

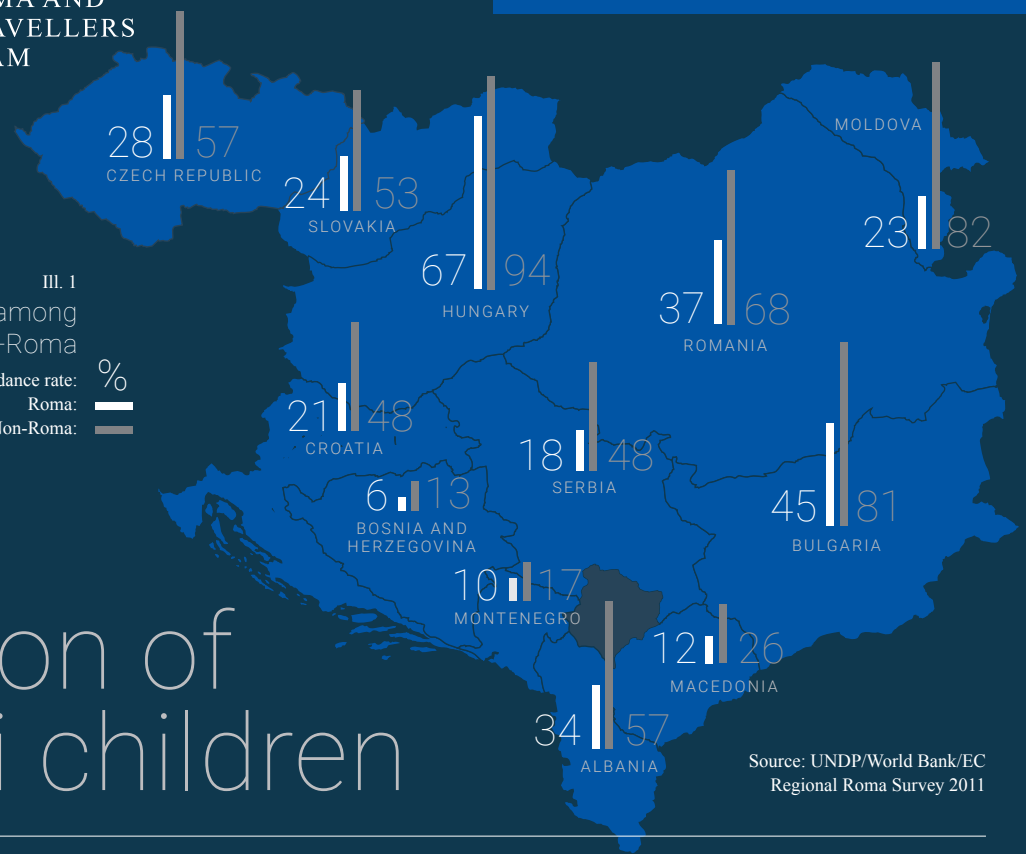


III. 1 Pre-school attendance rates among Roma and non-Roma

Pre-school attendance rate: %  
Roma: [white bar]  
Non-Roma: [grey bar]

1.4

# Education of Romani children



Source: UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey 2011

Eben Friedman

Roma's low participation and levels of attainment in education have often been attributed primarily to features of Romani culture. Even if lack of trust in schools is common among Roma, however, widespread acceptance of schooling as a necessity has still not resulted in Roma's educational integration. Thus, although most Romani children complete compulsory education, many do so in segregated settings as a result of culturally biased testing practices, residential segregation, or both. Consequently, the education Roma receive tends to be inferior to that received by non-Roma.

## INTRODUCTION

In most countries, Roma participate in education at much lower rates than non-Roma. Whereas fewer than half of Roma attend pre-school education in the countries with the largest Romani populations, enrolment in compulsory education is considerably higher but dropout in higher grades is common. Less than a quarter of Roma complete secondary education, with the share of Roma who complete higher levels of education below one percent. Overall, Roma spend around half the time in education spent by non-Roma.

## PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

For Romani children as children from a cultural and often linguistic environment different from that around which the public education system is designed, early exposure to educational institutions is particularly important for success at subsequent levels of education. In practice, however, high poverty rates among Roma combine with the fact that pre-school education is in most countries with large Romani populations neither mandatory nor free of charge to make for much lower rates of pre-school attendance among Roma than among non-Roma.

## PRIMARY SCHOOL ENTRY TESTING

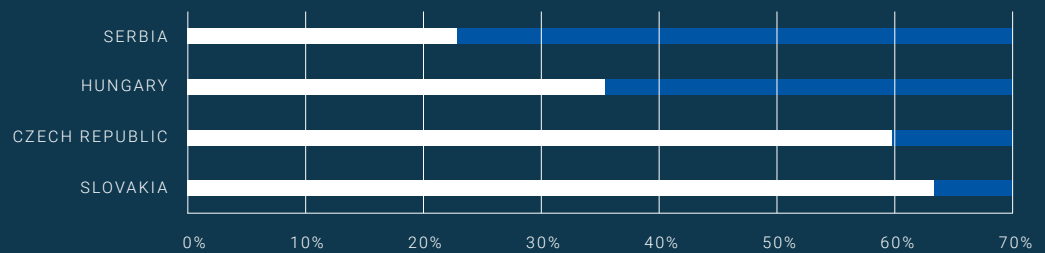
Low rates of participation in pre-school education and the rarity of instruction in the Romani language mean that many Romani children enter the education system at a significant disadvantage relative to native speakers of the language of the majority. Enrolment in primary education usually involves standardized assessments of children's school readiness. Because the measures used in such assessments assume a child's exposure to experiences which form the basis for a culturally specific repertoire of knowledge and skills and for a vocabulary associated with membership in the middle class, school-age Romani children are often assessed as not ready for entry to standard primary education. [III. 1]

Among the options available to children assessed as not ready for entry to standard primary education are postponement of school entry, enrolment in preparatory or transition classes, or immediate diagnosis of mental disability. Whereas postponement of school entry is problematic insofar as it further denies Romani children the exposure to educational institutions needed for them to adjust to a non-Romani cultural and linguistic environment, enrolment in preparatory or transition classes often results in Romani children continuing

## III 2.

Roma in Romani-majority  
special primary schools

Source: UNDP/World Bank/EC  
Regional Roma Survey 2011



their educational career in special education. In other words, the practical result of enrolment in such classes may be little different from that of a diagnosis of mental disability.

## SPECIAL EDUCATION

As a result of the cultural and linguistic factors and low rates of participation in pre-school education described above, mental disability is diagnosed much more frequently among Romani children than among non-Romani children. Once mental disability is diagnosed, the most likely course of action is streaming into special education in classes or schools separate from those attended by children without a diagnosis of mental disability. As a result, Romani children are overrepresented in these forms of special education in most countries in Central and Eastern Europe, accounting in some countries for the majority of pupils in special education despite the fact that there is no country in which Roma account for close to a majority of all children. [III. 2]

Insofar as special education involves an abridged curriculum and lower standards for academic achievement, pupils streamed into special education before or during primary education are unlikely to return to standard education at any point in their educational career. Further, completion of standard primary education considerably lowers pupils' chances of advancing to higher levels of education or of finding stable and well-paying employment, increasing in turn the chances that the next generation of Roma will grow up in poverty and lacking access to the

pre-school education vital to successful entry to standard schools and classes.

RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION AND  
SEGREGATED SCHOOLS

A large proportion of Roma live in isolated settlements characterized by poor basic infrastructure and housing conditions. Where the schools which enroll children from such settlements are located outside the settlements, Roma face barriers to regular participation in education. These barriers include on the one hand access to and costs of transportation between home and school, and on the other hand the costs of the books, clothing, food, and materials required for participation in education, which are often prohibitive for Romani parents due to high poverty rates.

Where schools are located in or near Romani settlements, schools often become de facto segregated as non-Romani parents transfer their children from schools attended by significant numbers of Roma to schools with few or no Romani pupils. Although the curriculum taught in segregated schools may not differ from that taught in other public schools, the quality of education tends to be considerably lower due to higher proportions of unqualified teachers, higher rates of teacher absenteeism, and fewer educational resources. As a result, segregated schools are generally characterized by poorer academic performance, lower rates of transition from one grade to the next, and higher drop-out rates than other schools.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brüggemann, Christian* (2012) Roma Education in Comparative Perspective: Findings from the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey. Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme.
- Friedman, Eben / Kriglerová, Elena Gallová / Kubánová, Martina / Slosiarik, Martin* (2009) School As Ghetto: Systemic Overrepresentation of Roma in Special Education in Slovakia, coordinated by Friedman, Eben / Surdu, Mihai. Budapest: Roma Education Fund.
- Mihajlović, Milena / McDonald, Christina / Negrin, Katy* (2010) Roma Children in "Special Education" in Serbia: Overrepresentation, Underachievement, and Impact on Life. New York: Open Society Institute.
- Surdu, Mihai / Friedman, Eben* (2013) The Roma Education Fund – developments and prospects for Roma inclusion. In: Die Bildungssituation von Roma in Europa, edited by Hornberg, Sabine / Brüggemann, Christian. Münster: Waxmann. 35-51
- White, Julia M.* (2012) Pitfalls and Bias: Entry Testing and the Overrepresentation of Romani Children in Special Education. Budapest: Roma Education Fund.