



Monthly Review

published by the International Reference Center for the
Rights of Children Deprived of their Family-ISS

No. 239

FEBRUARY 2020

'Human beings must recognise themselves in their shared humanity, whilst also recognising their individual and cultural diversity.'

Edgar Morin
Philosopher, Scientist and Sociologist
[Free translation]

EDITORIAL

Roma inclusion: A commitment achieved?

Maria Herczog, International Expert on child protection, shares in this Editorial the progress made and remaining challenges that governments and societies have to address to achieve decent lives for Roma population, including children.



The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 was an unprecedented political commitment by European governments to eliminate discrimination against Roma and close the unacceptable gaps between Roma and the rest of society. The Roma Decade focused on the priority areas of education, employment, health, and housing, and committed governments to take into account the other core issues of poverty, discrimination, and gender mainstreaming¹.

A right balance between progress and challenges?

The Roma Inclusion Index shows some progress in literacy levels, completion of primary education, and access to health insurance. But all in all, the daily life of Roma remains a struggle no other ethnic group in Europe faces. On average, in the decade countries, only one in ten Roma completes secondary school, almost half of Roma are unemployed, and more than one in three Roma still live in absolute poverty. As mentioned by Zeliko Jovanovic, 'one change is noticeable: when

the decade began, there was less money and more political will to deliver; today there is more money, but less political will².

'One in four children in the [European Union] live in poor households. One in four children who are poor is 25 million children who experience poverty within the richest corner of the world. And then if you go to particular groups already on the margins of our society, the figures shoot up way higher than one in four. Among Roma, the figure for children living in a poor household is 41% - nearly half.³ As Mr O'Flaherty noted earlier, 'although the number of Roma in Europe exceeds the population of some European countries, their social indicators are worse than those of Sierra Leone or Burundi, two of the poorest countries in the world'. Roma children and their families continue to face discrimination, and a lot of barriers in access to health care, education, employment, and housing and equal opportunities in employment. There are a growing numbers of discrimination and hate crime. There has been little change in the social and economic situation of Roma across Europe, according to the statistics available.

Roma children over-represented in the care system?

Roma children, who make up a significant proportion of the estimated 10-15 million Roma in Europe (around six million in the European Union) are widely acknowledged to be one such particularly vulnerable group. The exact representation of Roma children in the care system is not known and only estimated, due to the prohibition of data compilation on ethnic and religious background in many European countries. Based on our earlier research with the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), it is estimated at over 60% –and could be even higher in correctional facilities, where it can reach 90%⁴ (see ERRC's reports presented in Monthly Review No. 07/2012).

The placement of Roma children out of their families is an important indicator of the operation of the child welfare and child protection system. It is clearly an indication of the lack or very limited access of poor and Roma children and their families to basic, community-based, local and high quality services. In many settlements where many poor and Roma families are living, the local authorities are also poor, just like the services and those working in health, education and social services⁵. There is a high fluctuation in vacancies, a lack of proper transportation, thereby all contributing to the increased difficulties and

isolation. It is obvious that if poor and Roma children are discriminated against, and that if they are segregated from an early age, starting in kindergarten, there is a very limited opportunity for them to achieve. If the parents and children are not getting the needed help and services, separation from the family is also closely related to a lack of prevention and early support.

Despite the efforts made to promote the recruitment of Roma foster parents (see pp. 4 and 9), many Roma children are still systematically over-represented in institutions, as mentioned by Open Doors' report⁶. There is a shortage of foster parents, but many families are also afraid that the children in their care may face discrimination and segregation and that they cannot protect them. Domestic adoption of Roma children also remains low due to these fears, but also due to prejudice and rejection from prospective adoptive parents. In various of its Concluding Observations⁷, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has specified that Roma children still suffer from discrimination, over-representation in institutions and that adoption is rarely an option for them. Indeed domestic adoption is not an option and intercountry adoption, in many cases, involves older children (aged 9 to 11), who are adopted without follow-up on their well-being. Additionally, siblings are often separated for the purpose of intercountry adoption.

There is an urgent need for political commitment, awareness-raising and resources of all kind to help all those in need in order to get fair and equal opportunities and access to services in all locations in Europe⁸. International, regional and national efforts to support Roma communities must be pursued in order to address isolation, prevent family separation and the over-representation of children in institutions. Some promising practices presented below (see p. 4) should be highly supported and expanded.

*Maria Herczog,
International Expert on child protection
February 2020*

References:

¹ Roma Decade and the EU: <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/pages/4/roma-decade-and-the-eu>.

² Zeljko Jovanovic is the Director of the Roma Initiatives Office, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/why-europe-s-roma-decade-didn-t-lead-inclusion>.

³ See: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/speech/2019/cosac-plenary-speech>.

⁴ ERRC (2007). *Dis-interest of the child: Romani children in the Hungarian child protection system*, <http://www.errc.org/reports--submissions/dis-interest-of-the-child-romani-children-in-the-hungarian-child-protection-system>.

⁵ Herczog, M. (2015). *Poor children, poor services, poor outcomes: Child poverty and its impact on the referral and placement in public care system in Hungary*. In: E. Fernandez, A. Zeira, T. Vecchiato and C. Canali (2015). *Theoretical and empirical insights into child and family poverty: cross national perspectives*. Springer.

⁶ *Opening Doors for Europe's Children. Roma children. Contribution to public consultation on the evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*. Available at: https://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/public/04_News/Eurochild/Roma_children_OD_Eurochild_submission.pdf.

⁷ See: CRC. *Concluding Observations: Bulgaria* 21 November 2016, CRC/C/BGR/CO/3,-5; CRC. *Concluding Observations: Hungary*, CRC/C/HUN/CO/3-5, 13 October 2014; CRC. *Concluding Observations: Republic of Moldova*, CRC/MDA/CO/4-5, 4 October 2017; CRC. *Concluding Observations: Slovakia*, CRC/C/SVK/CO/3-5, 19 July 2016; CRC. *Concluding Observations: Czech Republic*, CRC/C/CZE/CO/3-4, 4 August 2011; CRC. *Concluding Observations: Romania*, CRC/C/ROU/CO/5, 13 July 2017; CRC. *Concluding Observations: Serbia*, CRC/C/SRB/CO/2-3, 7 March 2017. All documents available at: Committee on the Rights of the Child, 'Country-specific information', <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/CRCIndex.aspx>.

⁸ <https://hungarianspectrum.org/2020/01/17/in-hungary-it-is-viktor-orban-who-has-the-final-word-on-the-law/>.

