

Discrimination of Roma Girls in the Education Process by their Community and the Parents Role in their Children's Education

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Abstract

This study analyzes the factors that impede the Roma parents support their children, mainly female one, who are less uneducated compared to Roma males. On the other hand, this study reflects upon the reasons of Roma female for abandoning school at a certain age. Giving certain circumstances, the study is based on parents' opinions, mothers and fathers, regarding their role in the education of children, as well as the obstacles they are facing on this process. The picture is completed by recommendations of representatives on corresponding institutions in implementing social and inclusive policies and strategies for Roma community integration to the society. The results of this study identify the barriers for implementing the policies and strategies as Roma community, as well as the difficulties that Roma family face towards their children education process. To come to the conclusions of this study, are used the qualitative method of data collection analyzes, being focused on target groups, received by parents of Roma children, or from interviews with representatives of local government, based on other internal and external studies and data for this topic. From the data analysis, is concluded that parents play a significant role in their children's education, by preventing them to continue the education process, especially female, which results as less educated as boys.

Keywords: Roma community, Roma children, education, Roma parents, integration, human right.

Roma community in Albania and their education background

In the territory of Albanian Republic, besides Albanians, reside some other ethnic groups such as: Greeks, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Vlachs, Roma and Egyptians. In the census of year 1989, the data showed that other ethnic groups represented about 2 % of the population (Statistical Yearbook 1990, Tirana 1991). Other independent sources show that these groups in Albania represent about 5% of the population (Arqile Bexholi, Minorities in Albania (Tirana 2005), pp. 19-24). According to Census of year 2011, the total number of Roma population in the country goes to 8,301 people or 0.30% of the population (Census of Population and Housing, 2011, INSTAT).

Roma in Albania are called by different names. In the northern part of the country, they are called "gabele", in southern part as "gypsies" and southeastern (in Korca, etc.) as "kurbatë" (Marcel Courthiade, gypsy means "foreigner", while "kurbate" reflected upon the Turkish word "curve", ie. Means emigration). Despite the names, Roma community has played an important role in Albanian society.

Roma community is organized in groups or tribes that can be distinguished from each other by time and route

of their arrival in Albania, their socio-economic status, their lifestyle and customs, dialects, etc. They are called as: "meçkar", "karbuxhinjtë", "cergar (rupanë and skodrra)", "bamillët and kurtofët" (Courthiade M. Duke J., A Social and historical profiles of the Romans in Albania; De Soto, H., Gedeshi I., Dimensions of Poverty in Romania Albania, Roma Rights, Number 1, 2002, Quarterly Journal of the European Roma Rights Center, Budapest, Hungary; Barjaba K., Recent implications of Inter-Ethnic Relations in Albania, Anthropological Journal on European Cultures, Vol. 4, Number 1, 1995), which form, according Liegeois's expression, a mosaic of diversified groups (Liegeois JP., Tsiganes, La Decouverte, Paris 1983).

Historically, in Albania, as in other European countries, Roma community had low levels of education. Nomadic traditions and particular ways of living, poverty and discrimination are some of the main factors that explain this situation. In the '30s of the last century, describing the Roma nomadism, Hasluck noted that they sometimes "were settled in a city for a few months", and soon after to come back to "tent life" (Hasluck M., The Gypsies of Albania, Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society, 17 (2): 49-61, 1938). In these conditions, the education of children was something really difficult.

During the post socialism period, the education level of Roma, as in other countries of Central and Eastern

Europe was deteriorated (D Ringold, Orenstein AM, E. Wilkens, Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the Poverty Cycle, A World Bank Study, Washington DC, 2003). High level of unemployment and poverty, discrimination and social exclusion was reflected in diminishing the level of their education. The population is characterized by illiteracy (40.3%), attended primary education (25.9%) and interrupted primary education (14.9%), while very few have completed 8-year education (16.1%) and high education (2, 1%). The average years of schooling are 5.6 years for male and 5.3 for female (the average was made only for those who have attended or are attending school, according to the World Bank, 2005). However, a comparison to the majority population shows that the gap is significantly high. As a consequence of lack of education, the population has difficulties in integrating to labor market, compared to the majority of population, and this trend tend to decrease. In existing studies regarding education of Roma children, the facts show that the percentage of Roma children males attending the school is larger than females. According to the study, 46.5% versus 44.5% males and females (Karaj T, Adem Tamo, Situata Arsimore, p. 45) are more educated than female, or attending the school longer than females. Referring Ilir Gëdeshi's study, it is said that the average years of schooling are 5.6 years for males and 5.3 years for females (Ilir Gëdeshi, Hartësimi, p. 35).

However, during the next 2-3 years, about 350-400 children per year will reach the school age system. Education of children determines their economical, social future, cultural standards and is the main connection to get this community out of poverty. Many parents are now aware of the role of education. From an economical point of view, this brings benefits for the public sector because the cost of children education today will be much lower than the cost of "economic aid" tomorrow.

Used methodology and study results

In this study was used the qualitative method, because the study deals with understanding of the "inner experiences of subjects" and "the forms of social interaction" between them and society, seen through the eyes of participants and representatives based on "cultural understanding" that they give to these experiences (Joseph Silverman, Marc Hindry, Diophantine Geometry: An Introduction, (Springer-Verlag, GTM201,2000), p. 89). This method is seen as more appropriate for analyzing the experience of mothers and fathers of Roma community in educating their children. The method selected is appropriate, due to the sensitive and delicate issues involved in this study, considering that there are few studies on this topic. Among the most important existing studies are: Romani Children in South East Europe (Romania Children in South East Europe: the Challenge of Overcoming Centuries of Distrust and Discrimination: Discussion Paper # 7, UNICEF, March

2007); Roma and Egyptians in Albania: From social exclusion to the Social Inclusion (Roma and Egyptians in Albania: From social exclusion to Social Inclusion, ISSN 17265878, World Bank, 2008), the publication: "The situation of Roma Children Education in Albania" (Karaj T, Adem Tamo, Human Development Centre, " Education situation of Roma children in Albania ", 2007), Mapping Services of Roma Children in Albania against the CESS (Ilir Gëdeshi: Center for Economic and Social Studies (CESS) Drawing of social services policies toward Roma children in Albania of, 2011), etc.

The focus of this study were parents of Roma children (mothers and fathers), whom in some cases were presented as grandparents, despite their young age. The number of persons involved in the target groups was 39, 21 of which were women. The study was focused in 5 districts: Tirana, Elbasan, Fier, Berat and Korca.

In terms of attending primary education process, the parents had expressed their interest in educating their children, at least at this level. At the same time, they are worried about economic problem, as well as the social problems that accompany their lifetime. These deficiencies hinder the education of their children.

Mothers are more active in the school life of their children and more concerned about their children education process; even though the make evident the discrimination within the group, in terms of gender. Parents in the questionnaires of the study explicitly clarified the educational situation of children and the actual situation of their education.

Mother 2, Korca: *"I sent both son and daughters to school, but the older daughter is engaged with a guy in our neighborhood, so my husband does not allow her to go to school. I wish she could attend the school, but there is nothing I can do. The Roma female do what Roma male say."*

Mother 3, Berat: *"I cannot let my daughters to school as the neighbors will shout at me. If there are not married, they will remain still. No one take my opinion about my daughter's education process"*.

Mother 1, Tirana: *"My boys dropped out the school and are working with me in the market. My daughter got engaged 2 years ago, and she is 13 years. Next year she will get married, so school does not fit for her. If her father let her go, it's ok. I am really sorry for her because she is still too young to drop school out, but on the other hand, she is getting married. I am afraid to let her home alone"*. Parents comment over gender discrimination within the group. This is regarding to females and males in the family, who do not have equal access to high education. Female attend the school just a little or almost do not attend it, in comparison to males, as from the community and their parents, Roma female are considered in proper age to get married. Here's how parents say about this phenomenon:

Mother 2, Baltëz, Fier: *"Our girls could not attend high school. Even if they wish to go, is a problem for Roma community. Roma people are fanatics. Mature females should not go out of house. It is a big risk for them".*

Mother 3 Baltëz Fier: *"Our girls will have 9 years of education".*

Mother 2 Baltëz, Fier: *"I will not send my daughter to school. I just wait to marry her". But at age 16-17-18, we forbid them to go to school as they should be at home and wait to get married".*

Mother 3 Berat: *" My husband will not allow his daughter to attend high school because she is engaged. I have only 4 years of education and I really want my daughters to attend school and do not be as ignorant as me, being married since I was 13 years old. I do not have money to send them to school."*

Mother 1 Elbasan: *"I have engaged my daughter when she was 14 years old and no, I cannot sent her to school as her husband do not allow her anymore. She works with me in the market."*

Father 2 Elbasan: *"The neighbors will laugh at you if you let your daughter to go to school, they will say she is a bitch".*

Mother 4 Yzberisht, Tirana: *"I have only males and they are uneducated. Even females have no reasons to go to school; no one will get them a job as teachers."*

Mother 5 Yzberisht, Tirana: *"I have sent my daughter to a hairdresser course, and still she is jobless. I have no money to buy a shop for her."*

Another finding of the study is the marriage at early age of Roma people, and this phenomenon affects more females as stated by the parents, but also by teachers and representatives of education systems, is less educated and is fewer in number in terms of education. Roma people are getting married too early and it takes mainly female to drop the school at a very young age to gain a new status, that of a housewife. Besides the negative consequences on physical and psychological health, marriage at an early age female is encumbering their education and their access to employment opportunities (ERRC, Submission to the Joint CEDAW, CRC, General Recommendation / Comment on Harmful Practices: Children Marriages among Rome, 9 September 2011). This finding is supported also by the findings of other studies on this topic. Roma children, especially girls, drop out of school at a young age because of early marriage, or from their parent's prejudices. This one comes as a result of patriarchal beliefs according to which girls should not be associated with boys when they reach the first years of adolescence, and schools were seen as places where this

unwanted socialization can occur. However from the beginning of fifth grade of school, many females are kept at home because their parents want them to get married, so since fifth grade to eighth grade there are no Roma girls at schools (PNUD, in danger, p. 27).

The low education level of the Roma parents themselves is another finding of the study. Roma parents not only have a low educational level, but in most cases they are illiterate. Another characteristic of Roma parents is their young age. In other studies is noted that the lower the educational level of parents, the lower the perception of the benefits of education, as an another obstacle in the education of Roma children (Ilir Gedeshi, Hartësimi, p. 39). It is known that many young mothers are children themselves and they lack every kind of knowledge concerning the upbringing of children (Hermine De Soto, Beddies S., Ilir Gedeshi, Roma and Egyptians in Albania: From social exclusion to social Inclusion, The World Bank , Washington DC, 2005, p. 89). Illiteracy and low level of education of premature mothers affects the prosper children's education.

The results of the study

According to the study, Roma mothers are more concerned than fathers regarding their children's education, mainly for females. This shows that mothers do not want their daughters have the same lives as they had, and therefore their efforts in this direction are much bigger. Mothers are significantly involved in the educational lives of their children. They care about them at school; they go mainly to meet with teachers, while fathers are less attracted to this. Studies had shown the role of mothers, mainly in the life of Roma girls, as an evoking model for them, and little strength they have when it comes to important decisions in the lives of girls, such as marriage, which remains in the hand of fathers.

- Mothers are more concerned than fathers to their children's education and tried to have for their daughters not their example of life (abandoning the school and premature marriage).
- The community plays a significant role in the lives of Roma children, because of the prejudices to Roma females who attend school after a certain age, and does not support children and parents of children who attend school. It mainly happens after fifth grade of primary education.
- Marriage at an early age is a very serious problem, because it forces them to leave school at a very young age. This phenomenon is more prevalent among females who are 12-13 years old and married against their will by families, interrupting their studies. Otherwise, females risk remaining unmarried. This is the reason why parents force them to drop the school. But it is worth to notice that this is a phenomenon which has been observed to males

as well, even though the phenomenon is more evident to females, considering the fact that they might be object of trafficking.

- Low level of parents' education is a major obstacle for misunderstand their children, nor helping them with homework. It comes out the fact that some children are helped by their grandparents, who unlike parents are literate.
- The economic support of Roma parents, who have children at school, is almost absent. Local governments do not implement any policies for financial support for Roma parents who have children in school.
- Lack of successful Roma models is missing. Roma parents have no trust that schools can change the live of their children, because they do not have any successful model of Roma people to take as an example.
- The number of Roma children attending secondary education is very low.

Recommendations for Roma parents

- Roma parents has to be considered legally responsible for their children based on the right to education that every child has as a constitutional right and must exercise their parental responsibility and to provide to their children the necessary education.
- Roma parents need to settle down the barriers raised by themselves and become active part in the educational live of their children, giving them the real support in the fulfillment of this important process for life and for their social integration.
- Parents should ensure more stability in their children's lives, by deciding not to move constantly the city, because it confuses more the children.
- Early age marriages of Roma children must be restrained by their parents, as this remains a major obstacle to children who marry at an early age. Parents should not force their children to marry at a young age against their will.
- Males and females should be treated equally by Roma parents. Girls should not be discriminated based on gender and drop them out of school earlier than boys, because children have equal rights, regardless of their sex.
- Roma parents should be aware of the importance of education of children in their lives and see it as a solution to many problems in children's lives and not as an obstacle for them.
- It should be diminished the discrimination barriers within the community to educate children, mostly girls, that it does not become an obstacle to children's educational life. Parents need to change mentality about adverse reactions to the community.
- Parents should provide greater moral support for their children and be promoters of realization of the educational process for them and not prohibitive.

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