

Social and Educational Exclusion of Roma in Macedonia with Focus on Roma Children on the Street

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Introduction

Roma are traditionally vulnerable ethnic group in the Republic of Macedonia. They are facing with the problem of poverty and social exclusion which is the basis for multiplication of series of other social problems. Namely, Roma are exposed to educational and cultural exclusion, marginalization and discrimination in society as well as a long-term passivity of the state in regards of undertaking in-depth structural measures for overcoming of their situation. This unfavorable social situation of Roma reflects in all aspects of their living.

Especially vulnerable are Roma children that due to the high rate of poverty and social exclusion face with the situation in which their basic needs for a home, food, clothing, health, education, and communal services are neglected. Alarming is the data on their low level of participation in the formal education. This is especially drastic among children on the streets of Roma nationality who are facing with the shortage of parental care and are left on the severity of the street life. These children are also facing threats on the basic right to life, survival and development, the right to nondiscrimination, the right on the child best interest and the right of child's participation.

1. Participation of Roma in the demographic structure in Macedonia

The Republic of Macedonia is a society comprised of different ethnic communities with a total population of two million citizens. Dominant is the Macedonian ethnic group (64.18%), Albanians are the second largest ethnic community (25.17%), than follow Turks (3.85%), Roma (2.66%), and other (State Statistical Office, 2003).¹ The Roma ethnic group has been identified as a fastest growing community, which has grown from 2.20% in 1994 to 2.66% in 2002, indicating a growth of 0.46% for a period of eight years. These official figures have been subject of dispute by the representatives of Roma communities as well as by the NGO sector. Formal representatives of Roma are pointing out that the numbers are not accurate, due to the fact that there is a significant number of unregistered (without country of domain) persons within these

¹ The official data of the demographic structure of citizens is outdated due to the unsuccessful implementation of a census of population in October, 2011.

communities. According to the Commission of European Communities (2009) in Macedonia there are between 3000 to 5000 unregistered persons, most of them of Roma background. These persons are lacking personal documents, such as birth certificates and medical insurance or employment cards, which are necessary to benefit from social insurance, healthcare and other social services. Despite the attempt mostly of the NGO sector to obtain necessary documents for registration of citizens, the problem of identification of accurate number of citizens remains. There are also a number of Roma refugees (approximately 2,500) that were not reintegrated after the Kosovo crisis and kept the refugee status in Macedonia (Trbojevik, Bogoevska, 2011).

There is an uneven distribution of population in the Republic of Macedonia with more than one third of its citizens living in the capital city Skopje. This, also, applies to distribution of ethnic Roma where 43.6% of all Roma live in Skopje. Almost (1/4) or (24.8%) of them live in the municipality of Skopje named Shuto Orizari. This municipality is the largest settlement of Roma in Europe. "Roma in Shuto Orizari have achieved certain minority rights following their compact (some say segregated) residence, most notably in a higher degree of political participation in local affairs" (Open Society Institute, 2008). The uniqueness of this community is in the fact that it is the only Roma governed community in Europe. Other communities with high concentration of Roma are: Prilep, Kumanovo, Bitola, Gostivar, Vinica, Debar, Kichevo, Kochani, Tetovo, and Shtip (State Statistical Office, 2003). Roma communities have highest concentration of young population; most of them practice Islam and are bilingual. Roma students attend schools in Macedonian language.

2. Poverty and social exclusion of Roma

Roma are an ethnic group that has traditionally been exposed to the highest level of poverty and social exclusion. All relevant research and official data point out to Roma community as materially deprived and stripped of basic human rights for home, food, clothing, education, health, and communal services.

The position of Roma in Macedonian society has varied throughout history. It probably improved most in the former Yugoslavia, when many Roma were integrated into society as unskilled laborers. Unfortunately, few took advantage of the era of free education in order to improve their position in society. The transitional period cast many to the outskirts of society as superfluous remnants of the unskilled labor force.

The activity rate among Roma is 50.4%, whereas the unemployment rate among Roma is 78.5 % and they are represented with only 0.42% in the structure of the public sector. However, the participation of Roma ethnic communities in the informal economy is quite high, indicating a limited employment opportunities in public administration (Gerovska-Mitev et al., 2007).

Poverty among Roma is higher than among other groups and is based on number of accumulated factors that are incorporated in the history, tradition and their permanent social exclusion. Roma have the lowest incomes and the highest mortality rate. An estimated two thirds or 63% of Roma households live below the poverty line. (Commission of the European Communities, 2009:23)

On average, Roma in the Republic of Macedonia have younger population compared to the average age of population. Owing to the different fertility and mortality rate compared to the national average, there is a higher proportion of Roma children in their groups, and a lower proportion of older persons. The reproductive rate at Roma is twice as big as the national average but also the mortality rate at children is twice higher than other ethnic groups. The life expectancy is shorter and Roma are more prone to chronic illness (Ministry of labour and social policy, 2005).

The living conditions are below the standard level. The vast number of Roma (95%) is mostly concentrated in poorer and suburban areas. In the area of housing, Roma are mostly facing the problems of unclear ownership status of property, located outside of urbanized planning zones, lacking basic infrastructure, and lacking access to services (Lakinska, 2000).

Roma in Macedonia are facing with conditions of direct or indirect discrimination and marginalization. This situation reflects in numerous areas due to which Roma are not in position to fully integrate in the society.

The police do not respond to fights against Roma, some local policemen are constantly harassing them but there is no effect from reporting the policemen, cases have been reported of prohibited access to night clubs, swimming pools and restaurants, Roma are restrain from court procedures (Ministry of labour and social policy, 2005)².

3. Educational exclusion of Roma children

The high rate of students who vacate the process of regular education is a serious problem in Macedonia. The official data from the State Bureau of Statistics shows that not all children are included in the regular educational process i.e. in 2008/2009 only 91% of the total number of school age children enrolled in school. This fact points out that there is insufficient representation of children from vulnerable categories (children challenged with developmental problems, children from socially endangered families, Roma children, children from distanced rural settlements, etc.) in educational processes (State Statistical Office, 2008).

The statistical figures about the level of education among Roma have been traditionally low. According to the census data of 2002, there are 23% of Roma without education, 28.6% with incomplete primary school education, 37.4% primary school, 9.7% secondary school, 0.2% high school and 0.2% higher school, faculty or academy (State Statistical Office, 2003). In 2002, over half or 51.8 % of the adult Roma population had either no education at all or had never completed even elementary education, as compared to only 18.0 % for the total population. Roma children have a lower rate of literacy and have a low rate of inclusion, attendance, and enrolment in primary education (61%), and secondary education (17%) (Commission of the European Communities, 2009).

Also, significant is the rate of exclusion of Roma children from participation in extracurricular activities which is due lack of material resources. Namely, participation in extracurricular activities presumes additional expenses for which their parents do not have sufficient financial resources.

Connecting the problem of educational exclusion with a certain ethnic group indicates existence of social exclusion based on social, religious, cultural, and gender background. The relevant research locate the reasons for this situation in the specific characteristics of the Roma family, insufficient inclusion in elementary school and long-term passivity of the state in undertaking active measures for overcoming this situation³.

3.1. Reasons generated in the family

Various aspects of live of Roma family have influences on the level of school attendance and success of children in elementary school. The most important reasons connected to family, limiting children in successful inclusion in the educational processes, are low socioeconomic status, tradition, lifestyle and communications. The problem of educational exclusion of Roma children is a result of a prevalent presence of certain social problems such as disturbed family relations and neglect of children, the phenomenon of underage marriages and large number of children in the families, illiteracy of parents and no appreciation for the importance of the education in the Roma family as well as low cultural level.

² For more information see: Trbojevik, Bogoevska (2011), Migration, social exclusion and identity issues of Macedonian Roma, in: ed. Kristina Toplak Two Homelands, Ljubljana, Slovenian Migration Institute

³ For purposes of this paper we will present the data obtained from qualitative research conducted in 2010 which was conducted by the authors of the text. The research employed an explorative method using the following instruments: experts interview with the relevant local stake holders, semi structured interview with teachers and professionals from school social services and Roma educative centres and focus groups discussions with parents, local leaders and children. The sample included 240 research unites (For more see Donevska et al., 2010).

Special attention deserves the fact that Roma children to a large extent participate in provision of existence for the family by work engagements such as joining their parents in the seasonal work which forces them to travel from one to another place, collecting the old iron, plastics and other materials and begging.

All of these undermine the socialization function that family has on children. The lack of parental assistance and support, among the large number of Roma children, results in the decreased motivation, absence of positive goals and negative friendships.

3.2. Reasons generated at educational process

Roma children are facing difficulties at school as a result of certain didactical problems, inappropriate and inflexible educational process and low level of involvement in preschool education.

Didactical problems that are identified as the most important reason for the occurrence of educational problems in children are related to the scope, difficultness and content of the teaching material. Also, having Macedonian as a teaching language, a large number of children show lack of language proficiency, causing them problems to follow the content of the curricula. It is not the case of an absolute ignorance of the language but problem of a limited font of words and the inability to understand and use abstract and complex language constructs that are immanent for overcoming of the teaching content in higher years of education. Additional problems which are emerging as a result of poverty are lack of learning materials, clothing, footwear and meals.

3.3. Reasons generated in the system's structure

Structural problems of Roma in Macedonian society are long-term discrimination of Roma, ghettoization, social, political and cultural exclusion in society as well as enduring passivity of the state in regard of undertaking measures for overcoming the situation. This group stresses factors located in the state such as: the limited access to institutions and exercise of rights, lack of systems networking, unsustainable programs as well as a lack of positive examples for employment of educated Roma.

An important systemic problem is caused by the legal provision which foresees all students from first to fifth grade elementary school to be enrolled in the higher grade without the possibility of failure. That creates a situation in which students enrolled at the higher grades miss the elementary knowledge of reading, writing and calculus, necessary for regular attendance of classes.

Also, often students enroll at older age in the educational process and that is the reason why they do not fit physically and psychologically in the teaching group. It is not a rare case to enroll of these children in institutions for the grown ups or in special and combined classrooms.

4. Roma and the problem of children on the street

One of the major social problems of the Roma community represents the phenomenon of children on the street and the inclusion of children in begging and other deviant phenomena. Roma children on the street are most ferociously deprived of basic rights, which represent their basic needs for food, home, security, education and play. They are often inappropriately dressed for the weather conditions; are not being submitted to regular medical examination; and are being subject to the various abuses and exploitation.

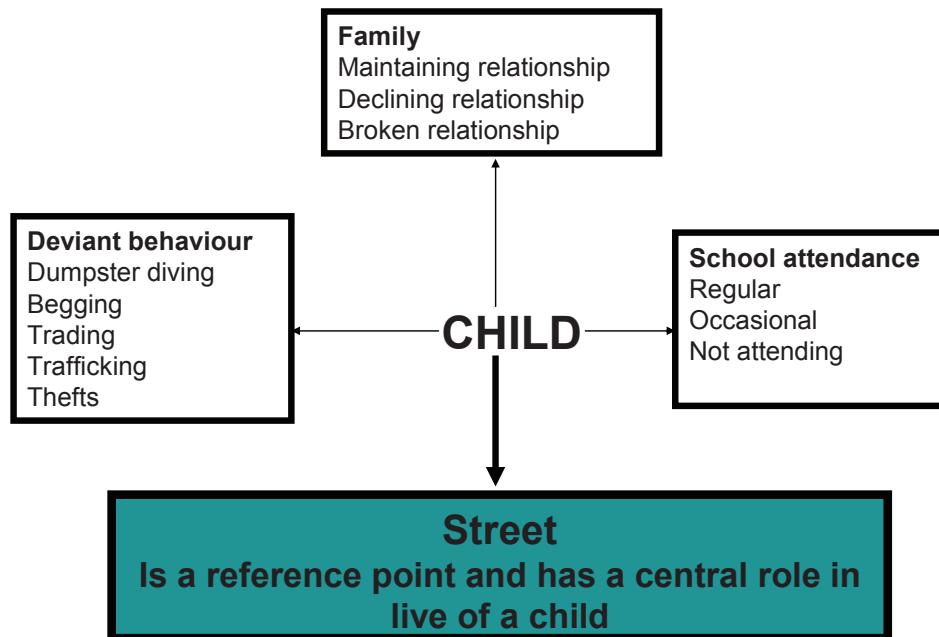
The phenomenon of street children encompasses a number of social problems that are imposed on Roma family. In essence it points out the disturbed functions and relations of three key factors:

(1) Family, it points out the existence of family dysfunction. Generally the relations among children and parents are manifested in two forms: on one hand strong family ties (the child inherits the family model of living of the street, is forced and controlled by the family) and on the other when family ties are weak or broken (the child is left on its own and is lacking parental care).

(2) The impact of school as second most important socializing factor is minimized. Namely, most of the children are not attend or irregularly attend school.

(3) Common to all of them is practices that are socially unaccepted and unadjusted to their age (dumpster diving, begging, trading, thefts, and trafficking).

The street is the reference point to all of them. Almost all Roma children in Macedonia are children on the street and street is a place where they spent most of their time⁴.



4.1. Scope and characteristic of the phenomenon Roma children on the street in the Republic of Macedonia

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy estimates that there are about 1,000 street children in Macedonia. Of these, 95% are Roma suggesting that the group has a dominant share in the problem of street children (Ombudsman, 2011). This problem has urban dimensions, concentrating mostly in the country's capital of Skopje as well as in other bigger cities such as Tetovo, Bitola, Kumanovo, Shtip, Strumica, Ohrid and Gostivar. Annually there are around 500 children on the streets rotating on the territory of city of Skopje.

The number of recorded street children is 719, indicating that more than a quarter of children are not registered in the system of protection and support. Namely, only nine centers for social work in the Republic of Macedonia (out of 30 that cover the whole territory of the state) recorded presence of street children. Six centers reported street children who beg but come from other municipalities. Typically, these are children that travel together with their parents to other cities during the holiday season, market days or during summer period in places that have larger populations living in the diaspora.

⁴ This distinction is important since "children on the street" have families and homes to go to at night, whereas "street children" live on the streets and probably lack parental, emotional and psychological support normally found in parenting situations.

Out of the registered street children, about 75% are engaged in begging. A significant number of children, about 9.3% are recorded as juvenile delinquents. Others deal with cleaning windshield glass at intersections, selling various commodities and other street work.

The recorded street children have parents but coercion is seen as one of the main reasons for labor exploitation and begging. The majority of children were instructed by their parents to beg in order to generate incomes for their families.

A particular problem is the existence of so-called "phantom children." Namely, about 37% of these children do not have birth certificates which limit them in the exercise of their rights. As a result, problems arise in enrollment of school, utilization of health care, and utilization of social protection rights. Only 17% of the total number of recorded street children is involved in the educational process. A number of street children have trials of drug and other psychotropic substances (glue, bronze, etc.) abuse.

4.2. Characteristics of children beneficiaries of services in daycare centers for street children

Protection of children on the street in the Republic of Macedonia has been realized through the system of social protection. Centres for social work are in charge of the undertaken institutional measures for:

- Family protection. There are no specific provisions for children on the streets within the Family Law apart from the general provisions for parental obligations as well as supervision of parental obligations and stripping of parental rights;
- Social protection. Social prevention, non residual and residual protection, financial family benefits;
- Child protection. Child benefits;
- Juvenile justice. Defining children at risk and juvenile perpetrators, procedures for undertaking measures and sanctions.

In practice the most common form of social protection of children on the streets is accommodation and care in the daycare centers. There are four daycare centers for children on the street. Three of the daycare centers are located in Skopje and one in Bitola. Some of them are result of the partnership between the state and the NGO sector. Daycare centers provide meals and hygiene, basic educational services (literacy), counseling for children and their families, cultural and recreational activities.

Services in the daycare centers (May 2010-May 2011) have been used by a total of 235 street children which represents one third of total number of registered street children. Analysis of the number and characteristics of users indicates that most of them (219 children) used the benefits of Skopje's daycare centers. All children except one were children of Roma nationality. Most of beneficiary children originate from urban areas and are not fully involved in the educational process, come from poor and dysfunctional families. Daycare centers protect children at risk aged 4-16 years who have a lack of parental care. All children show some manifestations of asocial behavior such as begging, vagabondage, and the smaller number are involved in criminal activities. (See the Table 1.)

Table no. 1: Characteristics of children beneficiaries of Day-care centres in 2010/2011

	Numb. of children	Roma	Age	Urban/rural	Education	Family	Practices
Day-care centers Skopje (Kisela Voda and Autocomanda)	129	128	4-16	94% urban	Not fully included in educational processes	Poor and dysfunctional families lack parental care exposed to different risks	Manifesting asocial behavior such as begging, wondering, and last year 4 have convicted criminal acts (90% of children on the streets in Skopje)

Day-care Shuto Orizari	90	90	5-15	Urban	Not fully included in educational processes	Poor and dysfunctional families lack parental care exposed to different risks	Manifest asocial behavior such as begging, wondering etc.
Day-care centre in Bitola	16	16	4-14	Urban	Not fully included in educational processes	Poor and dysfunctional families lack parental care exposed to different risks	Manifest asocial behavior such as begging, wondering etc.

(Source: Institute for social advancement, 2011)

4.3. Weaknesses of day-care protection of children on the street

The protection of children in day care centers shows some weaknesses in its practical implementation. They can be summarized to the following key weaknesses:

- Children are not attending regularly the day-care centers, that diminishes the effects of the social-protection measures implemented in the programs
- Lack of developmental and educational programs and planned interventions, in accordance with the maturity and potentials of children.
- Undeveloped mechanisms for stimulating individual and group work with parents and children
- Insufficient infrastructural and human capacities of Daycare Centers (some of them are inappropriately equipped with staff and do not have appropriate space, part of the staff is not fully employed that decreases the motivation).
- Insufficient implementation of "supervision of exercising parental right" as standard procedure in the work with beneficiaries.
- Insufficient individual and group work with parents for adoption of positive model of behavior that will provide efficient integration in the social-educational and cultural setting
- Lack of community-based services for children on the street

The effects of application of this measure can be accomplished only if a holistic multisectoral approach is employed and it this encompasses work with families. This is partly recognized by the central government due to which: (1) in 2011, on the territory of Skopje, a 24 hour transit center for children in social risk was open with the goal to strengthen capacities for protection and care of street children. (2) a strengthening of professional potentials in the centers for social work is conducted, this will enable active and continuous supervision on parental rights and will take measures against parents who abuse their children (parents of 10 street children have been deprived of their parental rights).

5. Social and educational inclusion measures for Roma in Macedonia

Roma are identified as a most vulnerable ethnic group in the Republic of Macedonia. In effort to promote their societal position the Government and the NGO sector undertake number of initiatives. The main goal of the strategic and operative activities was to develop the capacities of Roma communities, to utilize of human capital and to reduce social exclusion.

The Decade for Roma inclusion (2005-2015) and the National Strategy for Roma are the main strategic documents that focus on Roma inclusion in Macedonia. Their main goals are focused on empowerment and integration of Roma population in the social and economical life, decrease of poverty and marginalization of Roma population as well as continuous development of Roma communities⁵.

NGO sector played crucial role in recognizing the problem of Roma exclusion. They implemented programs and assist in developing spin-off organizations focusing on Roma in the area of education, health, media, housing and civil society. In that context FOSIM was leader in initiation of programs for developing and strengthening human and social capital of Roma population. Their work with the Roma is based on the strategic approach focused on developing programs, establishing the structure, staffing for independent work and ensuring sustainability.

The process of educational inclusion Roma was strongly supported by the Roma Education Centers. The main activity of Roma educational centers is to provide assistance and support in learning and homework. Despite that there is an effort to develop children's abilities and social skills.

The activities of the state and the NGO sector for increasing awareness for the importance of education, support of the educational processes as well as provision of financial support in a form of scholarships contributed to gradual increase of the number of Roma enrolled on all level of education.

The data shows that the Project for inclusion of Roma children in preschool institutions in the period of 2006-2011 covered 1650 Roma children of whom 84% have enrolled in primary education. Also, according to other relevant data there were 1.3% of Roma students who have completed primary education in 1997/1998, this number increased in 2002/2003 to 2.1%, and in 2007/2008 increased to 2.5%. There is evident increase in the number Roma who have completed secondary education from 0.4 percent in 1997/1998, to 0.6% in school year 2002/2003 and 1.2 % in 2007/2008.

This trend of inclusion of Roma children in the processes of education is also supported with the Government measures for conditional cash transfers for children, students from socially disadvantaged families. The Government has designated \$ 180 million annually for this measure. Currently, from around 1,000 beneficiaries of conditional cash transfers 10% are the Roma.

Also, the number of Roma who attend higher education is increasing. The Ministry of Education and Science in the context of the implementation of measures envisaged in the Decade of Roma issues 600 scholarships for Roma students (<http://vlada.mk/node/3108>).

Conclusion

Roma are socially most deprived ethnic group in Macedonia. Frequently, due to experienced discrimination in the society, they have been exposed to ghettoization and harassment from dominant groups and local authorities. Unfortunately, social perception about the problems associated with Roma are imposing a distorted viewpoint, locating the reasons for the unfavorable situation in the Roma community and their subculture rather than the society (Donevska et al., 2010). On contrary Roma should be recognized as long-standing ethnic minorities with a history of discrimination (Boswell, 2005).

Despite the significant progress, there is an evident need to evaluate the effects of the implemented programs. Identification of strengths and weaknesses of the implemented programs will contribute to their

⁵ Programs realized by the Ministry of Education and Science targeting Roma are focusing on: scholarships for continuing education of the Roma children, organizing courses for the teachers, training sessions aimed at preventing a large portion of the children leaving the school at early age, organizing after-school classes. Programs realized by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy focus on: opening of a daily centers for children on the street, supporting activities of some NGO's working with Roma children, helping in securing free educational materials, provision of free meals at schools, and provision of social benefits.

further improvement and adaptation to the needs of the Roma community. The key challenges still remain:

- Decrease of poverty and social exclusion at Roma children is of special importance because poverty is identified as a key factor for transgenerational reproduction of poverty and ending the circle at certain group of population.
- Sarah Thomas de Benítez and collaborators consider that preventing and reducing the violence that children are forced to experience will eliminate significant factors pushing them onto the streets and will improve their quality of life. According to them to put the blame on poverty is a simplistic approach to a complex problem. Very often the root causes are violence in the home and community; not just poverty. It is important that, as individuals and organisations taking responsibility for the care and wellbeing of children, we learn to listen and respond to their problems and needs. By responding to their needs we can help to create a safe and positive environment that allows children to learn and grow (Thomas de Benítez S., 2007).
- Developing social protection measures specifically focused toward help and assistance of children that are abusing drugs: on one hand there is an evident increase in the number of children on the street abusing drugs (sniffing, bronze, glue, heavy drugs) and on other hand there are no Centers for drug abuse for persons under 16 years old.

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