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Citation:

Brown, FC and Greenfields, M (2018) Roma Children and Early Childhood Education: A Story of Discrimination. In: International Handbook of Early Childhood Education. Routledge. ISBN 9781138673038

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Document Version:

Book Section

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in International Handbook of Early Childhood Education on 02 March 2018, available online: <http://www.routledge.com/9781138673038>

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CHAPTER

Roma Children and Early Childhood Education: a story of discrimination

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Roma Children and Early Childhood Education: a story of discrimination

Introduction

Within this chapter we set out to contextualize the special circumstances of Roma children's early years education and support needs, with particular reference to the high level of exclusion experienced by members of the communities in Central and Eastern Europe and the resultant impact on households of the social determinants of health which potentially affect child development and well-being.

For the purposes of this discussion, we focus on broad domains of Roma inclusion (required under European guidance to be incorporated within National Roma Inclusion Strategies (NRIS) – see further below) and consider how these elements play out in terms of strategic development of early years support for children under the age of seven. In particular, we set out to explore whether and how Roma children may be at particular risk of failing to achieve their maximum potential as a result of both national interpretations of NRIS guidance and political or fiscal considerations in their countries of origin. We provide a discussion on discrimination and life-chances as experienced by Roma populations, and a consideration of how and whether European Union policy enactments which set out to improve the circumstances of Roma families are in fact having any effect at grass-roots level. By way of example, we present a number of case-studies that consider how agencies in various member states have developed strategies to encourage Roma children to engage with early childhood education opportunities. However, in

our conclusions we do not shy away from the paucity of such examples, and the mismatch between the lofty ambitions of government agencies and the reality of life on the ground.

The Roma People in Europe: contextualizing exclusion

The Roma people, who are Europe's largest minority ethnic group, estimated to comprise between 10 and 12 million people (Council of Europe, 2012a) are widely recognised as experiencing extremes of discrimination, poverty and radicalized social exclusion throughout most of Europe (EU-Midis II, 2016; FRA, 2011; FRA, 2009).

Whilst the convenience term 'Roma' as used in EU policy documents and discussions encompasses diverse groups who self-identify using a range of names including Roma, Gypsies, Manouches, Kale and Sinti and *also* includes populations who in some cases have differing (non-Indic) ethnic origins (for example Boyash, Ashkeli, Yenish and Irish/Scottish Travellers) and variable histories of nomadism (Council of Europe, 2012b) but who share similar levels of exclusion to the Roma; it is possible to identify a core population (calculated to be around 88% of the population incorporated within the policy formulation of 'Roma') who have incontrovertible Indic origins (CoE 2012b:7). It is these populations (Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romany-Gypsies) who are most commonly recognised as being 'Roma' people in public discourse. The Roma, who can be identified from linguistic and other evidence as having been present in Europe since at least the fourteenth century, first left India in migratory waves from the ninth century onwards, travelling (and settling) throughout Persia and Asia Minor before reaching Europe (CoE, 2012b) and ultimately migrating onwards to the Americas and Australia (Greenfields et. al. 2017 forthcoming). Roma peoples are found in all European countries, although the highest density of population (and simultaneous indices of deprivation) are to be

found in Central and Eastern European countries. Although it is well attested that many Roma are reluctant to self-identify in official statistics and Census returns for fear of discrimination (OSF, 2013) and as such official figures may represent an undercount in population size; in 2011 (CoE, 2012a) the Roma officially accounted for 9.5% of the population of the Republic of Macedonia; 9.9% in Bulgaria; 9% in Slovakia; 8.6% in Romania; 8.2 in Serbia and 7.4% in Hungary. Overall (calculation for the whole of Europe) the Council of Europe suggest that Roma people comprise approximately 1.3% of the European population. Given the above-national-average family size of Roma people throughout Europe (FRA, 2011), and generally short generation span resulting from early marriage and child-bearing (ERTF/Phenjalipe 2014; Bošnjak & Acton, 2013) the Roma population in each of these countries (as well as elsewhere in Europe) can, at a conservative estimate, be anticipated to have increased by between 3-5% in the intervening years since the above calculations were undertaken. Importantly however, evidence is emerging that amongst some Roma communities, age at marriage, postponement of first child-bearing and decrease in family size are occurring in post-migration circumstances as economic and educational opportunities for women are increased (MigRom, 2014). These factors have the potential to impact on both demographic patterns in general and (over time) the take-up of early childhood provision as Roma women's roles change.

Despite variables in circumstances of the populations across the various EU Member States, with (generally speaking) poorer conditions existing for Roma in less economically developed former Soviet bloc countries, Roma populations in Europe have consistently been found to experience exceptionally high rates of poor environmental and housing conditions. For example they tend to be lacking in sanitation, access to running water or adequate heating (Eurofound, 2012; FRA, 2011; EU-Midis II/FRA 2016; ERRC, 2017), to have limited access to

primary and preventative health care (FRA, 2011; EU-Midis II/FRA 2016; European Commission, 2014). They also have higher rates of un- or under-employment, with such work as exists often taking place in very poor working environments and paid at a lower rate than are majority population workers (ERRC, 2007; FRA, 2011; FRA/EU Midis, 2016). Given, as identified by the World Health Organisation the importance of all of the above ‘social determinants of health’ in relation to morbidity and mortality rates, life-chances and inter-generational transmission of opportunity (2012), it is self-evident that Roma children are more likely to be fundamentally disadvantaged by the age of five than are their peer groups from surrounding populations (OSF/REF/UNICEF, 2012). It is particularly sobering to reflect that given the high rates of under and unemployment experienced by the populations (FRA, 2011) it can be calculated that the vast majority of Roma families will experience deep longitudinal poverty, which (Marmot Review, 2010) has been identified as one of the most substantial barriers to the holistic development of children in their early years; particularly when associated with malnutrition (calculated as experienced by around 23% of Roma children in Serbia, for example, OSF/REF/UNICEF, 2012: 100) and residence in poor quality physical environments.

As a general principle, the Roma population pyramid throughout Europe varies considerably from that of surrounding communities, with short generations and large family size. Based on calculations that around 36 per cent of the Roma population are under the age of fifteen years (UNICEF, 2007) it is abundantly clear that millions of Roma children are currently significantly disadvantaged throughout their youth. Based on current trends, unless there is a fundamental shift towards interventions targeted at children and young people, the current cohort of young Roma are likely to continue to experience life-long inequality of opportunity. Despite (see further below) well-intentioned Roma inclusion policies which have been developed

throughout the EU in recent years (ERRC, 2014), the failure to achieve substantial rapid improvements in the circumstances of these populations has been well identified.

Moreover, and critically important in terms of Roma youth's future access to employment, socio-economic inclusion and health literacy, as well as enabling parents to have the 'building blocks' to support and prepare their own children for school, Roma in Central and South East Europe frequently experience segregated or lower levels of schooling throughout their educational career. This impacts both on individual attainment and trans-generational opportunities (FRA, 2009; 2011; European Commissioner for Human Rights, 2012). The 2016 EU Midis report found that 50% of Roma children and young people between the ages of five and twenty-four do not access any form of education whilst 64% of 16-24 year old Roma are not in education, employment or training. In only three countries surveyed for the EU-Midis survey (2016), namely Spain, Hungary and Bulgaria, were over 50% of Roma children under compulsory school age (typically commencing at six years of age in Central and South East Europe), accessing early years education. Bloem & Brüggemann in a study for the Roma Education Fund (2016) conducted a meticulous analysis of the household circumstances of Roma pupils in Slovakia and comparable Central and South East European countries. This conclusively demonstrated that household socio-economic circumstances; use of Romanes as home/first language; parents' limited education and especially noticeably, low levels of pre-school experience, were prominent variables pertaining to explanatory and predictability categories for low levels of pupil attainment even where Roma Education Fund supported interventions existed (2016: 20-21).

It is of particular concern that the EU-Midis report (2016) found that throughout the European countries surveyed, even when the high degree of segregation into 'special educational

needs' classes of Roma children (a practice which is found particularly in Hungary and the Czech and Slovak Republics and which has been the subject of numerous legal challenges by Roma Rights Organizations, see further Rorke, 2016) is excluded from analysis; around 18% of Roma children are placed in classes which are working at a level below that which is expected of their chronological age, further impacting on their long-term educational opportunities. It is incontrovertible that lack of early childhood education, regardless of the country in which a child grows up, or their ethnicity, creates a 'lag' in terms of educational attainment during the years of compulsory schooling (Eshetu, 2015; Berlinski et. al., 2009; Bibi & Ali, 2012). Magnuson et al. (2007) reported that children who have had such opportunities consistently demonstrate higher academic skills levels than do their peers who have not attended pre-school education. Thus as discussed further below, ensuring that Roma children are able to access early years education offers the opportunity to lay down the foundations for successful academic attainment with wide-ranging impacts on future generations.

Finally, in addition to the multiple domains of exclusion rehearsed above, the degree of racism experienced by Roma people throughout Europe cannot be overstated, with 41% of Roma respondents participating in the EU-Midis survey (2016) reporting experiences of discrimination within the last five years based on their ethnicity. Such breaches of human rights not infrequently go beyond denial of access to services and may include violent assaults, which when coupled with deep exclusion and poverty impact children and young peoples' sense of psychological and physical security with significant impacts on mental health (Lee et. al., 2014). Noticeably discrimination and racism experienced by young people not uncommonly occurs in the context of educational settings (Kjaerum, 2013; Roma Education Fund/Institute for Human Rights, 2013). It can thus be seen that in terms of supporting Roma populations towards greater social

inclusion, the population are facing a ‘perfect storm’ of disadvantage within which, unequal access to education and in particular lack of appropriate pre-school and early years opportunities, are but one (albeit a crucial) element.

The Decade of Roma Inclusion; National Roma Integration Strategies and Policy Enactments Aimed at Enhancing the Situation of Roma

Despite the appalling lack of equality experienced by Roma people throughout much of Europe, steps have increasingly been taken by Governments and international agencies, predominantly driven by United Nations and European policy agendas, to attempt to redress the circumstances of the populations. Roma people throughout South and East Europe in particular (although also in Western Europe, albeit to a somewhat less stark degree) typically experience the highest degree of social exclusion of any population resident in Europe (World Bank, 2010b). However, over the last twenty years there has been an increasing recognition of both the human rights (CERD, 2012; Amnesty International, 2014) and economic arguments (World Bank, 2010a) pertaining to the necessity of devising strategies and enacting interventions to attempt to bring about greater equity between Roma people and surrounding populations. In recent decades, one particularly effective mechanism for engaging national governments in the former Eastern/Soviet bloc countries has been to require that in preparation for accession to the European Union, the circumstances of Roma communities should be treated to especial scrutiny (Ram, 2010; 2012). These new entrants to the EU were required to demonstrate whether adequate steps were being taken to comply with international treaties and responsibilities such as the United Nations’ International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination requirements (ICERD, 1965). It had been clearly recognised that since the

dissolution of the Soviet bloc (essentially post 1989) the situation of Roma people had declined across South and East Europe exponentially, with significantly higher levels of poverty, unemployment and enacted discrimination reported in numerous countries. As economic pressures and political realignments occurred, Roma populations became more exposed to exclusionary practices as significantly identifiable groups of ethnic 'others' in largely mono-cultural nation states which had not experienced mass migration and the enactment of resultant multiculturalist and integrationist policies common to the West (Barany, 2000; Pogany, 2004). In response to their drastically declining situation and the emergent potential to claim asylum in the West as post-Soviet borders became more porous, the first significant waves of Westward Roma migration in centuries commenced in the 1990s. This was despite the fact that asylum claims were frequently unsuccessful and claimants were returned to their countries of origin after some months or years (Muižnieks, 2015; Council of Europe, 2010).

The bridge-head effect of living and working in Western Europe led to a recognition that overt enacted racism and discrimination was less likely to occur post-migration, leading to new opportunities for inclusion (including access to non-segregated and free education for children and young people). This meant that even when asylum claims failed, entrepreneurial Roma migrants who were returned to their countries of origin were frequently at the forefront of those groups of migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe who anticipated and planned for migration to the West once their home member states had acceded to the EU; as occurred during the early 2000s. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given wide-spread representations in media discourse of poorly educated, low-skilled, high fertility young Roma criminals and antisocial Roma children who would represent a burden on any receiving state (see further: Christianakis, 2015; Muižnieks, 2015; Nicolae, 2009), Western member states expressed disquiet at the thought of large numbers

of Roma migrating once EU borders were enlarged. As such it may be argued that it was this geopolitical realpolitik (and indeed transfer of racist notions pertaining to fear of Roma poverty and criminality), almost as much as human rights concerns which has driven EU inclusion policies, aimed at enhancing the situation of Roma in their home nations and simultaneously discouraging Westwards migration. Accordingly the two 'late' waves of EU country accessions from former Soviet bloc countries (A8 in 2004; A2 in 2007 and Croatia in 2013) afforded an opportunity to strengthen the socio-legal-economic status of Roma in the acceding countries. Moreover, Roma advocacy and rights organizations utilised the accession talks to locate themselves as central to debates on minority rights and push Roma affairs further up the EU political agenda (Spirova and Budd, 2008; Guglielmo & Waters, 2005).

In 2005, in response to increasing disquiet at the situation of Roma populations, a coalition of twelve countries and international organizations came together to create a groundbreaking multi-stream, international programme aimed at enhancing the social inclusion and socio-economic status of Roma minorities. The initiative which was designed to run for ten years was launched at the Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005; in the same year as the Roma Education Fund (REF) was created as a key component of the Decade. The Decade had the explicit aim of ensuring countries participating in the initiative allocated resources to achieve inclusion, and aligned their country specific inclusion plans with the funding instruments and policies of international donors. Simultaneously the REF utilised funding streams to focus on expanding educational opportunities for Roma communities in Central, South and Eastern Europe, with the intent of closing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma at all stages from pre-school education to young Roma scholars engaged in doctoral and post-doctoral studies. In addition to the REF, the World Bank, Open Society Institute (OSI) and the United

Nations Development Program, the following core European governance agencies are all key members of the Decade, and party to its subsequent policy initiatives:- the Council of Europe, Council of Europe Development Bank, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights within the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF) and the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC). Whilst the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) became full partners in the programme in 2008, as did the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2011.

In 2010, expanding the policy initiatives beyond the twelve countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) - which were essentially those member states and pre-accession countries with large Roma populations - the European Commission issued a communication specifying the steps which EU member states were required to undertake to develop a concrete plan to improve the situation of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller people. There were four required activity strands focused on health, education, accommodation and access to essential services as well as employment. Whilst the way in which the strategy was to be developed and initiated was a matter for individual member states, the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) operated using a combination of 'carrot and stick' to encourage compliance. It specified targets and activities to be undertaken until 2020 (European Commission 2011a, 2011b) and provided access to fiscal support from European funding for such initiatives. As such it was explicitly specified that NRIS as enacted across member states would be subject to annual monitoring at European policy level, with such

reviews undertaken in partnership with multinational Roma agencies as well as Roma civil society active within participating countries (European Commission, 2012).

On the face of it the NRIS offered a superb opportunity to engage with sources of Roma exclusion, particularly in relation to improving the situation of young children and families who should be key beneficiaries of the multiple strands of activities. However, improvements in circumstances of Roma appear to be extremely limited, particularly in Southern and Eastern European countries where Roma experience the deepest poverty and constraints on education and employment (FRA, 2011; EU-MIDIS II, 2016). Albeit, the growth of early years and other educational activities, such as the Roma Early Childhood Initiative, funded by the REF, OSF and UNICEF (2012) - discussed further below - have brought some limited improvements and enhanced participation in early learning. Nevertheless, overall the Decade of Roma inclusion programme and NRIS strategy has been subject to significant critique by Roma civil society, who have not infrequently become disillusioned by the limited success of initiatives for which funding was accessed from European sources but which appears to have delivered limited or only short-term change at grass-roots level (Rorke, 2012; Bruggemann & Friedman, 2017; Kullmann et. al., 2014). Despite the Council of Europe's (2013) emphasis on the necessity of educational integration for Roma children from early years upwards, coupled with economic support for families, the EU-MIDIS survey of 2016 reported that throughout Europe only 53% of pre-school Roma children accessed early years education (with significantly lower levels of participation in many countries). The report also stated that 80% of Roma still live at risk of poverty and 30% of Roma children live in a household which faces hunger at least once a month – with obvious implications for childhood attainment, wellbeing and participation in education. Thus to date, overall, there would appear to be only limited success in terms of substantive

change following the implementation of Roma inclusion strategies (European Roma Policy Coalition, 2012; European Roma Rights Centre, 2014); although the picture is not entirely bleak when one considers (below) a number of successful case studies of early years education programmes which are delivering culturally accessible learning opportunities for both children and their parents (predominantly mothers) who are engaging in activities with them (REF, OSF and UNICEF, 2012; World Bank, 2012; Klaus & Marsh, 2014).

Roma Children and Early Years Education

As indicated above, the EU framework on Roma integration (2010; 2011a; 2011b), subsequent Council of Europe recommendations (2013) and NRIS policies as implemented throughout EU member states, have all foregrounded the role of education in enhancing inclusion and increasing opportunities for Roma populations. The manner in which national governments implement the NRIS framework is a matter for individual member states, and hence both the quality and extent of engagement with early childhood education may vary (UNESCO, 2010) from one country to another. However, certain expectations and monitoring requirements exist to ensure compliance and that attention is paid to the four main domains of NRIS activity, of which Education forms a key strut. The 2013 CoE recommendation on Roma integration urged Member States to take effective measures to ensure equality of treatment and full access to mainstream, quality education for Roma children of both genders with the intent of ensuring that all Roma children were able to complete compulsory schooling by 2020. This recommendation thus synchronizes with the EU's strategic framework for cooperation in education and training (Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) (2009), which sets a benchmark of 95% of all children accessing pre-school education. Despite this explicit emphasis on creating the building blocks

for later educational attainment and findings from the EU-MIDIS II (2016), it is clear that Roma children are still significantly under-represented in terms of access to early childhood education. The average early childhood participation rate is 54% for Roma children for those countries with generally the lowest access to compulsory education for Roma populations and highest degrees of educational segregation. In the Czech and Slovak Republics, Romania and Croatia, this is likely to fall to around 30%. In Kosovo pre-school education is only accessed by 0.2% of Roma children. On the face of it (for South East Europe) the striking exception is Bulgaria, where 66% of children benefit from pre-school education. On the other hand UNESCO (2010:80) reports that 20% of Bulgarian Roma children do not receive any form of education even at primary level. Within the EU the lowest figure for Roma children participating in early years education is found in Greece (28%), whilst only Spain (95 %) and Hungary (91 %) have participation rates that approximate to the ET 2020 target figure (EU-MIDIS, 2016). This is reflective of the prioritization given to education within these latter countries' NRIS strategies, and potentially indicative too of the strength and cohesion of Roma civil society organizations in those member states.

Overall however, throughout Europe Roma children are severely under-represented in educational statistics and families frequently report discrimination against their children at all stages of the school system. In a number of countries they also report educational segregation occasioned by a focus on Roma children's ethnicity, and a presumption that they should receive a separate education from non-Roma peers (despite the illegality of such practices – see further ERRC, 2004). For Roma children at all stages of their educational career in South Eastern Europe there is also disproportionality in terms of professionals' identification of children with special education needs, which status may pertain predominantly to unfamiliarity with early

years and school systems, or language barriers due to the language of instruction being in a national language which is unfamiliar to children who speak Romanes at home (UNESCO, 2010; World Bank, 2012). Given that Roma children typically commence school later than their non-Roma peers and often face radicalized stigmatization from teachers and classmates, it is thus unsurprising that the educational lag is profound for the majority of such children. In an attempt to mitigate the impact of educational and social exclusion the Council of Europe Children's Strategy (2016) explicitly identifies the need to support Roma children in both early years and mainstream education, stressing that:

Action will be undertaken in particular to ... strengthen access of Roma children and in particular girls and children with disabilities to inclusive education [and] to make full use of trained Roma mediators and assistants under ROMED (a Council of Europe/REF initiative which delivers mediation between Roma communities and statutory service providers such as education authorities, and works to break down barriers to inclusion) as well as to fight stereotypes against Roma children (2016:11).

In making these recommendations the CoE has drawn upon findings from the 2010 UNESCO report on Early Childhood Care and Education which stressed the impact of deep poverty and lack of parental education on Roma children's life-chances, noting that:

... many Roma children are not at all ready to integrate kindergarten successfully at the age of 5 years ... preparatory work needs to be undertaken in Roma settlements with parents to ready children for successful entry to public kindergartens as ... in situations of extreme poverty and distrust of official projects, some means of funding and organising informal education needs to be found, based on the principle of addressing the needs of young children and mothers together (2010:63).

Reiterating the urgency of engaging with young children and their carers in terms of developing preparedness for access to school, the World Bank (2012), in a study focused on closing the early learning gap between Roma children in Eastern European and their majority peers, emphasised the urgent necessity for Roma children to gain equality of access to early learning opportunities in order to ‘break the cycle of intergenerational transmission of poverty’ (2012:8). The report emphasised the need to work with Roma parents to educate them on the benefits of preschool attendance for children’s later life outcomes, as well as promoting inclusivity with early-years environments. To do this, it recommended reaching out to parents and involving them directly in pre-school through working with Roma teaching assistants. It also recommended diminishing financial barriers to early childhood participation and supporting parenting initiatives within the home. Given the fundamental barriers to inclusion for Roma families living on the margins of society, and for whom attendance at pre-school education may seem to be of less immediate importance than access to accommodation, safety from intimidation and the availability of basic services including clean water (ERRC, 2017), it is clear that a range of innovative methodologies and programmes (such as are illustrated below) are required to maximise take-up of early years education.

Case Study 1. Romania: Access to Education project (ARC 2017)

Summary: This small scale project ran for three years starting in 2010, on a budget of £10,000. It involved paying for extra schooling sessions for Roma children in Tirgu Mures. Identifiable successes included:

- A small number of Roma children making clear academic progress
- Teachers treating Roma children with more respect

- Improved integration between Roma and non-Roma children

Facilitators: Aid for Romanian Children - a UK charitable trust whose main focus is working with children in the Transylvania region of Romania.

Challenges: The Roma children of Valea Rece village were generally not well educated, and the system in their local town of Tirgu Mures militated against their success. The state run primary schools operated from 8.00am until 1.00pm. In the afternoon some of the teachers offered lessons that were not part of the free education system. Most non-Roma parents were happy to pay the additional fee, for which their children received a hot meal at lunchtime and extra tuition in the afternoon. The Roma children of Valea Rece are among the poorest in Europe. Clearly, they could not afford to attend these sessions, and therefore they were getting left behind, which in turn accentuated the gap between the Roma and the rest of the local Romanian population.

Goals: ARC aimed to give the Roma children of Valea Rece an equal opportunity of a decent start in life, by getting as many children as possible into the extra sessions run by teachers in out of school time.

Method: ARC attempted to bridge the opportunity gap by paying the extra fees for those Roma children who showed a genuine commitment to their early schooling. The ARC representative in Romania made regular checks to make sure the children were attending, and that they were being well treated by the teachers (sometimes that had also been a problem).

Impact: The project had an encouraging impact, with some Roma children not only able to show their academic abilities, but also able to integrate into the non-Roma community. Another very striking (and unexpected) result was the way in which the non-Roma

parents engaged with the project, by donating food and clothing for the teachers to distribute around the Roma children. However, the impact was short-lived. It was expensive for a charity to run, costing around £400 per year to help each child's education. Unfortunately, when Romania joined the EU it became increasingly difficult to raise funds for Romanian children, and the charity had to prioritize the more immediate demand for food and medicines.

Case Study 2. Serbia: Equal Chances: Integrating Roma children and youth into the educational system (UNICEF 2011)

Summary: This was the first Equal Chances project, running from 2002 to 2005 in the Serbian towns of Kragujevac and Nis. It was funded from a variety of governmental and non-governmental sources including UNICEF. Its main focus was on access to pre-school and primary education by Roma children. It laid great emphasis on the genuine participation of the Roma community in the project. Identifiable successes included:

- Improved relations between Roma and non-Roma children
- Development of curiosity and motivation in relation to educational materials and activities
- Educational achievements for Roma children in the scheme were better than for Roma children elsewhere in the country

Facilitators: The Fund for an Open Society Serbia was the primary operational partner. They worked with several 'implementing partners', including the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, the Roma Information Centre in Kragujevac, and the Roma Education Centre in Nis, as well as the local Departments of Ministry of Education and Sport

Challenges: Local Roma groups identified a range of issues, including weak academic performance, poor relations between Roma and non-Roma children, unacceptable attitudes on the part of teaching staff, and the quality and quantity of Roma Teaching Assistants (RTAs). At a national level Equal Chances had some success in 2003, helping the development of a Draft Strategy for Improving Education of Roma in the Republic of Serbia. This was supposed to lead to the development of local plans, but changes to local government in 2005 meant an end to such moves.

Goals: FOSS and its collaborators hoped to achieve change at all levels: national government, local communities, and individual schools. They were aiming not only for better academic performance by the Roma children, but also an improved classroom experience all round.

Method: Teachers were encouraged to be more child-centred in their general approach. They were also given Education for Social Justice training, with the aim of making them more aware of Roma culture and the needs of Roma children. The curriculum was altered accordingly, and included projects that were specifically designed to encourage parents to participate. Also, the employment of Roma Teaching Assistants was encouraged, and they were given comprehensive training.

Impact: The project was broadly successful, seeing better academic outcomes for these Roma children than for their counterparts elsewhere in the country. There was greater participation by Roma parents, and a change in teacher attitudes towards the children. There was greater use of Roma Teaching Assistants, and this element was highlighted as having a positive impact on the attitudes of both Roma and non-Roma children. The Step-by-Step approach in classrooms was thought to be a significant factor in the

success of the project. Finally, there was clear evidence of improved relations between all participants - Roma and non-Roma children, teachers, RTAs, school staff and parents. However, evaluations have tended to suggest that whilst acceptance of the new approach is quickly accepted at a classroom level, it is not always adopted throughout the school. This may mean that as a child moves from one class to the next, all the good work is at risk of being quickly undone.

Case Study 3. United Kingdom: Beeston Hill Sure Start for Travellers Project (SCF 2007)

Summary: Beeston Hill Children's Centre and Leeds Traveller Education Service created an outreach project aimed at early childhood development and education. The weekly play sessions were run by playworkers on site, and play materials were then left with the families for a week. The Centre also set aside five 'flexible' places for Roma children in their over-3s nursery. Identifiable successes included:

- Improved take up of the flexible places in the Children's Centre Nursery
- Regular use of the toy library artifacts
- Roma children engaging in a wider variety of play types

Facilitators: The Beeston Hill Children's Centre was funded as part of the national government's Sure Start programme. Leeds Traveller Education Service was established by the Leeds City Council.

Challenges: The Children's Centre had become aware of the fact that the local Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families were not making use of their services. In particular they wanted to address the non-attendance at their nursery sessions by these children. The decision to work in and around the children's homes brought its own challenges. For

example, quite apart from the obvious space restrictions, it may be that parents do not want their children making a mess, or a lot of noise. When playing outdoors the environment may not be especially safe, because the area is likely to be used as a workspace, and there may be moving traffic.

Goals: The project aimed to broaden the children's play experiences in their home environment, and encourage parents to bring their children along to the Children's Centre Nursery, where places would be made available for them.

Method: The project employed a number of playworkers, whose task was to visit children who had been referred by Leeds TES. The children were introduced to a range of play artifacts, supplied from the Children's Centre's resources, i.e. the toy library. They were encouraged to play with these artifacts in creative and imaginative ways. The visits normally involved two project workers, one of whom would play with the children, while the other might attempt to address the family's other issues. Parents were gradually encouraged to visit the Children's Centre, with a view to accessing the toy library for themselves, and also enrolling their child in the nursery.

Impact: Visiting children in their own home made it possible to conduct a more accurate assessment of their needs. Seeing the reality of the home environment made it much easier to arrange appropriately targeted support. In addition it tended to bring about a closer relationship with the child's parents, which made much easier to offer help, and sometimes demonstrate new ways of relating to their child. Also, there was an improved use of the 'flexible' nursery places at the Children's Centre. Sadly, funding for this project was withdrawn as a result of the UK Government's austerity measures, introduced in response to the global financial crisis.

Case Study 4. Albania: Securing access for Romani Children to quality, integrated preschool and compulsory education (Council of Europe 2013).

Summary: This was a five year project, starting in 2008 which ran in the Korca and Gjirokastra municipalities of Albania. It involved making substantial improvements to four schools and four kindergartens in these areas, especially in terms of their inclusivity of Roma children. The project also sought to increase the involvement of Roma parents in the education of their children. Identifiable successes included:

- Increased enrolment and retention of Roma children in these schools
- Roma children benefited from the provision of meals and transport
- Roma children showed improvement in their use of the Albanian language

Facilitators: The project was funded by Medicor and the Roma Education Fund, and managed by Save the Children Albania.

Challenge: There was general negativity from the majority Albanian population about the Roma communities, which led to both overt and covert discrimination. Roma children had hitherto not been welcomed into the schooling system. Consequently, Roma parents were suspicious of attempts to persuade them to let their children attend pre-school and primary education. It had proved especially difficult to keep Roma girls in school.

Goals: The project organizers aimed to establish good quality non-discriminatory education in schools and pre-schools, and increase the involvement of both Roma and non-Roma parents. They also aimed to pass on the lessons to the various local, regional and national education authorities.

Method: The project began by collaborating with universities to design a model which could be applied in schools and kindergartens in the two municipalities, and might be promoted to the wider nation. Teachers were given extra training which focused on child-centred culturally sensitive approaches to teaching. The Roma communities were challenged in terms of their existing largely negative attitudes towards education, and encouraged to participate in all aspects of the project. Extra classes were offered covering mathematics, the Albanian language, and Roma history and culture. The project also included poorer non-Roma families, in order to avoid being accused of favoring Roma children to the detriment of non-Roma children.

Impact: Nearly 800 Roma children benefited from the project, as shown by increased school enrolments and continued attendance. Well over 100 teachers participated in the project, reporting positive outcomes, and feeling more comfortable when teaching in a multi-cultural classroom environment. Around 500 Roma parents became actively involved in their children's schooling. It is clearly arguable that many hundreds of non-Roma parents also benefited, and that several thousand non-Roma children were introduced to a new way of relating to their Roma colleagues.

Conclusions

Regardless of ethnicity the lack of early childhood education leads to serious problems in terms of subsequent educational attainment (Magnuson et al., 2007). In the case of Roma children throughout Central and Eastern Europe this issue is accentuated by a range of issues, including language, segregation, exclusion, and outright racism (see above). This has historically led to deep suspicion on the part of Roma parents, who are likely to have been on the receiving

end of discrimination, and may well have received a poor quality education themselves (Sime, et. al., 2017). That has in turn caused a low take up of pre-school and kindergarten opportunities. Thus, we can see a negative cycle of Roma people at worst experiencing outright prejudice and discrimination, and at best feeling unwanted. This leads in many cases to deep resentment and a negative attitude towards public bodies, which of course includes education settings (Fleck & Rughinis, 2008; Szalai & Schiff, 2014), and results in low levels of enrolment in early childhood settings. Consequently, officialdom develops a negative image of Roma people, and so the cycle continues, impacting on both individual attainment and trans-generational opportunities (Smith, 2014; Bruggemann & Darcy, 2016).

As we have seen there have been many local, national and international programmes aiming to address these issues for the Roma population, e.g. NRIS, REF and UNICEF's Roma Early Childhood Initiative. Regrettably, to date, there would still appear to be only limited success in terms of tangible change which impacts the life chances of Roma children. Across Europe we have less than 50% of Roma children enrolling in early childhood opportunities, and in some countries the situation is far worse (EU-Midis, 2016). Roma children still tend to start formal schooling later than non-Roma children, and they also tend to access pre-school and kindergarten later, albeit to a statistically limited degree (World Bank, 2012).

Accordingly it can with confidence be argued that the most significant problem with these well-intentioned initiatives has been the short-term nature of the funding streams that supported their establishment, yet failed to yield long-term substantive change. In researching this study we were referred to numerous examples of good practice, but it is significant that it was very difficult to find evidence that most of these projects were still in existence five years (maximum) post implementation. We therefore argue that the funding issue has to be addressed

before anything substantial can be achieved in terms of long-term impact. It is tempting to say that there is a need for Government bodies and civil society to act in partnership to find new and imaginative ways of approaching the issue, but the truth is that many good examples on which we can draw are already in existence, with outcomes in the public domain. As such we would argue strongly that there is a significant lack of political will to ensure that these short-term ‘gains’ are mainstreamed and become part of State structures and expectations. Accordingly, in addition to the necessity of ensuring a deep-rooted commitment by States to providing long term funding, we propose that a programme which is serious about delivering change would need to include:

- Meaningful involvement of the Roma communities at all levels of the initiatives
- Training and employment of Roma Teachers and Teaching Assistants
- The employment of outreach playworkers to engage closely with children and parents in their home environment
- Working with Roma parents to educate them sensitively (i.e. without appearing patronizing) on the benefits of preschool attendance for children’s later life outcomes
- A degree of culturally appropriate level of *informal* education that addresses the needs of young children and mothers together, whilst ensuring that the doors are not shut and aspirations are not diminished in relation to ‘mainstream’ levels of academic achievement.
- Designing teacher training courses that include elements which are focused on Roma history and culture
- Addressing the additional prejudice (both intra and extra-communally) against Roma girls accessing educational opportunities

- And such other elements as emerge and are under constant review in terms of good practice and emergent recommendations to enable meaningful engagement with Roma communities (see for example UNICEF 2011 recommendations on ongoing engagement, especially pp.75-84)

In conclusion, whilst there are a substantial number of well-thought out and delivered programmes aimed at ensuring greater inclusion of Roma children in early years education many of these have emerged from pre-existing civil society initiatives or non-state funding and moreover are frequently facing an uncertain future as a result of funding insecurity. We therefore issue this chapter as a clarion call to those who are deeply engaged with social justice and the wellbeing of children, and urge that a deep commitment to change and a major emphasis on early years education is required at the highest level, if the intergenerational cycle of exclusion experienced by the Roma people is to be eradicated in the coming years and decades.

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