

SPOTLIGHT ON NORTHWEST BALKANS

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia

In this Spotlight, the main focus is on Roma children.

Roma population in Bosnia and Herzegovina is estimated to be 70,000-100,000. Roma people constitute 2% of total Serbia's population (their actual numbers are believed to be twice or three times as high). According to Montenegrin 2011 census, there are 8300 Roma and Egyptians in the country. Civil sector estimates that this number exceeds 20,000.

An estimated 1 million Roma live in the Western Balkans. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, this population group remains the most vulnerable and disadvantaged minority. Many Roma children have never been enrolled in any form of education, have not been registered at birth or vaccinated, and the majority live in very bad conditions, with no access to clean water or sanitation.

Roma face discrimination every day in all aspects of life, while Romani females are subject to double discrimination. The number of unemployed Roma is high throughout the region and their access to the labor market is primarily hampered by the lack of suitable education and qualifications. For this reason, successful integration of Roma children in education is not only an important social inclusion issue, but also one with a significant economic impact.

Save The Children's North-West Balkans national campaign will focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), with an aim to close the gap in educational opportunities for Roma children in BiH compared to the national average by increasing access to compulsory pre-school programs, leading to successful transition into primary education.

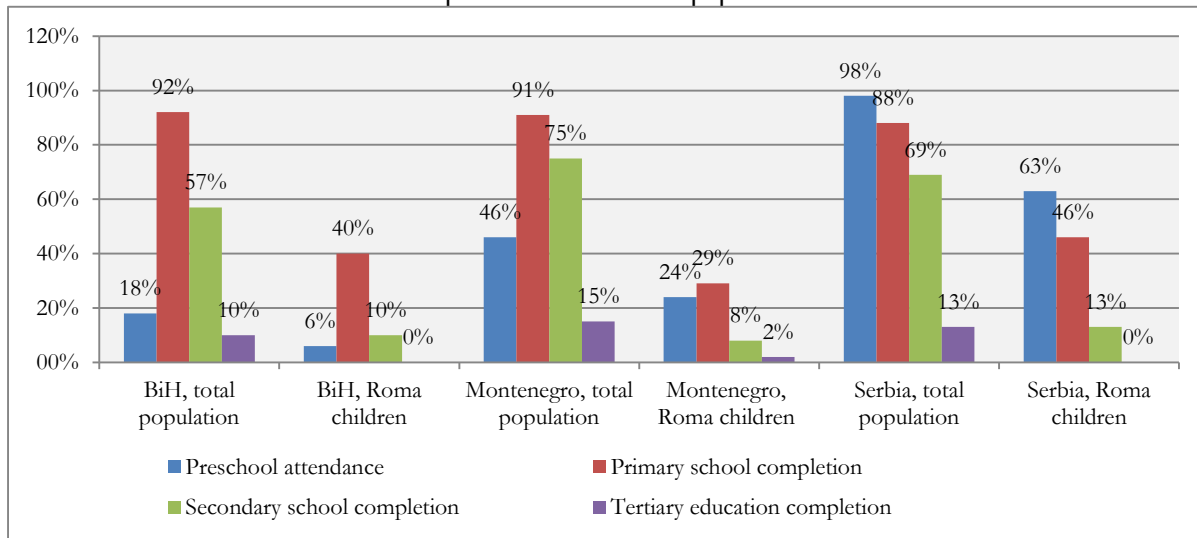
OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Many Roma children and youth in the region have never attended school. For BiH, that is two out of five children, and in Montenegro, over one quarter of Roma children from 10 to 18 never went to school. In Montenegro and Serbia, placement of Roma in special schools and school segregation is still an issue. Roma illiteracy remains high, especially among females, and there is an early dropout rate. Very few Roma complete secondary education.

Table 1 shows the rates of preschool attendance and completion rates for primary, secondary and tertiary education for the total population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, and separately for Roma children, as presented in the Roma Inclusion Index 2015. It demonstrates significant gaps between Roma and the total population in BiH, Montenegro and Serbia across entire education, although the gap in completing primary school has decreased over time in all three countries.¹

¹ According to the Roma Inclusion Index 2015 which compiled information from official governmental sources and Multiple Index Cluster Surveys, in 2005, completion rate for Roma children in BiH was 33%, in Montenegro this rate was 23% and in Serbia 40%. In 2014, the completion rate for BiH was 40%, for Montenegro 29% and 46% for Serbia.

Table 1: Education attendance and completion rates for total population and Roma children



*Source: Roma Inclusion Index 2015 http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9810_file1_roma-inclusion-index-2015-s.pdf

The gap in pre-school education is smallest, which is a reflection of very low attendance for the entire population. This is particularly true in the case of BiH, where the percentage of Roma children in pre-school education was assessed at a mere 1.5% in comparison with the 13-15% for other children.² The Roma Inclusion Index sets this rate at 6% for Roma children and 18% for others. Such discrepancy in numbers is an illustration of a lack of systematically gathered data for this group across the sectors.

In BiH, 0.5% of all Roma students are placed in special schools. In Montenegro, Roma are six times more frequently placed in special schools than others. 42% of Roma receive education in segregated schools. In Serbia, the rate of placement of Romani children in special schools is 36 times more than that of others. 27% of Roma receive education in segregated schools.
Roma Inclusion Index 2015

Roma children are at the highest risk of drop out. In BiH, this rate was estimated at 46.2% for primary school education.³ According to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey for BiH 2011-2012, net primary school completion rate is 92% meaning that about 8% of children in total do not complete primary education at the age when they were supposed to.⁴ UNICEF in Montenegro assessed that Roma children are most likely to drop out from school at the age of 10. The net attendance ratio (adjusted) reaches its peak among children aged 10 (72 %) and then gradually decreases for older children, being the lowest among children aged 14 (39%). Consequently the highest percentage of out-of-school children is among children 10 to 14.⁵

Key **CAUSES** for educational exclusion of Roma children are as follows:

² UNDP Overview of MDGs, MDG 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education. More information:

http://www.ba.undp.org/content/bosnia_and_herzegovina/en/home/mdgoverview/overview/mdg2.html

³ Non-enrolment and school dropout: A study based on a survey of children and youths who do not enrol in or drop out of primary and secondary education, UNICEF, December 2011. Full copy: http://www.unicef.org/bih/Dropout_EN-1.pdf

⁴ MICS for BiH 2011-2012, final report, UNICEF pg. 82-84. Full report: http://www.bhas.ba/ankete/MICS4_BiH_FinalReport_2011-12_Eng.pdf

⁵ Advancing the Education of Roma in Montenegro REF Country Assessment – 2015, Roma Education Fund. Full report: http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/mne_country_assessment_2015.pdf

POVERTY affects overwhelming majority of Roma families in the Balkans. They lack proper housing, employment, income and access to health services.⁶ About 80% of Roma children in BiH live in poverty, 50% of Roma families in Serbia are poor and the poverty headcount rate among Roma and Egyptian communities in Montenegro exceeds 36%⁷ compared to 8.6% for the general population.⁸ It is one of the reasons for widespread child begging. Though there is a little reliable information on the **HEALTH** of the Roma population, it is believed to be at a much lower level than that of the others, as Roma children are often not vaccinated, miss required medical check-ups, or do not do well at the school readiness assessments. Health insurance coverage for Roma has to improve significantly in all three countries.⁹ An EU progress report for BiH for 2014 notes an extremely low level of immunisation for Roma children (4%) and the fact that mortality rate under one year of age is three times higher for Roma children than for the overall population. In Montenegro, the mortality rate for Roma children is also estimated to be three times higher than for other children.¹⁰ The Serbian Health Ministry noted that the mortality rate among Roma new-borns has dropped by a half since 2010, but it is still twice as high as that recorded within the general population.¹¹

Many Roma have no resolved **LEGAL STATUS** which hampers their access to the labor market, health services or education, thus many Roma children are **INVISIBLE** to the system. Furthermore, they live in **ISOLATED SETTLEMENTS** which not only further complicates their access to basic services, but also prevents integration. All these factors add to widespread **DISCRIMINATION** against Roma. In Montenegro¹² and Serbia,¹³ Roma (and Egyptian) children often attend separate schools established in their communities, or are segregated from other children into special classes. Roma **TRADITION** and **CULTURE** is never taught in schools, and there are no text books in the Romani language.

Lack of **FAMILY** and **COMMUNITY SUPPORT** is very important. Many Roma parents either see no immediate benefit from enrolling their children in education or lack understanding of the importance of education in the long-term. **GENDER DISCRIMINATION** is another crucial issue, as there is a large discrepancy in education attendance and literacy among sexes. Many parents decide not to send their daughters to school, preferring that they stay at home and marry at an early age. In Serbia, this gender disparity among Roma is especially visible in secondary education.¹⁴ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Gender Parity Index for primary school indicates that girls were slightly less likely to attend primary school than boys but they were much more disadvantaged compared to boys at the secondary school level.¹⁵ The situation in Montenegro is very similar.¹⁶

⁶ Save The Children North-West Balkans Child Rights Situation Analysis, January 2015; and findings of the research conducted by young Roma leaders as part of the project Leaders – Young Roma in Action (more information: <https://nwb.savethechildren.net/news/roma-leaders-future>)

⁷ Advancing the Education of Roma in Montenegro REF Country Assessment – 2015, Roma Education Fund

⁸ In August 2015, Montenegro's Agency for Statistics, MONSTAT, released findings of its poverty survey showing a decline in poverty for general population from 11.3% in 2009 to 8.6% in 2013. This means that about 54,000 citizens live with less than 186 EUR monthly.

⁹ European Commission's progress reports for 2015 for the Western Balkans countries and Turkey released in November 2015. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/package/index_en.htm

¹⁰ UNICEF Montenegro, Country Programme Document 2012-2016. Full report:

http://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/Montenegro_final_approved_2012-2016_20_Oct_2011.pdf

¹¹ Tanjug news agency's report on presentation of the Report on the implementation of the programme of cooperation between Serbia and UNICEF, 22 October 2013

¹² Study on the obstacles to education in Montenegro, Focus on Roma and Egyptian Children, UNICEF and Ipsos, June 2013. Full report: http://www.unicef.org/montenegro/Studija_UNICEF-za-web-en.pdf

¹³ A Long Way To Go, A Report by the European Roma Rights Centre. Over representation of Romani Children in "Special Schools" in Serbia. January 2014. Full report: <http://www.errc.org/cms/upload/file/serbia-education-report-a-long-way-to-go-serbian-13-march-2014.pdf>

¹⁴ Serbia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014, UNICEF. Full report http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/MICS_5_-_Key_Findings.pdf

¹⁵ Multiple Index Cluster Survey 2011-2012, Roma Survey. UNICEF. Full report:

http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/PDF/djeca/MICS4_BiH_Roma_Survey_FinalReport_2011-12.pdf

¹⁶ Montenegro and Montenegro Roma Settlements. Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2013. Full report:

<http://www.monstat.org/userfiles/file/medjunarodna%20saradnja/2013%20Montenegro%20MICS%20and%202013%20Roma%20Settlements%20in%20Montenegro%20MICS.pdf>

As a **CONSEQUENCE** of the exclusion of Roma children from education, the vicious cycle of poverty, discrimination and isolation remains uninterrupted. Lack of education or lack of access to quality education prevents Roma from competing in the labor market as they lack skills, knowledge and experience. It also prevents them from participating in decision and policy-making processes at any level of authority, especially in those areas directly affecting the lives of their communities.

There are numerous **OBSTACLES** to integrating Roma children into the education systems of the three Balkans states. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, one of the key problems is an overly complicated and **fragmented education** sector. All countries lack reliable and **systematically gathered data** that would ensure effective policy making. **Education spending** in all three countries mainly goes for salaries, with not much left for development or advancement of curricula. Many Roma also **LACK INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE** on their rights or available assistance mechanisms, and comprehension of the importance of education. Research conducted by young Roma leaders who took part in the Save the Children-led regional project, Leaders –Young Roma in Action,¹⁷ showed that efforts to ensure a higher enrollment of Roma children should primarily focus on the parents, many of whom lack understanding on the benefits of education. This is especially the case with parents who are illiterate or uneducated. Furthermore, when parents are found to be supportive of education, they are also less likely to distinguish between male and female children, or to do so to a lesser extent.

Policy analysis

Numerous projects have been implemented in the past to advance the position of Roma in BiH, Montenegro and Serbia, including education, but no significant progress has been achieved.

In July 2010 the Council of Ministers of **Bosnia and Herzegovina** adopted the Revised Action Plan of Roma Educational Needs of BiH, which includes goals and measures to be implemented throughout the country. BiH has 12 ministries of education and one Department of Education in Brcko District which have not made specific plans and programs to support the education of Roma, but instead take part in the implementation of the State plan. In April 2012, the Government of **Montenegro** adopted the Strategy for Improving the Situation of Roma and Egyptians 2012-2016 and it set up a commission to monitor the implementation of the strategy. In 2014, it adopted a new action plan for strategy implementation. **Serbia's** Government has said it will adopt a new Roma Inclusion Strategy for a 10-year period, 2015-2025, compatible with the Europe 2020 Strategy, by the end of this year.

BiH offers little more than general information on the education of Roma children from preschool to tertiary education, due to administrative limitations. Information on preschool attendance and special education are either missing or are unreliable, as well as statistics that would enable comparison of data over the years. Lack of systematically gathered **DATA** is also a problem in the other two countries, with little real progress achieved in this field.

FINANCING advancement of Roma children in the education system relies to a great extent on donors, including EU pre-accession funds. Project-based funding often means a lack of continuity and sustainability, as there are not many budgetary funds, especially at the local level, to continue with introduced practices.¹⁸ National Roma Action Plans are not adequately resourced which hampers their implementation.

In order to fight **DISCRIMINATION**, BiH enacted Anti-Discrimination Law in August 2009, yet it remained the only country in Europe where Roma, like other minorities, are prevented from running for a seat in the tripartite Presidency. Serbian anti-discrimination legislation explicitly protects children as a group; in October 2014 it endorsed the action plan for the implementation of the strategy. In April 2014,

¹⁷ Report on the research conducted by young Roma in five towns in Bosnia and Herzegovina, April 2014

<https://nwb.savethechildren.net/sites/nwb.savethechildren.net/files/library/National-Report-LYRA-eng-web.pdf> .

¹⁸ For more information on adequate budget allocations, visibility of children in budgets and financial aspects of education, please see the SCNWB's Child Rights Governance Analysis from April 2015 and SCNWB's Child Rights Situation Analysis from January 2015.

Montenegro endorsed the changes to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination aiming to harmonize domestic with European standards in human rights protection, but Roma children continue to be widely discriminated against, especially in their access to education, healthcare and housing.

One of the main problems in fighting discrimination against Roma is the fact that discrimination is not only a widespread practice, but also tolerated in society. Roma mainly live beside – not with – other population groups who have limited knowledge of Romani culture and tradition. Another obstacle to actions that fight discrimination is the lack of knowledge by Roma children who are often unaware of their rights and ways to enforce them. To address this issue, authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina held a number of trainings for teachers, parents and children to raise their awareness on human rights and the rights of the child, as well as the importance of education.¹⁹

All three countries have a primary school enrollment rate of over 90%, yet attendance and completion rates for Roma children continue to be low. Policies are focusing on the provision of free text books in primary education, as well as scholarships and affirmative actions in secondary school. Montenegro has developed text books teaching Montenegrin as the second language.

Drop outs continue to be frequent, and there are no systems put in place to prevent and monitor early dropping out. In Montenegro, children who dropped out from regular education are barred from their education from ages nine to 15. Their only possibility is to continue education in adult primary education settings which can only enrol students older than 15.

Achievements of Roma students are also at a much lower level than others. Schools do not have an institutional framework to ensure engagement of Roma teaching assistants or mediators.

BiH made significant progress in civic registration of Roma people, as did Serbia, however Montenegro has not yet resolved the status of many Roma Internally Displaced People (IDPs) from Kosovo, which is also important to complete education desegregation in the refugee camps “Konik 1” and “Konik 2”.

Based on the evidence presented, Save the Children calls on the governments of BiH, Serbia and Montenegro to adopt the following key recommendations:

- Raise awareness and understanding on the importance and benefits of education (Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), primary and higher levels) among young parents, especially young mothers, as well as the wider Roma community through targeted capacity building on education and parenting skills. It is especially important to involve young Roma and Roma leaders in this awareness raising process.
- Enable access to inclusive and quality primary education to help break the cycle of poverty and raise awareness of Roma children on their right to, and the benefits of education, to prevent early school drop-out.
- Introduce effective and efficient referral mechanisms for the identification of out-of-school children and youth (most of whom are Roma) and for the prevention of drop out, while at the same time changing restrictive legislation and policies to enable the easy return of children who dropped out, back to school.

Save the Children has a proven record in piloting and successfully replicating models for enabling access to pre-school and primary education for Roma and other marginalized and vulnerable children in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These will be used to plan and execute an evidence-based national campaign in the country.

¹⁹ Bosnia and Herzegovina Progress Report 2014, Decade of Roma Inclusion. Full report: http://www.romadecade.org/cms/upload/file/9811_file4_bih-2014.pdf