education, resulting by a number of difficulties and limited entitlements in the life cycle, including right to employment, economic independence, social security, health insurance.
- ❖ Problems in access to regular education by Romani children have many layers: Insufficient communication between school and parents; irregular attendance of compulsory classes and early drop-out; absence of timely reaction and communication between schools and social welfare centres; neglecting Romani children in schools.
- ❖ Prejudice towards Romani population in schools result by discrimination and violence against Romani students by faculty and peers.
- ❖ Lack of systemic solutions, leading towards fulfilment of educational needs of the Romani, and especially the girls, is obvious.
- ❖ It is necessary to develop adequate multidisciplinary approach to include systemic provision of mediators, linking social benefits with education, incentives for positive examples and deconstruction of prejudice.

**Patriarchate as the First Obstacle in Education of Romani Girls**

Strong patriarchal opinions combined with gender roles, prevent girls in Romani families to get education. Difficult access to education of Romani children due to poverty, lack of funds for schooling, absence of parents and community's interest, are complemented with a gender aspect, too, when it comes to Romani girls: parents are more likely to decide educating male child, while it is believed to be more important for the girls to stay home and help with the household duties, caring for younger children; stay at home is considered beneficial to preserve their moral and traditional values that could be jeopardised in socialising with peers; under-age marriages mean the end of education and caring for husband and children.

Romani children, and especially girls, present the smallest number of those enrolled in primary and secondary schools. This shows that access to education presents a huge challenge. Romani children, by a rule, do not attend preschool education, while the rate of attending primary education among Romani is at a close difference for both genders (70.9% for boys and 67.8% for girls). The rate of attendance of secondary education is 18% for girls, and 26.6% for boys - **only 4.5 % Romani girls completes secondary school education**.<sup>1</sup> Some Romani children never receive call to be enrolled into school, because they are not registered in the Register of Births.

<sup>1</sup> Platform for improvement of position and rights of Romani Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, <https://www.bolja-buducnost.org/index.php/bs/o-nama/dokumenti/send/2-dokumenti/36-platforma-za-unapredenje-prava-i-polozaja-romkinja-u-bosni-i-hercegovini>.

### Absence of Law Implementation and Interest in Inclusion

*„Due to absence of other programmes for work with Romani children, those that could assist the learning process, like extracurricular or remedial teaching, teachers often fail to fully implement the curriculum with Romani children. Aware of the fact that the Romani children cannot achieve equal level of knowledge like other children in such conditions, the teachers lower the criteria for evaluation in order to motivate and retain children in schools. In such way, Romani children achieve the certificate for completion of primary school, but their scope of knowledge is small and insufficient to enrol the four-year secondary school programme.“*

The existing programmes of Romani children inclusion in education have shown a number of weaknesses: unsatisfactory and project-like approach to securing mediators (from the community); poor communication and implementation of legal provisions in view of education monitoring for Romani children (including different levels of authority and institution, their coordination); misuse of affirmative actions through neglect of Romani children in schools; non-sensitised of faculty. Additionally, strategic and action documents do not deal with the essential problems of education and do not include gender aspect of the problem and instruments for their resolution. As an example, *Action Plan for Social Inclusion of Romani Men and Women 2021 – 2025* is not comprehensive but it focuses only on Romani language in education and dismissal of stereotype. Furthermore, allocation of funds aimed to improve access and stay of Romani children in education is necessary to be allocated coming from funds for socially vulnerable categories. This is especially difficult due to their non-adaptation and real availability which should help Romani girls and boys in enrolment to school and during education.

### Discrimination and Violence against Romani Children in Schools

When Romani girls overcome the first two obstacles, and when they attend school, they are faced with a new type of problems. Antiziganism, stereotypes and prejudices towards Romani community exist also among students and faculty, and there is no implementation of principle of compulsory primary education. Discrimination is seen in grading, placement in back rows, limiting possibilities for participation in extracurricular activities, treatment of absences, quality of dedication to children and communication with parents. Shocking testimonies speak of mental violence suffered by Romani children; children and parents usually do not report it, and there is no monitoring and protection. Romani children are sometimes unable to follow the education like other children because of lack of language knowledge, or have poorer grades due to inadequate conditions to learn or parents' inability to help them. There are cases where Romani children are sent to schools for children with special needs in education, because they were unable to follow the lessons. Curriculum, textbooks and education have rare elements of Romani culture. None of these obstacles were recognised or addressed at any level of education.

*Research shows relatively high exposure rate to social distance, since 28.5% of the students expressed that they are not bothered with Romani children going to school in BiH. The lowest is the attitude towards sitting together in school with a Romani child, which was chosen by 2.4% of students.*

*All of the above problems result in discouragement for both parents and children in the Romani community. This reproduces the matrix of poverty, violence and discrimination, not offering an adequate response for access and education of Romani girls. Educational ghettoing will continue to produce unequal society in the future and unused work force. At the same time, Romani girls have been excluded, not because they do not want education, but because they do not have access to it.*

### Recommendations

- It is necessary to include community work in development of multidisciplinary approach, provide close cooperation with parents and provide motivation for the girls. Positive examples must be a part of the approach.
- Ensure means for preschool education of Romani children and scholarships of Romani girls in primary and secondary education.
- Establish sustainable system to engage mediators in education in all local communities in cooperation with Institute of Pedagogy, instead of current project-based provision of this type of support and coordination.
- Monitor quality of education of Romani children and request form education-related inspections to monitor discrimination of Romani children.
- Empower the parents, children and faculty to recognise and resolve cases of peer violence and discrimination.