

Roma Early Childhood Inclusion+

Croatia Report



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As per the United Nations Security Council Resolution 817, the UN adopted the provisional reference name, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.” In this report the three Sponsoring Agencies – REF, Open Society Foundations and UNICEF – adopt this name.

ISBN: 978-1940983-34-9

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Design and layout/Judit Kovacs/Createch Ltd.

Printed in Croatia/2015

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The Sponsoring Agencies

The *Open Society Foundations* work to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose Governments are accountable to their citizens. To achieve this mission, the Foundations seek to shape public policies that assure greater fairness in political, legal and economic systems and safeguard fundamental rights. On a local level, the Open Society Foundations implement a range of initiatives to advance justice, education, public health and independent media. The Foundations place a high priority on protecting and improving the lives of people in marginalized communities. The Open Society Foundations have been key drivers of the *Decade of Roma Inclusion*. The Open Society Foundations have considerable experiences in working in partnership with and strengthening Roma civil society organisations, but also in collecting and analysing data and the evaluation of projects and programs. The Early Childhood Program (ECP) promotes healthy development and wellbeing of young children through initiatives that emphasise parent and community engagement, professional development and government accountability. The ECP's rights-based approach and social justice framework give particular attention to minorities, children living in poverty and children with developmental delays, malnutrition and disabilities. In Central Eastern Europe/ Eurasia, large ECP initiatives focus on addressing the situation of Roma children, children with disabilities and children who do not have access to services. The ECP continues to support and collaborate with the national and regional early childhood practitioners and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) established through its flagship Step by Step program, including the International Step by Step Association and, since 2012, the Romani Early Years Network (REYN).

The *Roma Education Fund (REF)* was created in 2005 in the framework of the *Decade of Roma Inclusion*. Its mission and ultimate goal is to close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. In order to achieve this goal, the organization supports policies and programs that ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems. Through its activities, the REF promotes Roma inclusion in all aspects of the national education systems of countries participating in the *Decade of Roma Inclusion*, as well as other countries that wish to join in this effort. The objectives of REF include ensuring access to compulsory education, improving the quality of education, implementing integration and desegregation of Roma students, expanding access to preschool education, and increasing access to secondary, post-secondary and adult education through, for example, scholarships, adult literacy courses and career advice for secondary school students.

UNICEF has been working in the Central and Eastern Europe region and the Commonwealth of Independent States since the 1990s with the objective of protecting and promoting the rights of children, especially those from the most vulnerable and marginalized groups. UNICEF is a member of the Steering Committee of the *Decade of Roma Inclusion*. UNICEF is engaged in developing a systematic and coherent engagement with Roma issues through the key entry points of early childhood development and basic education. UNICEF is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to advocate for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. UNICEF is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and strives to establish children's rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children. UNICEF insists that the survival, protection and development of children are universal development imperatives that are integral to human progress. UNICEF mobilizes political will and material resources to help countries, particularly developing countries, ensure a "first call for children" and to build their capacity to form appropriate policies and

deliver services for children and their families. UNICEF is committed to ensuring special protection for the most disadvantaged children – victims of war, disasters, extreme poverty, all forms of violence and exploitation and those with disabilities.

Open Society Foundations

Early Childhood Program
London

Roma Education Fund

Budapest

UNICEF

Regional Office CEECIS
Geneva

Acknowledgements

The Open Society Foundations, the Roma Education Fund and UNICEF would like to acknowledge with appreciation and gratitude the Institute of Social Sciences, Ivo Pilar in Zagreb, Croatia and the research team led by Lynette Šikić-Mićanović, Marija Geiger-Zeman and Danijel Vojak, who were responsible for contributing so constructively to the development of the research tools, the recruitment and training of national researchers, conducting the fieldwork research process, and writing and finalising the main sections of the *RECI+ Croatia Report*. The research team also supported and participated in the national consultation and launch events. The Sponsoring Agencies would like to express their gratitude to Arthur Ivatts for his invaluable contribution to the overall report and to the writing of substantial and important parts of this report, including the introduction, the conclusions and the recommendations. The Sponsoring Agencies also wish to thank the Open Academy Step by Step Croatia for its valuable contributions to organisational logistics throughout the whole process, including the recruitment of Roma research workers and the training in social justice, as well as the many meetings and the national consultation and launch events. The Sponsoring Agencies further wish to acknowledge with thanks the valuable contribution to the RECI+ process given by the international consultants Dr Adrian Marsh and Professor Mathias Urban. The Sponsoring Agencies also acknowledge with sincere gratitude the cooperative and dignified response of Roma families and Roma civil society organisations. Finally, the Sponsoring Agencies acknowledge with thanks the supportive role of government ministries, municipalities, kindergartens, schools and other agencies.

A Note on Terminology

The text of this Report seeks to comply with the European Commission and the Council of Europe's adopted usage of the term 'Roma'. The term 'Roma' in this Report, in common with the inherent definitions used widely in publications by the Council of Europe, the European Commission and other international institutions, refers to a diverse community of related groups that would include, but not be limited to, Roma, Sinti, Manouche, Gitano, Resande, Romer, Romanlar, Domlar, Lomlar, Kaale, Egyptians, Ashkali, Tattare, Gypsies, Scottish Travellers, Mandopolini, Ghurbeti, Beyash (Bajaši, Rudari/Ludari), Jevgjit and many others that are understood to be part of the wider Roma populations across Europe and beyond. By using the term 'Roma' it is understood that the Sponsoring Agencies and the authors intend no disrespect to individual communities. Readers should note that the usage of the term is not intended in any way to deny the diversity that exists across both Roma and Traveller groups. It is to be noted that a significant and growing Roma middle class exists, which participates fully as citizens in the countries and societies in which they live, including the Republic of Croatia, without sacrificing their ethnic and cultural identity. For readability purposes, the adjective 'Roma' will generally be used, in particular when referring to the Roma people as a whole or to groups or individuals, e.g. Roma children, Roma families. The adjective 'Romani' will generally refer to languages and culture.

List of Abbreviations

CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CBS	Croatian Bureau of Statistics
CES	Croatian Employment Service
CNIPH	Croatian National Institute of Public Health
CPS	Center for Peace Studies
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECP	Early Childhood Program [of Open Society Foundations]
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ETTA	Education Teaching and Training Agency
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRK	Croatian Kuna
IPA	Instruments of Pre-accession Assistance
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
MHSW	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
MoSES	Ministry of Science, Education and Sports
NCEEE	National Centre for External Evaluation of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSF	Open Society Foundations
OSI	Open Society Institute–Croatia
REF	Roma Education Fund
REYN	Romani Early Years Network
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	US Dollar
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organisation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context

It is right and just for young Roma children and their futures to be at the centre of this important research.

The Roma Early Childhood Inclusion+ (RECI+) Studies and Reports are a joint initiative between the Sponsoring Agencies, namely: the Roma 'Kopači' Initiatives at the Early Childhood Program (ECP) of Open Society Foundations (OSF), the Roma Education Fund (REF) and UNICEF.

The Roma Early Childhood Inclusion+ (RECI+) Croatia Study was commissioned by the Sponsoring Agencies in 2012. Contracts were awarded to the Institute of Social Sciences, Ivo Pilar in Zagreb and the Open Academy Step by Step Croatia. With the support of the Sponsoring Agencies, the main authors of the *RECI+ Croatia Report* are the designated research team from the Institute of Social Sciences, Ivo Pilar and the OSF International Consultants. The five settlements featured in the study are Kozari putevi, Capraške poljane, Parag, Darda, and Vodnjan/Galižana.

The *RECI+ Croatia Report* is intended to aid the appropriate authorities in ensuring the development of unhindered and equal access to quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services and provision for Croatian Roma children, through advocacy rooted in credible and informed research. The growth of early childhood services in Central and Eastern European (CEE) and South-Eastern European (SEE) countries provides a unique opportunity to promote research based advocacy, within a process of practising democratic consultation and through securing collaboration amongst key state institutions, legally competent authorities, majority populations and minority communities, including Roma.

The need for the RECI project stemmed from the convergence of different rationales. First is the difficult situation of Roma populations and their children in the CEE and SEE countries that has been increasingly researched and documented during the last decade by many international organisations and continues to be at the top of the human rights and political agendas of inter-governmental organisations, including the European Commission of the European Union and the Council of Europe. Second is the growing commitment of national Roma populations and their national governments to address the lack of progress in this situation. Third is an understanding that the early childhood period,

from birth to three years old in particular, is the foundation not only of individual health, wellbeing and educational attainment, but also of later success in lifelong learning and employment.

There is a growing body of robust international evidence demonstrating the importance of investment in early childhood development, particularly during the infant years (0–3), for the most marginalised communities. Investment in early childhood development is linked to direct beneficial returns in the form of fairness and social justice, the protection of children’s human rights and economic returns in the medium and longer terms.

Building on the experience of previous RECI studies in Serbia, Hungary, Romania, Czech Republic and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, this next phase RECI+ Study has endeavoured to advance the research process by incorporating Roma researchers and assistants within the research teams and providing all such teams with anti-bias and social justice training prior to the commencement of fieldwork research. The RECI+ concept also places greater emphasis on post-publication advocacy for targeted advancements in early childhood policy, provision and practice.

It is to be noted that there is a considerable mismatch between the official census data on the number of Croatian Roma in the Republic of Croatia and the unofficial estimates made by reputable international organisations.

Roma started to settle in Croatian lands in the 14th century as part of a pattern of migration in South-eastern Europe, which makes them one of the oldest established ethnic minorities in the Republic of Croatia.¹ They are mentioned as “Gypsies” towards the end of 1362 in Dubrovnik and in 1378 in Zagreb. Croatian authorities followed the example of most European authorities and began to adopt anti-Roma legislation at the end of the 15th century, accusing them of witchcraft, sorcery, spying for the Ottomans and kidnapping children.² These legal provisions required citizens to expel Roma from their territories or to refuse them board and lodging. Increasingly negative attitudes towards the Roma influenced Croatian authorities from the 16th century onwards; the Croatian Parliament at the end of the 16th century adopted further legal provisions regarding the persecution of Roma.

Modern contextual analysis is cognisant of the reality that the Croatian economy, in common with many other European Union Member States, is currently undergoing a severe, long-standing economic and social crisis, which has been characterised by decreases in real gross domestic product and levels of overall economic activity. The recommendations in this *RECI+ Croatia Report* take due account of this bleak reality but also make clear that national and internationally respected principles of human rights and social justice cannot be compromised by economic circumstances.

The unfavourable socio-economic situation of the Roma is largely caused by deep-rooted social problems linked to economic exclusion and marginalisation, poverty and high rates of unemployment, low educational attainment, inadequate housing and impoverished living environments, poor health conditions and prejudice and discrimination towards them on a broad basis from the majority population. Interconnected and multi-causal, these negative factors have created a closed circle of social deprivation which most Croatian Roma families are unable to exit without significant support.

1 Vojak, 2013, pp. 10–12, 19–20.

2 Some researchers link Roma arrival in Croatia with the Ottoman conquests of the Balkans in the 14th and 15th centuries, when ‘Cingeneleer’ (Gypsies in Turkish) were part of the Ottoman military organisation (Berberski, 1979, pp. 420–421).

Negative perceptions of Croatian Roma remain part of daily opinions amongst the majority Croatian population, often focused on the perceived lifestyle and child rearing practices of Roma families. Research evidence confirms that ethnic prejudices and xenophobic attitudes exist in Croatian society towards minorities to a large extent, particularly towards the Roma population. Conversely, Roma themselves reported that they had encountered both positive and negative attitudes towards them from the majority population. However, most Roma felt that they were negatively perceived by members of the majority society and socially discriminated against as a consequence.

Legally, discrimination against Roma (or other Croatian minority populations) in the Republic of Croatia is prohibited by the *Constitution*, international laws and the Conventions the Republic of Croatia has ratified in which Roma are guaranteed equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms, together with other citizens of the Republic. Despite this legal background, Roma continue to face discrimination as evidenced in international legal judgements (education – *Oršuš and others v. the Republic of Croatia*, 2010) and in research conducted by international organisations (employment – UNDP, WB and EC, 2011).

Findings – health, social welfare and education

The socio-economic situation of the Roma population adversely determines their access to health care and this considerably increases health risks and drastically reduces their life expectancy. For example, only 1.4% of Roma adults are aged 65 or above, compared to 16.8% of the majority population, which indicates a markedly lower life expectancy amongst the Roma.³

Information on the health status and health care of Croatian Roma is not systematically collected or available from the Croatian Institute for Public Health or the Croatian Institute for Health Insurance, since data on health and any other data related to the health care system is not disaggregated by ethnicity. This is a major hindrance to understanding the full extent of the health status of young children and infants within Roma families and this finding is thus highlighted in the recommendations section of this report.

Almost one-fifth of the RECI+ Croatia Study sample (18%) of 135 respondents from five different locations reported not having any national health insurance. When asked about the other adult members (253) in their households, they reported that almost a quarter of these adults (22.5%) did not have any form of health insurance.

Some research data indicates significantly above average levels of infant mortality for Croatian Roma, particularly related to sudden infant death syndrome and respiratory diseases. The lack of accurate official data about the health status of Roma is evidenced within the Republic of Croatia's *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*.

The RECI+ Croatia Study results show that the living environments in some Roma settlements are unsafe and this has detrimental effects on health, especially amongst young children. In some settlements environmental conditions pose a threat to public health and are exacerbated by the lack or irregular collection of refuse by the respective local authorities.

The RECI+ Croatia Study findings indicate that 40% of Roma households cannot afford to eat meat, fish or a protein equivalent (eggs, dairy products, grains, beans, lentils) every

3 Croatian Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 2013d, p. 19.

second day. The diet for many Roma children is nutritionally insufficient, with serious implications for unhealthy childhoods, chronic adult illnesses and frequently interrupted learning at school.

Roma women often experience multiple discrimination and social exclusion on the basis of ethnicity, gender and social status. The health of Croatian Roma women is a key area of concern, considering socio-economic factors such as poverty, inadequate nutrition, unsuitable sub-standard housing and lack of access to health services. Of the women in the RECI+ Croatia Study sample, 21% reported that they did not have any health insurance other than during pregnancies, when they were insured through the national provision for mothers-to-be.

Although a majority of Roma families included in the RECI+ Croatia fieldwork research confirmed that they received some form of social welfare benefit, respondents said that these benefits were insufficient to pay for the additional costs of sending children to preschool and primary school. Furthermore, a discriminatory cap on welfare benefits, irrespective of the size of a family, threatens the health, welfare and protection of many Croatian Roma children.

It is encouraging that the number of Croatian Roma children registered in primary school increased from 4,186 in 2009/2010 to 5,470 pupils in 2013/2014. Owing to this successful upward pattern, the comparative percentage gap has narrowed significantly between total known numbers of Roma children and their enrolment in primary education, as has the comparative percentage gap between enrolment of Roma and non-Roma pupil cohorts.

Data on the degree of inclusion in an educational program for children with disabilities within each county of Croatia is unknown, as methods of data collection differ and do not provide an accurate representation of the current situation. In one area studied there was evidence that a disproportionate number (41.12%) of the pupils in one special school were of Roma heritage, although it is recognised that in this particular case the percentage of Roma in the county in question (5.4%) is significantly above the national ratio of Roma to non-Roma populations. It is also the case that access to kindergartens for children with disabilities cannot always be guaranteed.

Success rates at each level of education, including attainment and attendance, are not officially available with regard to Roma pupils in Croatian schools. Public official data is not disaggregated by ethnicity. However, within the context of the Legal Framework for Data Collection, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports (MoSES), in collaboration with the Croatian Bureau of Statistics and the Agency for Data Protection, is making marked progress in securing such data, which will serve the commendable educational ambitions contained within the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*.

Local government authorities are financed partly by the state budget and partly by their own fundraising, but the number and availability of local services can greatly differ, especially in the area of early childhood education and care. Due to the fact that the financing of early education is highly decentralised in the Republic of Croatia, the role of regional governments and city municipalities is crucial in addressing the challenges that are present in developing inclusive education.

Experience over the last decade has shown that Roma communities are not actively involved in the creation and implementation of policies and measures aimed at their inclusion or in the assessment and evaluation of the long-term effects of these policies and measures.

There are a small number of active Roma non-governmental organisations (NGOs), but their influence on improving the living circumstances of Roma communities has been minimal and their access to funding is problematic, particularly because of the economic recession of 2008 and changes in the overall levels of engagement by international donors in Croatia.

Findings – the early childhood education and care system and the place of Roma children

Findings from the RECI+ Croatia Study conclusively show that there are gaps in the early childhood education and care system that have a disproportionately negative impact upon young Roma children and their families.

Resources allocated to funding programs that relate to family and child wellbeing in the Republic of Croatia significantly lag behind averages in other European countries and are among the lowest in Europe. Croatia also lags behind other European countries with regard to the level of involvement of all children in preschool education. It is acknowledged and welcomed, however, that the MoSES has substantially increased funding in recent years in the interests specifically of Roma inclusion in education.

The development of preschool education is largely left to the initiatives of local authorities; this has resulted in significant regional differences in early childhood care and preschool education coverage for young children. It is clear that a uniform high quality network of provision for all preschool age children is absent because responsibility for their education and care is decentralised to local governments that often have significantly different fiscal capacities and policy priorities. Access to services and resources for young children is thus largely determined by the lottery of place of residence. Actions to address this unsatisfactory situation are being taken by the appropriate legally competent authorities which is most encouraging. However, this is an important policy area which is also reflected within the recommendations to this report.

The uneven national pattern of early childhood educational opportunities and the relative costs involved reflects an inequality of both access and take-up. According to previously conducted research, children from families of lower socio-economic status would most benefit from preschool care and education, yet prior to the recent compulsory and generous arrangements introduced in the autumn of 2014 for the preparatory pre-primary year, children from families of lower socio-economic status were the most excluded overall as measured by the relatively low involvement of such children in preschool programs.

In the 2012/2013 school year a total of 128,046 children were included in preschool education in the Republic of Croatia. However, as this data is not officially disaggregated by ethnicity, the percentage of Croatian Roma children in this total has to be estimated to some extent. This, again, is a very serious gap in information for the authorities with responsibility for Roma inclusion and child protection. However, although the actual total number of Roma children of preschool age that should be enrolled is unknown, there is available data that makes it possible to determine the percentage of Roma children actually enrolled in comparison to enrolment figures for the entire preschool population.

The available data for Croatian Roma children shows that a considerably large percentage of Roma children attend preparatory pre-primary year programs just before they start mandatory primary school at the age of 5–6 years (about 55%). While this is encouraging it is less than preferable to regular preschool education because these programs to date

are reported to be far from uniform. It is commendable that this provision, which is free for Roma children, has been put on a mandatory basis by the MoSES and in situations where preschool facilities are absent the provision has been located in primary schools. However, it is also to be noted that these preparatory pre-primary year programs are said to vary in length, quality and dynamics, depending on location, and there has been no systematic mechanism established to secure the uniform quality of these programs.

From the RECI+ Croatia Study, it is evident that only 20% of all Roma children (aged between 0–6 years) in Roma households included in this study are accessing any kind of preschool education or preschool program, including preparatory pre-primary programs despite their availability (albeit sometimes in primary schools) and the recent heavy co-financial subsidies to aid Roma access to entitlements.⁴ There was also a complete absence of any kind of preschool education at one location in the study, though it is only five kilometres from the county centre of Sisak-Moslavina and is thus not so remote that it would have been impractical to make preschool provision available.

Previous reports have indicated that Roma children's enrolment into first grade can be delayed on the basis of poor test results, which are said to be mostly caused by a limited knowledge of the standard Croatian language.⁵ Indisputably, quality preschool education for Roma children is fundamentally important as this markedly improves their linguistic preparation and readiness for primary school.

A number of positive measures have been implemented at the primary school level to bridge gaps and improve Roma pupils' progress and attainment. These include extra instruction in the Croatian language, improved access and assisted transportation, employing Roma teaching assistants and MoSES funded after-school programs that support learning. These initiatives by the MoSES must be judged as very welcome and much needed developments. The importance of Roma teaching assistants was raised by a number of school staff and Roma parents during the course of the RECI+ Croatia Study.

Reports indicate that MoSES funded after-school programs for Roma children are often unavailable due to a lack of classroom space and available teaching staff. An opportunity to get extra help with homework, participate in cultural and sporting activities with peers and have a hot meal (which often cannot be guaranteed, given the circumstances of many Roma families) would be very beneficial to many Roma children.

Based on all the aforementioned evidence drawn from the RECI+ Croatia Study, this report concludes that it is essential that Roma children be provided with access to high quality early educational services as early as possible, both to facilitate their successful inclusion within the formal education system and to ensure that before they begin primary education any measurable additional learning needs have been addressed by child-centred quality preschool teaching and learning.

4 The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports informed the Study that following the *Oršuš and others vs. the Republic of Croatia*, the funding for Roma inclusion in preschool education was sharply increased by more than double between 2012 and 2013.

5 In 2011 a *Preparatory Program of Croatian language teaching for pupils in primary and secondary education who do not speak, or are insufficiently proficient in the Croatian language*, (*Official Gazette*, 151/11) was introduced. This was followed in 2013 by the *Ordinance on carrying out preparatory and remedy classes for pupils who do not speak or are insufficiently proficient in the Croatian language and the mother tongue and culture classes* (*Official Gazette*, 15/13). Pupils can receive up to 70 hours per year of Croatian language tuition.

Challenges

Despite some welcome and recent improvements, of all the national minorities and ethnic groups in the Republic of Croatia, the Roma undoubtedly have the most difficult social position, characterised by a high degree of social exclusion. The RECI+ Croatia Study results show that Roma communities experience exclusion across economic, social and political spheres of life in many ways and that this exclusion encompasses profound deprivation.

Multiple poverty factors are particularly pronounced amongst Roma families and these inescapably have an enduring negative impact on infants and children of all ages, but particularly on the youngest. Incontestably, the enduring impact of these poverty factors has a negative impact on children and their engagement with education as well as their overall development, progress and attainment.

Low cultural and social capital, prejudice and economic exclusion all shape the employment possibilities for Roma adults and ultimately limit the amount of economic capital that remains available to Roma families.

Results from the RECI+ Croatia Study show that there are specific challenges in particular locations where Roma live that threaten children's overall wellbeing. These include unhealthy and dangerous environments (home, neighbourhood and the wider world immediately adjacent to Roma settlements) and the marked social, economic and (in terms of a profound "digital divide") technological exclusion of a majority of Roma in the Republic of Croatia. These factors are frequently reflected in marginalised and segregated living neighbourhoods with limited access to standard public services. This pattern is generally more pronounced in rural areas. The isolation and stigmatisation of many Roma settlements is counterproductive for the happy and successful integration of Roma children into the education system, including preschool settings.

The isolation and stigmatisation of many Roma settlements further disadvantages parents and their children in terms of a lack of access to professional advice and information coupled with significantly restricted access to further education and training for youth and adults. The role of Roma NGOs on this matter is featured in the recommendations to this report.

The underprivileged position of Roma women and girls is evidenced by the findings of this RECI+ Croatia Study and, indeed, many other reports. This reality undoubtedly has negative impacts on the life experiences of young Roma children and their access to and inclusion in early childhood education and care, as well as their attendance patterns and levels of attainment in the formal education system. As a result of family social responsibilities and traditional values, young Roma girls often 'drop out' of education at an early age.

The hindered integration of the Roma community in preschool provision at the local level is a challenge that seriously and negatively impacts Roma children's access to quality preschool facilities. Exclusion and segregation of some Roma children in preschool settings is sometimes linked to the prejudiced anti-Roma public attitudes of many non-Roma parents. An actual incident at Gornji Hrašćan, Medjimurje is detailed in this Report. Anti-Roma attitudes amongst parents (and sometimes teachers) must be addressed in order to seriously deal with the lack of social inclusion of Croatian Roma communities. Another obstacle to accessing quality preschool education and care relates to high rates of poverty and the burden to families of additional costs such as clothes, shoes, school excursions and possibly transport (in those areas where free provision has yet to be

implemented) and some extra-curricular activities. Organisational and administrative obstacles are also present in many localities and include shortages of preschools, long waiting lists and a lack of effective communication in terms of the dissemination of vital and practical information about educational opportunities. It is acknowledged, however, that preschool institutions now have an obligation to inform parents that free preschool places are available and that in best practice models this vital information should be communicated to Roma families through outreach strategies.

Evidence from the RECI+ Croatia Study shows that poor living conditions complicate the work that women do and adversely affect the ways in which Roma women can look after their families and themselves. Women, in particular, do not often have the opportunity to complete their education or acquire skills around self and family care that might enable them to modify traditional cultural practices that negatively impact their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their children.

It is encouraging that the number of female Roma tertiary level students has risen and is presently higher than the number of male Roma tertiary level students for all academic years. Data also shows that since 2010 Roma women's participation has increased (compared to male participation) in adult learning and non-formal educational programs. The wellbeing of the family, and especially of children, is closely related to the mother's level of education, so gender inequality in access to education is of special concern and these are thus important improvements. Moreover, such changes may enhance mothers' aspirations regarding the education of their children, especially their daughters.

Overall, participants of focus groups held in three of the five locations of the RECI+ Croatia Study evaluated nursery or preschool facilities as a good form of care and early education, but many parents either did not know about what preschool facilities and support existed locally or reported being unable to enrol their children due to exclusion, unemployment (levels of absolute poverty), an absence of Roma teachers or teaching assistants, a shortage of kindergarten child places, rural isolation and/or the additional financial burdens associated with formal schooling. This is despite the recently introduced financial incentives including the potential for the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports' contribution to the parental share of preschool fees. Additional causal factors include substandard housing, dangerous and unhygienic environments and these all combined with, and complicated by, poor infant health.

In primary education multiple hindrances are part of the complex analysis and the RECI+ Croatia Study summarises these to include the following: limited participation and poor levels of progress and attainment; poor pupil motivation, which is causally mirrored by low teacher expectations; lack of teacher encouragement and lack of challenging curricula; grade failure and repeats at crucial age stages; a real lack of teachers' intercultural competence (also evidenced in preschool provision); unaddressed racist bullying of Roma pupils; ethnic segregation by class or pupil grouping within classes; pupils feeling insecure and inferior on account of negative teacher attitudes towards Roma; lack of monitoring and evaluation of the quality and equality aspects of education; and the consequent pattern of premature drop-out from the education system.

The *RECI+ Croatia Report* affirms the ambitious initiatives set out in the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020* and welcomes the ongoing commitment to their implementation. However, there is a very real danger that this process is insufficiently rapid to seriously address the needs of the differing Roma communities in the Republic of Croatia. In consequence, there is evidence that too many preschool and school-aged Roma children are falling through wide gaps in nationwide preschool provision. The research team also asserts that despite major enhancements to preschool education

budgets by the MoSES, insufficient resources are being devoted to the important work of preschool provision and the national patchwork of unsystematic allocations at the local level is resulting in unequal educational opportunities that lead to discriminatory outcomes. Generally, more coordinated efforts from and between state bodies and local authorities are required to ensure access to quality education for all Croatian Roma children.

Though many Roma parents support some form of community based pre-primary education for their children, some publicly and privately sponsored preschools and playgroups are ethnically segregated and therefore reflect limited opportunities for social mixing and integration.

Exclusion of Roma in Croatian society is also manifest in the low representation of Roma personnel in public life and the design and delivery of public services, including education and health. This reality is particularly true for Roma women and girls, few of whom are represented in political, economic or social arenas.

Inequality between Croatian Roma and the majority population in the Republic of Croatia is well documented. In a context of negative public opinion and prejudicial attitudes, Roma express their demands for equal treatment and social fairness in a peaceful and dignified way through recognised spokespeople and noble self-advocacy, despite their very limited overall social and economic capital.

Chronic lack of reliable, uniform and accurate ethnically disaggregated data prevents any real measurement of the success – or lack of success – of the policies and planned initiatives within the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*. The Government of the Republic of Croatia is also hindered by the need for an attitude shift on the part of the majority population towards Croatian Roma people, a shift from the dynamics of racism and xenophobia to an understanding of the importance of human rights, inclusion and social justice.

In light of these seminal research findings from the RECI+ Croatia Study, the Recommendations in Chapter 5 are arranged by level of priority, in order to suggest an appropriate sequence for the undertakings that will be required to secure access to high quality early childhood education and care for all children aged 0–6 years, as well as addressing other elements that indirectly negatively impact Roma families. Recommendations also focus on the necessity of improving Roma children’s attainment and regular attendance in preschool institutional settings. The challenges related to the need to change majority attitudes towards Croatian Roma (and other minority groups) are also included in the Recommendations, in the interest of improving social cohesion and creating a more just and productive society for all. The recommendations in this report are offered in the belief that they are in the universe of the possible.

INTRODUCTION

Sponsoring Agencies and Research Institution

The Roma Early Childhood Inclusion+ (RECI+) Studies and Reports are a joint initiative between the Sponsoring Agencies: namely, the Roma 'Kopači' initiatives at the Early Childhood Program (ECP) of Open Society Foundations (OSF), the Roma Education Fund (REF) and UNICEF. The research was conducted by the Institute of Social Sciences, Ivo Pilar in Zagreb, Croatia. The four main chapters of this Report were written and finalised by the lead research team at Ivo Pilar.

Justification for the RECI+ Studies and Reports

Every European nation has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and therefore has an obligation to protect and promote, with equity and without discrimination, the rights of all children.⁶ Yet, across Europe, the majority of poor Roma children face a challenging present and a difficult future. Their possibilities to succeed in life are severely constrained by prevailing negative attitudes towards their families and communities by majority populations. From the very start of life, Roma children have reduced opportunities to develop to their full potential. For this reason Roma young children and their futures are at the centre of this important piece of research.

The Open Society Foundations Early Childhood Program, the Roma Education Fund and UNICEF are committed to tackling the pervasive violation of rights experienced by a majority of Roma children in Europe. The Sponsoring Agencies believe that early childhood development is one of the most important keys to breaking the cycle of poverty and exclusion, a cycle that has proven so difficult to counter with what have most often been sporadic and short-term measures that are frequently too limited and too late.

Some of the most persuasive arguments about the critical importance of early childhood are those proposed by Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman, who notes that investing in disadvantaged young children is a rare public policy that not only promotes economic productivity but also fairness and social justice. Investments in high quality services for young children and their families, particularly those who are poor and

6 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, available at <http://www.unicef.org.uk/UNICEFs-Work/UN-Convention/>

disadvantaged, not only protect children's rights but also lead to significant public expenditure savings later. These savings are achieved because early interventions help families to improve their children's health and wellbeing and make the most of subsequent educational opportunities. Children are, therefore, more likely to succeed in later life, and are less likely to require social welfare and other support benefits. And yet, in spite of a growing body of evidence that establishes early childhood as the most significant period for human capital formation, most governments invest inversely, prioritising programs that target older children and young adults.

The Open Society Foundations, the Roma Education Fund and UNICEF have collaborated to develop the series of *Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (RECI) Reports*. The research partnership was initiated in response to the independent commitment of each organisation to the rights of Roma children. All three organisations are committed to enabling young Roma children to access and benefit from appropriate, inclusive and effective early childhood development services. The Reports build a detailed picture of early childhood policy and provision frameworks, highlighting the barriers and opportunities for improving the access of Roma children to appropriate and high-quality early childhood education and care. The principle objective of the Reports is to make information and data on young Roma children's exclusion available to decision makers and key stakeholders with a view to advocate for equitable early childhood policies and programs. This RECI+ series of studies is the second round of reports in the Central and Eastern European region to capture and systematically present the situation of young Roma children. Through examining available data, each RECI+ Report will identify priority early childhood policy issues and concerns in respect of Roma families and young children.

This RECI+ Report is based on the Republic of Croatia. The Report proposes a series of recommendations for more comprehensive and inclusive early childhood services and provides a clear agenda for action by the Croatian Government and other key players. The findings and recommendations of the Report are particularly relevant at this point in time, as the recent European Commission's 2020 strategy requires Member States and those seeking accession to the European Union to develop national strategies for Roma inclusion. Moreover, two years of preschool education for all Roma children has been one of the long-standing targets of the Roma Decade of Inclusion, since its inception in 2005. As we come to the close of the *Decade of Roma Inclusion* it is important to be able to demonstrate that progress has been made in a number of countries. While it is acknowledged that very significant steps forward have been taken in recent years by the legally competent authorities, including the MoSES, it is still the belief of the Sponsoring Agencies that the time is now right for the Croatian Government to act more decisively. Comprehensive early childhood services for all children, starting with the prenatal period and extending through the early years of primary education, must be expanded, with an explicit focus on the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups such as the Roma, so that the reality of Roma inclusion is realised for this generation of young Roma children and beyond.

20 **New elements of the research process**

Building on the experience of the RECI studies Phase 1, this first RECI+ Study has endeavoured to advance the research process by incorporating young Roma research workers/assistants within the research teams and for all such teams to receive training in anti-bias and social justice prior to the commencement of the fieldwork research. The RECI+ concept is also to place a greater emphasis on post-publication advocacy for targeted advancements in early childhood policy, provision and practice.

The fieldwork aspects of the research conducted by the Institute of Social Sciences, Ivo Pilar, includes the views of Roma communities, Roma women and men and Roma children, preschool/school principles and teachers, municipality leaders, social and health workers and Roma NGOs, gathered through focus group discussions and interviews. These views have been incorporated in the research process. Technical experts, representatives of ministries, academics and members of civil society organisations had the opportunity to be briefed on the main findings of the study, either by their participation in the national consultation held in December 2013 or subsequently by direct invitation. The Sponsoring Agencies and their specialist consultants have read draft versions of the *RECI+ Croatia Report* and contributed from their respective points of view to the articulation of policy reforms and practical steps required to improve the situation of young and disadvantaged Roma children in the Republic of Croatia.

The RECI+ Croatia Study purposefully involved qualitative research that included fieldwork observations, surveys, in-depth interviews and focus groups. Some of the main aims of this project were to collect data on the situation of Roma children and their families and to map out best practices as well as the gaps and hindrances to Roma children's access, regular attendance, satisfactory levels of attainment and progress in education. Additional goals of this study were to detect and describe the real problems and to identify the challenges and opportunities that Roma children and their families face. (See Annex 1: Research Methodology)

Background to the RECI+ Studies and the *RECI+ Croatia Report*

The Roma Early Childhood Inclusion Project (RECI Phase 1) was started in 2009. It was sponsored and managed collectively by the Sponsoring Agencies with the purpose of gathering data and information about the inclusion of young Roma children in five Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, namely, the Czech Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Romania and Hungary.

For each Phase 1 country a national *Roma Early Childhood Inclusion Report* was researched and written by national experts in the fields of early childhood and Roma inclusion. These Reports identified high priority early childhood policy issues and concerns in respect to Roma families and their young children. They were grounded in: normative values (e.g. the basic rights of children and minority groups as outlined in the UN Conventions and EU Directive 2000/73 of 29 June 2007); agreed early childhood research positions on the strategies to be adopted in supporting excluded families and children (e.g. the need to provide strong government leadership and funding; the need to involve all the major stakeholders, especially the target group) and data-based investigation. The Reports placed strong emphasis on the progress achieved and on innovative programs that hold the potential to be generalised to the benefit of all countries with similar needs. A number of these reports are now published and an *Overview Report* was published in 2012.⁷

In 2011 the Sponsoring Agencies agreed to launch Phase 2 of the project, hereinafter referred to as RECI+. This project envisaged RECI+ studies in a further five countries; the first of these studies has focused on the Republic of Croatia.

7 'Roma Early Childhood Inclusion – Overview Report', a joint initiative of OSF, REF and UNICEF, published by UNICEF – Hungary, 2010. Available at <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/roma-early-childhood-inclusion-overview-report>

CHAPTER 1

The Country Context and the Situation of the Roma Population

1.1 Introduction to the country

- 1.1.1 The Republic of Croatia is a Mediterranean, Central European and South-eastern European country. During the war that took place in Croatia between 1991 and 1995, the Republic of Croatia became an independent and internationally recognised state in 1992 when it became a member of the United Nations. The process of accession to the European Union ended in July 2013 when Croatia became its 28th Member State. According to the 2011 census the Republic of Croatia has a population of 4,284,889 million inhabitants. The country is territorially organised into 21 units of regional self-government (20 counties and the City of Zagreb), 127 towns, 429 municipalities and 6,756 settlements. Zagreb, the capital city, has a population of 790,017 and constitutes the political, cultural and economic centre of Croatia.
- 1.1.2 The Republic of Croatia is a sovereign, democratic and social state. Its constitutional order is based on the principles of freedom, equality, national equality and equality of the sexes, peace-building, social justice, respect for human rights, inviolability of property, sustainability of nature and environment, the rule of law and a democratic multiparty system.⁸
- 1.1.3 The first multi-party elections were held in 1990 when the country underwent a political and economic system change and declared independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The official language is Croatian and 95% of the population speak the official language, although this is not necessarily true for Roma. According to the 2011 census, the ethnic structure of the population is as follows: Croats (90%), 21 ethnic minorities (about 8%) and other categories (about 2%).⁹ Of the ethnic minorities, Serbians represent the largest group (186,633 inhabitants or 4.36%), followed by Bosniacs (31,479 inhabitants or 0.73%), Italians (17,807 inhabitants or 0.42%), Albanians (17,513 inhabitants or 0.41%) and Roma (16,975 inhabitants or 0.41%).¹⁰ The majority of people in the Republic of Croatia are Roman Catholic Christians (about 86%), while a

8 *The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia* (consolidated text), Article 3, see <http://www.sabor.hr/Default.aspx?art=2405>

9 This includes all other ethnic minorities (0.44%), persons who stated regional affiliation (0.64%), persons who did not state any affiliation (0.62%) and unknown (0.21%).

10 Centre for Peace Studies, 2013; CBS, 2013d, p. 11.

smaller share of the population are Orthodox Christians (about 4.4%), Muslims (1.4%), agnostics and atheists (4.5%) and other religions (about 3.2%).¹¹

1.1.4 The Croatian economy is currently undergoing a severe, long-standing economic and social crisis that has been characterised by a decrease in the real gross domestic product (GDP) and overall economic activity. The GDP per capita in 2012 amounted to 10,295 EUR or 13,227 USD.¹² Within the European Union, the Republic of Croatia recorded the greatest decrease in economic activity in 2012 (following Greece, Portugal, Italy, Cyprus and Slovenia), as well as one of the highest rates of unemployment (following Greece, Portugal and Spain) and the lowest rates of employment.¹³ As will be seen later in this Report, the economic situation in Croatia negatively impacts Roma communities, families and young children.

1.2 Demographic data about the Roma

1.2.1 Demographically, Roma communities in the Republic of Croatia generally maintain an age structure characterised by a high percentage of children and low percentage of older community members. More than half of the population (55.4%) is under the age of 19 years.¹⁴ Such a disproportionately young population reflects a relatively high birth rate and a markedly shorter life expectancy. Data also shows that the Roma population is the youngest in Croatia, with an average age of 21.9 years compared to the average age of the population, which is 41.7 years.¹⁵

1.2.2 According to the 2011 Croatian census, there are 16,975 Roma persons, which represents 0.41% of the total population in the Republic of Croatia.¹⁶ It is to be noted, however, that there is a considerable mismatch between the official census data on the number of Croatian Roma in the Republic of Croatia and unofficial estimates made by reputable international organisations. This is rightly acknowledged within the Government of the Republic of Croatia's *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*. In the period before World War II, the census indicated that the number of Roma had steadily increased to about 15,000. Subsequently, that number was only reached and surpassed in the most recent 2011 census. This data reveals the significant demographic loss of the Roma population in Croatia during World War II.

1.2.3 Use of mother tongue is a second way to determine the number of Roma in Croatia. In the 2011 census, 14,369 people reported the Romani language as their mother tongue – 2,606 fewer people than those who identified themselves as Roma.¹⁷ The discrepancy begins to shed light on the numbers of non-Romani-speaking Roma living in Croatia.

1.2.4 In the 2011 census, the Roma population mainly identified themselves as Roman Catholics (8,299 or 49%), Muslims (5,039 or 30%) and Orthodox (2,381 or 14%). The remaining 7% declared themselves as members of other religions or as agnostics.¹⁸

11 Digital Information Documentation Office, 2013, p. 3. The 'other religions' category includes: Oriental religions (0.06%); Other religions, movements and philosophies (0.06%); Not stated (2.17%); and Unknown (0.29%).

12 CBS, 2013a, p. 7.

13 Croatian Chamber of Economy, 2013, p. 5.

14 CBS, 2013d, p. 18.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

- 1.2.5 In terms of the structure of the Roma population, the sexes are almost equal in numbers; there were 109 more males (8,542 Roma males compared to 8,433 Roma females) recorded in the 2011 census.¹⁹ The territorial distribution of the Roma population, according to the 2011 census, reflects that most live in the County of Medjimurje (5,107 or 30% of all Roma), the City of Zagreb (2,755 or 16% of all Roma) and the County of Osijek-Baranja (1,874 or 11% of all Roma). The fewest Roma can be found in Dalmatia, Lika, Gorski Kotor, the Croatian Zagorje region and some parts of Slavonia.²⁰

1.3 The history, culture and present situation of Roma

- 1.3.1 Roma started to settle in Croatian lands in the 14th century as part of a pattern of migration in South-eastern Europe, which makes them one of the oldest established ethnic minorities in the Republic of Croatia.²¹ They are mentioned as “Gypsies” towards the end of 1362 in Dubrovnik and in 1378 in Zagreb. Croatian authorities followed the example of most European authorities and began to adopt anti-Roma legislation at the end of the 15th century, accusing them of witchcraft, sorcery, spying for the Ottomans and kidnapping children.²² These legal provisions required citizens to expel Roma from their territories or to refuse them board and lodging. Increasingly negative attitudes towards the Roma influenced Croatian authorities from the 16th century onwards; the Croatian Parliament at the end of 16th century adopted further legal provisions regarding the persecution of Roma.
- 1.3.2 Comprehensive reforms tied to the ‘enlightened’ absolutism of Empress Maria Theresa (1717–1780) and Emperor Joseph II (1741–1790) in the Habsburg lands shifted policy towards the Gypsies, impacting the situation of Roma in Croatia.²³ The Habsburg monarchy issued a number of important legal provisions in the period 1749 to 1783 that sought to assimilate Roma into the Habsburg state as ‘New Hungarians’ or ‘New Peasants’.²⁴ Following the abolition of Gypsy slavery in the territories of Wallachia and Moldavia from the mid 19th century, larger groups of Beyash²⁵ from the Rumanian lands settled in the territories of Croatia and Slavonia,²⁶ which had a significant effect on the composition of the Roma populations in the Croatian lands.²⁷
- 1.3.3 Following the First World War (1914–1918) and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, Roma populations, along with the general population of Croats, Serbs and others in the Croatian lands, became subjects in the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918–1929) until the advent of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1941). According to the official population census, the number of Roma in the interwar Yugoslav state was around 70,000, of which 15,000 lived in the Banovina of Croatia, mostly in the

19 CBS, 2011.

20 CBS, 2013d, pp. 22–59.

21 Vojak, 2013, pp. 10–12, 19–20.

22 Some researchers link Roma arrival in Croatia with the Ottoman conquests of the Balkans in the 14th and 15th centuries, when ‘Cingeneler’ (Gypsies in Turkish) were part of the Ottoman military organisation (Berberski, 1979, pp. 420–421).

23 Crowe, 1996, pp. 39, 73–76.

24 The military advances of the Habsburg Empire against the Ottomans in South-eastern Europe during the late 17th and 18th centuries further complicated the regulation of local Roma populations (Fraser, 1995, pp. 156–159).

25 The Beyash have been known by a number of names, principally ‘Rudari’ as miners and ‘Lungurari’ or ‘Lingurari’ as spoon-makers and wood workers in the Wallachian and Moldavian lands. They are likely to have ‘lost’ their use of Romani language during the period of enslavement in the 14th to 19th centuries, maintaining instead an archaic form of Rumanian into the present.

26 Hrvatić and Ivančić, 2000, p. 257; Vojak, 2013, p. 30.

27 Vojak, 2005, pp. 145–162.

eastern and northern parts of the Banovina. Roma were not recognised or protected as one of the minorities in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.²⁸

1.3.4 German Nazi policies in the 1930s included persecution of the Roma population, particularly the Nazi 'project' of 'Endlösung' ('Final Solution'), which spread to other European countries in a series of aggressive measures supported by Nazis and fascist regimes. During World War II in Europe, the Roma were victims of these regimes and their destruction is, besides other things, described by the term *O Baro Porrajmos*, meaning 'the Great Devouring' in the Romani language.²⁹ In early April 1941, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia capitulated. Dalmatia was annexed to Italy, Baranja and Medjmurje to Hungary and the remaining parts of Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Syrmia were incorporated into the Independent State of Croatia, supported by the Nazi and Italian Fascist regimes. This new state was led by the ultranationalist Ante Pavelić Ustaše government, who promulgated anti-Semitic laws and instigated ethnic cleansing measures against Jews, Serbs, and Roma, incarcerating them in the Jasenovac and other concentration camps. The pro-fascist Ustaše government adopted anti-Gypsy policies (similar to policies in Nazi Germany) in dealing with the Roma,³⁰ setting the groundwork for the wholesale persecution and killing of the Roma.³¹ In the summer of 1942 Roma were subjected to mass arrests and deportation to the Jasenovac camp, where most were exterminated. It is believed that no Roma remained in Jasenovac after July 1942, except a small number of gravediggers who were killed at the beginning of 1945.³²

1.3.5 After World War II, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia authorities legally protected the rights of national minorities³³ at the federal and state level; however, the status of all Roma in the new socialist state remained unrecognised.³⁴ As a minority ethnic population, Roma were later recognised in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1971), Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro (early 1980s).³⁵ Increasing autonomy for Croatia from 1974 onwards did not lead to the recognition of Roma as a national minority. Numbers of Roma in Croatia grew from 405 (in 1948) to 6,695 (in 1991). These changes in the number of registered Roma can be partly attributed to their initial fear to declare Roma ethnicity stemming from their experiences of persecution during the Second World War. The status and position of Roma during this period was still marked by social and economic marginalisation, poor living conditions, inadequate levels of education and the relatively high rates of unemployment.³⁶ Government policies and measures were unsuccessful in promoting improvements in these conditions for Roma in Croatian society. Economic reforms in the 1960s made employment possible abroad and resulted in the migration of some Roma to Western European countries.³⁷ In 1980, the first Roma association in Croatia was founded. This was called the Kulturno-prosvjetno društvo Rom (Culture and Education Society). Shortly thereafter, other Roma organisations were established such as the Roma Association Zagreb – Croatia, which was a member of the Union of Roma of Yugoslavia and the Roma cultural-artistic society *Romsko srce* (Romani Heart).³⁸

28 Vojak, 2004, pp. 447–476.

29 Weiss-Wendt, 2013, pp. 21–24.

30 Lengel Krizman, 2003, pp. 47–53.

31 Biondich, 2002, pp. 38–39.

32 Hrečkovski, 1985, pp. 36–37.

33 This included Czechs, Slovaks, Italians, Hungarians, Jews, Germans, Austrians, Ukrainians and Ruthenians.

34 As a minority population, Roma were later recognised in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1971), Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro (early 1980s) (Latham, 1999, p. 206).

35 Latham, 1999, p. 206.

36 Crowe, 1996, pp. 222–231.

37 Latham, 1999, pp. 206–207, 217–218.

38 Kamenski and Ilić, 1982, p. 13; Domini, 1990, p. 104.

1.3.6 During the 1990s, Roma were not recognised as a national minority, but as an ‘ethnic group’. Levels of political, social and cultural organization amongst Roma improved, but at the same time, problems related to education, health, unemployment, poor living conditions and discrimination remained. The social, cultural and political organisation of Roma continued and more than 120 Roma organisations were founded, including the Croatian Roma Party (1991), with branches in Zagreb, Rijeka and Čakovec.³⁹ In 2002, Roma were guaranteed full protection as a national minority through the *Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities*.⁴⁰

1.3.7 The Croatian Government introduced its first *National Program for the Roma* (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2003) and the Republic of Croatia subsequently joined the *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015*.⁴¹ These initiatives resulted in the national *Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015*,⁴² which has been superseded by the Republic of Croatia’s *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*; the latter provides a comprehensive range of objectives in favour of the Roma’s integration into full and representative citizenship with dignity and respect.⁴³

1.4 Roma languages and other cultural specificities

1.4.1 Roma in Croatia mostly speak the Romani language (*Rromani-chib*, Romanës).⁴⁴ As a rule, Roma in Croatia are bilingual, however, many do not have a good command of standard Croatian, principally due to exclusion from education and segregation from the majority population.⁴⁵ A number of Roma in Croatia speak some of the Vlax Romani dialects, such as Kalderash and Lovari. According to research conducted by the State Institute for the Protection of Family, Maternity and Youth in 2002, Roma in Croatia speak Rromani-chib (42%) and Ljimba d’bjaš (36%), while 11% of respondents speak Albanian, 6% speak Croatian and 4% speak Romanian.⁴⁶ However, in some areas the loss of the Romani language is particularly pronounced, partly because of pressure from the majority language and interference with other languages.⁴⁷

39 Župarić-Iljić, 2011, pp. 150–153.

40 See Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities (*Official Gazette*, 155/02) and Constitutional Act Amending the Constitutional National Minority Rights Act (*Official Gazette*, 80/10). It is to be noted that although Romanies were given national minority status in 2000 (*Official Gazette*, 105/00) their rights were more precisely determined in the the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities in 2002 (*Official Gazette*, 155/02).

41 The *Decade for Roma Inclusion* was initiated by the World Bank, OSI, UNDP, the Council of Europe, the Council of Europe Development Bank, the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Roma Information Office, the European Roma and Travellers Forum, the European Roma Rights Centre and the Roma Education Fund. The United Nations Human Settlements Program, the Office of the UNHCR and UNICEF became partners in the Decade in 2008 and the World Health Organization became a partner in 2011. The Republic of Croatia presided over the Roma Decade between 1 July 2012 and 30 June 2013.

42 The national *Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015* aims to deliver a series of outcomes that will improve access and participation in mainstream education for Roma children, improve delivery of health care to Roma families, increase employment opportunities, particularly for Roma women, and improve the quality of housing for Roma communities. Some aspects of the plan are intended to support Romani cultures, traditions, languages and customs to ensure their preservation (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2005, pp. 1–4, 99–100, 106).

43 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012. See also http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_croatia_strategy_en.pdf

44 Romani belongs to the Indo-Aryan group of the Indo-European language family and is related to Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and other Indian languages.

45 Rašić, 2013, pp. 27–30. In mutual communication, many Roma in Croatia commonly use one or two dialects of the Romani languages, whilst the Beyash use an archaic form of Rumanian.

46 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2003, p. 6.

47 Rašić, 2013, pp. 27–30.

- 1.4.2 A number of Roma activists feel that the standardisation of the Romani language is important because this may lead to the realisation of Roma minority rights to use their own language as well as the preservation of ethnic identity.⁴⁸ The Zagreb Congress on the Romani Languages in 2008 allowed linguists, publicists and writers to discuss the development and standardisation of the Romani language. At this event, the International Romani Union issued a Declaration on the Romani Language and established November 5th as the International Day of Romani Language. The Croatian Parliament unanimously supported this initiative in 2012.⁴⁹
- 1.4.3 Romani culture is part of the wider European cultural traditions that emerged in the medieval and the early modern period, when Roma began to arrive in Europe in significant numbers. Roma communities have maintained specific patterns and forms of lifestyle, language, customs and traditions that serve to maintain the 'ethnic boundaries' between Roma and non-Roma, preserving distinctions and governing relationships with non-Roma people (*gadje* in Romani-chib). Exclusion frequently reinforces these boundaries, which have functioned as cultural 'survival mechanisms' in periods of outright hostility and persecution since the early modern period, for example in the 18th century. Roma cultural patterns are consistently represented by non-Roma as 'deviant', 'anti-social' and obstacles to integration in wider Croatian society.⁵⁰
- 1.4.4 Until the second half of the 20th century, Roma in Croatia were under considerable pressure from the government and the majority population to assimilate. Assimilation strategies included forbidding their (nomadic) lifestyle, denying them the use of the Romani language, outlawing certain traditional occupations (such as horse trading) and customs (such as those surrounding marriage). Majority prejudices about religious observance amongst the Roma assumed this was superficial.⁵¹ In the decades following the appearance of the first Roma cultural organisations in the late 1980s, their memberships considerably increased, reflecting a desire to preserve the ethnic, religious and cultural identities they maintain to this day in Croatia.⁵²

1.5 The general socio-economic status of the Roma population

- 1.5.1 The poor and marginalized socio-economic situation of the Roma is caused by deep-rooted social problems linked to xenophobia, racism, poverty, poor access to education and low attainment, high rates of unemployment, inadequate housing and living conditions, poor health status and widespread discrimination. Interconnected and multi-causal, these negative factors create a closed circle of social exclusion in which Roma are unable to exit on their own and without significant support.⁵³
- 1.5.2 A significant difference between Roma and non-Roma populations that live in the same neighbourhoods, or those living close to each other, has been noted in several studies conducted over the last few decades.⁵⁴ This difference is primarily related to the quality

48 Veljko Kajtazi, one of the representatives for minorities in the Croatian Parliament, maintains that the existence of numerous dialects and non-standardisation of the Romani language threatens its existence. He recommends the standardisation of the Romani language to preserve Roma national identity (Kajtazi, 2012, pp. 154–155).

49 In addition, the Department of Ideology and Far Eastern Studies at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb has offered elective courses including 'Introduction to Romani language' and 'Introduction to the literature and culture of the Roma', since 2012 (Kajtazi, 2012, pp. 151–156).

50 Vojak, 2013, pp. 20–31.

51 See <http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/index.php/culture/introduction/roma-culture>; Liégeois, 2012, pp. 89–92.

52 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, pp. 34, 99–100.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

54 Šućur, 2005, pp. 135–139.

of their living conditions and standards of living; Roma often have no proper sanitation, electricity or electrical appliances (e.g. washing machines) in their households, and generally lack access to public transportation. For years, Roma have been on the margins of public interest, which has contributed to a significant deterioration of their living conditions compared to the average living conditions of the majority population.⁵⁵ According to official data, Roma account for less than 1 % of the total population, yet 13.56% of the recipients of social assistance are Roma,⁵⁶ which confirms their marginalised and excluded socio-economic position.

1.6 Contemporary majority perceptions of Roma

- 1.6.1 Negative perceptions of Roma as thieves, idlers (work shy), disease carriers and child kidnappers have historically been dominant perceptions by the majority in Croatian society.⁵⁷ Daily opinions amongst the Croatian majority population also often focus on the negatively perceived lifestyle of Roma families.⁵⁸ The Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies conducted a study on relationships between the majority population and minorities in 2009. Based on research results, ethnic prejudices and xenophobic attitudes exist in Croatian society to a large extent and in particular towards the Roma population.⁵⁹ Negative prejudices towards Roma were also found in school textbooks.⁶⁰ Prominent Roma leaders argue that some Croatian media, such as that from Medjmurje, negatively represent Roma in ways that encourage intolerance and a lack of understanding between Roma and the non-Roma populations.⁶¹
- 1.6.2 As part of the *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015*, research on the attitudes and perceptions of non-Roma towards Roma in Croatia was conducted in 2005.⁶² According to this study, Roma were perceived to be very different from the majority population. Some non-Roma perceived the Roma positively in light of the challenges they face, especially difficult living conditions, poor health care, discrimination and lack of employment opportunities. Some perceived their ‘way of life’ in terms of ‘freedom’ and part of an existence outside the existing social system and its boundaries, restrictions and social conventions. Others emphasised the need for integrating them without assimilation into Croatian society, as assimilation could mean the loss of Roma values, traditions and culture.
- 1.6.3 However, other non-Roma perceived the Roma negatively, largely on the basis of common prejudices in wider society and a particular view of recent historical circumstances related to the impact of the ‘Homeland War’ in Croatia from 1991 to 1995.⁶³ These were often negative perceptions and attitudes based on ‘collective identification and generalisation’, whereby *all* Roma were criticised for not adhering to the existing social norms of the Croatian majority. This group objected to Roma integration, arguing for segregation on the basis that Roma make no positive contribution to Croatian

55 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 31.

56 UNDP, 2006, p. 45.

57 Vojak, 2013, pp. 164–171, 187–197, 207. Based on these perceptions, during World War II, part of the population advocated the extermination of the Roma and Ustasha authorities used racial laws as a basis to commit genocide.

58 Amnesty International, 2006, pp. 2, 48, 52.

59 Radulić, 2014.

60 Amnesty International, 2006, pp. 2, 48, 52; Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2012.

61 Balog, 2013, p. 5.

62 World Bank, Puls, 2005.

63 *Ibid.*, pp. 19–26, 43.

society. Some of the majority population attributed the Roma's difficult position to negative attitudes from majority society, but most blamed the Roma themselves for their plight. Most respondents could not agree on whether the government is able to help or not, but most agreed that the authorities should be involved in adopting measures that aim to improving their position.⁶⁴

- 1.6.4 The Centre for Peace Studies in Zagreb conducted research on the attitudes of adult citizens of Croatia on the topic of immigration of foreigners in 2013. Results showed that more than 40% of citizens consider Roma as 'foreigners' and a source of danger for Croatia in the area of security, culture and politics.⁶⁵ This perception clearly impacts upon incidences of discrimination against Roma, confirmed in the reports of the Ombudsperson, which note that Roma are among the most common victims of the worst forms of discrimination based on ethnicity or national origin (violence and hate speech).⁶⁶ The stereotypical perception of Roma as 'criminals' is prevalent today in Croatian society. Such negative perceptions led to violent conflicts in 2012 between the Croatian majority and Roma populations in Škabrnja, where local villagers physically fenced off a Roma family, eventually forcing the family to leave the village.⁶⁷ The Ombudsperson and the County State Attorney's Office filed an indictment against the mayor of the municipality, charging the office with the criminal offense of racial discrimination. In another incident, a vigilante 'headquarters' was established in the village of Lika to 'defend' the majority population against the Roma, as local residents from the majority population claimed that Roma stole from them and trespassed on their properties.⁶⁸
- 1.6.5 Perceptions of Roma as carriers of infectious disease are still present in Croatian society, reflected in graffiti that appeared in 2010 at the main bus station in Zagreb: 'Do not touch the Roma, they are infected'.⁶⁹ Such notions may reflect notions of racial biology propagated by the fascist state during the 1939–1945 period. In the opinion of the Ombudsperson, these cases threaten the personal security of Roma and cause well-founded fears of attack and persecution amongst them.⁷⁰

1.7 Roma perceptions of mainstream society and its institutions

- 1.7.1 In the aforementioned study that was carried out as part of the *Decade of Roma Inclusion* in 2005, a comparative study of Roma attitudes and perceptions regarding non-Roma was also conducted.⁷¹ Three focus groups of Roma were held in three locations, Zagreb, Beli Manastir and Čakovec. Roma expressed a very pessimistic view of the current situation in Croatia, particularly in the areas of agriculture, social welfare and health care. Accountability for this state of affairs was seen by the participants to be with the Croatian Government and its policies. Roma pointed out that though they had encountered some positive attitudes from the majority population, most felt they were negatively perceived by members of the majority society and discriminated against as a consequence. Apart from unemployment, Roma also brought up difficulties with the health care system, housing situation, financial status and 'family issues' (e.g. traditional lifestyles, status of women, early marriages, position of youth, marital problems related to alcoholism). Discrimination is a part of the daily life of Roma and their testimonies indicate that a

64 *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 30.

65 CPS, 2013, pp. 24, 27, 29.

66 Office of the Ombudsman, 2012, pp. 3, 30.

67 Romić and Sarnavka, 2013, pp. 59–63.

68 Office of the Ombudsman, 2013, p. 96.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 45; Office of the Ombudsman, 2014, p. 118.

70 The court epilogue of this case is still pending because the Ombudsman filed an appeal to the High Court (Crnić et al., 2011, pp. 166–167).

71 World Bank, Puls, 2005.

significant degree of antagonism towards Roma still exists in Croatia.⁷² Other identified problems included exclusion from mainstream education and the study states that low levels of educational experience and attainment cause unemployment, poverty and other problems that push the Roma population towards marginality and social exclusion.⁷³ The report suggests that interaction would also facilitate the socialisation process, help resolve problems facing the Roma population (e.g. education and employment) and help Roma become an integral part of Croatian society.⁷⁴ Participants stressed that they wanted to improve ties with the majority population in Croatia because they believed increased interaction and integration could reduce or eliminate prejudice and discriminatory behaviour towards them.⁷⁵ Many Roma respondents believed that the Croatian Government should play a pivotal role providing help and support, ensuring adequate living conditions and facilitating employment opportunities for the Roma population.⁷⁶

- 1.7.2 As part of the initiative 'Advancing Educational Inclusion and Quality in South-eastern Europe', a piece of research was conducted in Croatia during 2009. From this research the positive perception of Roma towards Croatian educational institutions can be partially observed; namely, Roma parents are more satisfied than parents of the majority population with regard to the information they receive from schools and the ways in which they are welcomed to schools that seek to include them.⁷⁷

1.8 Legal protection of the Roma minority

- 1.8.1 The Croatian authorities inherited a model of protection rights for some 'autochthonous' national minorities from the former Yugoslavia.⁷⁸ The Roma were not explicitly mentioned but were included in the 'other' category. In December 1991, the *Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Freedoms and the Rights of Ethnic or National Communities or Minorities* was adopted.⁷⁹ In December 1997, the Croatian Parliament passed the Act on Amendments to the *Constitution of the Republic of Croatia* in which the first article of the *Constitution* was changed and the Republic of Croatia was established as the national state of the Croatian people and the state of autochthonous national minorities: Serbs, Czechs, Slovaks, Italians, Hungarians, Jews, Germans, Austrians, Ukrainians, Ruthenians and others, who are its citizens.⁸⁰ Although not legally defined, the term 'autochthonous minorities' was introduced; the Roma are not listed as an autochthonous minority.⁸¹
- 1.8.2 That same year, the Republic of Croatia accepted international regulations related to the protection status of minorities by signing and ratifying the *Law on Ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*⁸² and the *Law on*

72 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

73 *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 36.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

75 *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 36.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

77 Miljević-Ridički and Pahić, 2009, p. 3.

78 This is visible in the Preamble (Historical Foundations) of the *Croatian Constitution of December 1990*, which states that Croatia is the national state of the Croatian people as well as state members of other nations and minorities, including Serbs, Muslims, Slovenes, Czechs, Slovaks, Italians, Hungarians and Jews (*Official Gazette*, 56/90; Tatalović, 2001, pp. 95–96).

79 This law stipulated the protection of human rights and freedoms, cultural autonomy, proportional participation of minorities in legislative and other bodies, special status in municipalities where national minorities constitute a clear majority, proportional allocation of employees in municipal courts and police departments, education in minority language and script, judicial protection, etc. (*Official Gazette*, 65/91).

80 *Official Gazette*, 135/97.

81 Some believe that autochthonous minorities unofficially existed before the establishment of the first Yugoslav state on 1 December 1918 (Mesić, 2013, p. 121).

82 *Official Gazette*, International Agreements 14/97.

*Ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.*⁸³ The Croatian authorities adopted amendments to the *Constitutional Law on Human Rights and Freedoms and the Rights of Ethnic or National Minorities* in 2000; Article 3 stipulates that the Republic of Croatia protects the equality of national minorities, citing Roma ("the Romanies")⁸⁴ as one of 22 national minorities.⁸⁵ The Croatian authorities passed two laws related to the rights of national minorities in 2000. The *Law on the Right to Education of National Minorities* describes the provisions related to education in the language and script of a national minority. Among other things, this prescribes how a school with the language and script of a national minority may be established for a small number of pupils and that national minority pupils have enrolment priority.⁸⁶ The *Law on Use of Languages and Scripts of National Minorities* stipulates the equal official use of languages and scripts of national minorities in representative, executive, administrative and judicial bodies at the level of municipalities and counties.⁸⁷ *The Constitutional Law on National Minorities* describes 'support and protection' for rights and freedoms of persons belonging to national minorities as fundamental human rights and freedoms; it was passed in December 2002.⁸⁸ The political participation of 22 national minority representatives is regulated in the *Law on the Election of Members of the Croatian Parliament*; elections are carried out in a special constituency for eight guaranteed seats. Depending on the proportion of national minorities in the total population, a specific number of parliamentary seats are fixed. Specifically, the Roma are given the right to political participation at parliamentary elections on the basis of this law, whereas previously, this right was guaranteed to 10 members of the so-called autochthonous minorities.⁸⁹ Political participation of national minority representatives is further regulated by the amendments to the *Law on the Election of Members for Representative Bodies of Local and Regional Self-government*. Among other things, this law stipulates the election of members of the Council for National Minorities in local units of self-government.⁹⁰ Roma are represented by the Council for National Minorities at all levels of local government in regions where they make up more than 1.5% of the total population, in units of local government where more than 200 members from national minorities live and in regional units of governments where over 500 members from national minorities live. The Council for National Minorities has an advisory role in relation to the policies and provision in units of local and regional self-government.⁹¹

83 *Official Gazette*, International Agreements 18/97.

84 Constitutional Law of Human Rights and Freedoms and the Rights of National and Ethnic Communities or Minorities in Croatia (as amended in May 2000), Article 3, p. 3. It should be noted that the rights of national minorities were more precisely determined in the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities in 2002 (*Official Gazette*, 155/02).

85 *Official Gazette*, 105/00.

86 *Official Gazette*, 51/00.

87 *Ibid.*

88 A national minority is defined as a group of Croatian citizens whose members have traditionally settled in Croatian territory who in terms of ethnic, linguistic, cultural and/or religious characteristics are different from other citizens. Among other things, there are provisions for freedom of expression and non-discrimination as well as the right to language, culture, education, self-organisation and political participation of minority group members. The mentioned law stipulates mandatory representation of national minorities in the Croatian Parliament, specifying the number of minority representatives in this body. However, the way in which minority representatives are to be elected is not explicitly stated (*Official Gazette*, 155/02).

89 Article 16 states that members of the Austrian, Bulgarian, German, Polish, Roma, Romanian, Ruthenian, Russian, Turkish, Ukrainian, Vlach and Jewish minorities jointly elect one representative to Parliament (*Official Gazette*, 69/03).

90 *Official Gazette*, 45/03.

91 Based on official data from the 2001 census, the following minorities: Austrian, German, Rumanian, Bulgarian, Polish, Ruthenian, Ukrainian, Russian, Hebrew, Turkish and the Vlach communities together with Roma are classified as a separate group of National Minorities and are entitled to one representative as specified in the *Law on the Election of Members of the Croatian Parliament* from 2003 (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, pp. 32–33).

- 1.8.3 In accordance with these statutes, Nazif Memedi (2008–2011) and Veljko Kajtazi (2012) were consecutively elected as representatives from the Roma minority as members of the Croatian Parliament. Another provision of the same *Law* stipulates that persons belonging to national minorities in municipalities and cities that have a population that is between 5% and 15% are entitled to one minority representative councillor. In accordance with constitutional and other statutes, Roma participate in the Council for National Minorities and in a Commission that monitors the implementation of the *National Program for the Roma*.
- 1.8.4 Discrimination against Roma in Croatia is prohibited under the *Constitution*, international laws and conventions which Croatia has ratified⁹² and under which the Roma are guaranteed equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms together with other citizens of the Republic. The institutions responsible for monitoring discrimination, and seeking redress when it is proven, include the Croatian People’s Ombudsman’s office and the Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities, a state body that is directly involved in promoting measures that eliminate discrimination against minority ethnic communities. The Republic of Croatia has adopted several measures to prevent various types of discrimination against Roma including raising public awareness about injustice and prejudice towards Roma, encouraging cooperation with Roma political and community representatives, promoting and monitoring the implementation of the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020* and inclusion ‘action plans’ and measures aimed at combating violence towards Roma from non-Roma.⁹³ In December 2013, the Republic of Croatia and other members of the European Union adopted the first EU legal instrument for Roma inclusion, committing to implement a set of recommendations proposed by the European Commission that focus on access to education, employment, health care and housing.⁹⁴
- 1.8.5 One of the most important examples of discrimination against Roma is well illustrated in the case of *Oršuš and others v. The Republic of Croatia* (15766/03). This case was before the European Court of Human Rights and concerned Roma-only classes in Croatian schools that had been judged to be legal by the Croatian Constitutional Court (2007) in a case brought by parents on the basis of violation of articles 6, 2 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights. These rights to equality of education were judged by the Grand Chamber (16 March 2010)⁹⁵ to have been denied⁹⁶ and the Roma children were awarded damages.⁹⁷
- 1.8.6 The case centred upon groups of Roma pupils who were placed in Roma-only classes between 1996 and 2007 at schools in the County of Medjimurje, based on teacher

92 Besides other laws outlined in the *Constitution* of the Republic of Croatia (*Official Gazette*, 56/90, 135/97, 8/98, 113/00, 124/00, 28/01, 41/01, 55/01); Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (*Official Gazette* – International agreements, 6/99, 8/99, 14/02, 9/05); International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (*Official Gazette* – International agreements, 12/93); Anti-discrimination Act (*Official Gazette*, 85/08); Criminal Code (*Official Gazette*, 110/97, 27/98, 50/00, 129/00, 51/01, 111/03, 190/03, 105/04, 71/06, 110/07). Roma children are additionally protected by the terms of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Roma with learning difficulties and disabilities are protected under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

93 OSCE/ODIHR, 2013, pp. 15–16, 21, 26–28, 56–58, 60, 69.

94 Information about the first EU legal instrument for Roma inclusion is available at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-1226_en.htm; Office of the Ombudsman, 2014, p. 31. The aim is to step up the economic and social integration of Roma communities to bridge the gap between Roma and the rest of the population. The implementation of these decisions involved the Office of the Ombudsman as the national body for the promotion of equality and the Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities as another point of contact.

95 European Court for Human Rights, 2010.

96 Memedov, 2010.

97 The primary schools involved in the case requested that the government provide three years of preschool for the children following the judgement, to support early learning and language acquisition, but Amnesty International found that little had substantively changed (Amnesty International, 2011, pp. 1–11).

assessments of these pupils' inadequate command of the Croatian language. The European Court of Human Rights ruled that the practice of segregating Roma primary school students into Roma-only classes amounted to discrimination and that the adapted curriculum delivered in these classes was unclear as to its educational content. The argument that these classes were for short-term separation was dismissed, as the mechanisms for Roma children transferring into mixed classes were not transparent and there were no consistent criteria for such transfers. Most Roma children spent the entirety of their education in such segregated classes. The court judged that while special reading and writing classes for children not fluent in the language of classroom instruction were legal, continuing segregation on the basis of a 'specific ethnic group' was not.⁹⁸

- 1.8.7 Despite the success of this ruling, in March 2012 several Roma children were actively prevented from attending a preschool program at a school in Medjimurje by local parents from the majority population.⁹⁹ More positively, a ruling from the Municipal Court in Varaždin in early 2012 found that two secondary school pupils had been denied the possibility of work experience on the basis of their ethnicity, which was an encouraging sign that rulings to prevent discrimination continue to emerge.¹⁰⁰ Cases of discrimination against Roma continue to be recorded by the Ombudsman's Office in the realms of education, housing and dealings with local authorities and employment, as well as cases relating to the identification of unacceptable and discriminatory expressions in the media and from some public figures.¹⁰¹

1.9 The current economic and labour market situation for Roma

- 1.9.1 The *National Program for the Roma* and the *Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015* clearly identify addressing the disproportionately high unemployment rate amongst Roma as a priority area for improving the social and economic circumstances of Roma. In Croatia, there were 354,104 unemployed persons (November 2013) and a national registered unemployment rate of 20.3% in October of that same year.¹⁰² Roma have been over-represented in this category over the last three years, where it is evident that the percentage of Roma as a total of the unemployed population is approximately four times greater than in the total population.¹⁰³ According to earlier research on Roma access to employment in 2004, similar results showed a disproportionately high unemployment rate among Roma in Croatia, where the report stated that Roma in the County of Medjimurje, many of whom lack basic qualifications and work experience, comprised 20% of the total number (7,316) of the registered unemployed.¹⁰⁴
- 1.9.2 According to a 2011 survey conducted by the UNDP, World Bank and European Commission, the share of Roma within the employed working age population in Croatia was approximately 35%, compared to 77% in the non-Roma population. The proportion of unemployed Roma within the working age population was 65%, whilst it was about

98 HUDOC European Court of Human Rights, 2010.

99 Amnesty International, 2011, pp. 1–11; Office of the Ombudsman, 2013, p. 44; ECRI, 2012, pp. 64–65.

100 OSCE/ODIHR, 2013, pp. 34, 40; Lalić, Benčić and Kuharić, 2012, pp. 22–25; H-Alter, 2013.

101 Lalić, Benčić and Kuharić, 2012, pp. 26, 30–31; Office of the Ombudsman, 2013, pp. 24, 35, 39, 41–42, 44, 75–77, 84, 94, 96.

102 See CES website <http://www.hzz.hr/>

103 Accordingly, 4,731 Roma or 1.79% of the total unemployed in Croatia were registered as unemployed in 2009; 4,533 Roma or 1.49% of the total unemployed in Croatia were registered as unemployed in 2010; 4,499 Roma or 1.42% of the total number of unemployed were registered as unemployed in 2011 (Government of the Republic of Croatia 2012, p. 51).

104 Kušan and Zoon, 2004.

23% for the non-Roma population.¹⁰⁵ According to the Government's Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities, unemployment rates amongst Roma vary depending on the region where they live. In Medjmurje, for example, 98% of all Roma of working age are unemployed, while in Rijeka only 15% are unemployed.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, there is a grave gender imbalance, in that Roma women are in a particularly difficult position as they are almost all unemployed. According to research conducted by the Association of Roma Women *Bolja Budućnost* (Better Future) in 2009, Roma women were mostly homemakers (outside of paid employment), were less likely to be employed than male Roma and the majority had only ever worked in temporary jobs. Evidence suggests that, in common with the situation across Europe, Roma girls in Croatia generally 'drop out' of school at the late primary or early secondary stage. Consequently, the educational levels of Roma women are predominantly lower than the levels of education among Roma men, creating further obstacles to employment in the labour market.¹⁰⁷

- 1.9.3 Although there are official programs aimed at ensuring equality of opportunity in employment for national minorities in the civil service, only two Roma were employed at the end of 2013, accounting for 0.004% of the total number of staff officers and employees.¹⁰⁸ Based on measures included in the *National Program for the Roma* and the *Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion from 2005 to 2015*, the Croatian Employment Service (CES) has implemented measures to address unemployment in the form of financing and co-financing education, training for self-employment, vocational training for work without employment and co-employment in all sectors of activity and public works. The CES also aims to ensure that the work experience necessary for a first job for young educated Roma is in place.¹⁰⁹

1.10 Current cultural and diversity policy of the country

- 1.10.1 Recognition of the Roma as a national minority in 2000¹¹⁰ highlights the importance of a national minority's cultural autonomy through preservation, development and expression of one's own culture and the preservation and protection of cultural heritage and traditions.¹¹¹ The *National Program for the Roma* prescribes measures to preserve traditional Romani culture and the *Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015* refers to the goal 'to raise awareness regarding the preservation of culture, language and customs in Roma amongst non-Roma populations'.¹¹² The *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020* includes a specific objective aimed at empowering Roma for participation in the wider cultural life in Croatia.¹¹³
- 1.10.2 The realisation of national minority rights is based upon the integration of minorities, assuming that the exercise of these rights is possible in the relevant institutions of the system and that the functioning of national minority non-governmental organisations

105 UNDP, World Bank and European Commission. 2011. see http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbec/docs/Roma_survey_data__Croatia_2011.xls

106 Office of the Ombudsman, 2013, p. 43.

107 Baranović, 2009, pp. 40–45; Kušan and Zoon, 2004.

108 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2013, p. 47.

109 CES, 2012, p. 32.

110 Constitutional Law of Human Rights and Freedoms and the Rights of National and Ethnic Communities or Minorities in Croatia (as amended in May 2000), Article 3, p. 3. It is noted elsewhere in this RECI+ Report that the initial inclusion of Roma (Romanies) in 2000 was followed in 2002 with the national minority rights being more precisely determined, (*Official Gazette*, 155/02).

111 Constitutional Law on The Rights of National Minorities (*Official Gazette*, 155/02, 47/10, 80/10, 93/11), see also <http://www.zakon.hr/z/295/Ustavni-zakon-o-pravima-nacionalnih-manjina>

112 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2003, pp. 17–21; Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2005, p. 16.

113 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, pp. 1–4, 99–100, 106.

is effective. Problems are evident with regard to the implementation of these minority rights according to this model, particularly problems related to inadequate training of staff and the lack of readiness of the relevant institutions to deal with the realisation of national minority rights. The indifference of local government bodies needs to be challenged to ensure that the rights of persons belonging to national minorities who live in their area are met.¹¹⁴ Realisation of national minority rights in Croatia is evident at the level of cultural autonomy, upbringing and education in the minority written and spoken languages, as well as in proportional representation in state and local level government. There is also a degree of international cooperation of national minorities.¹¹⁵

1.10.3 International bodies advocate for the need to promote Romani culture (through the media and the education system) and to secure Roma children's education in their language and script.¹¹⁶ However, these goals are yet to be achieved. There are few representations of Roma cultural activity in the media, nor is there a media (television or radio) program in the Romani language, with the exception of occasional segments on national minorities in the weekly television program 'Prizma'. It should be noted that media reporting on Roma is generally discriminatory in that it propagates stigmatisation and stereotypical images of Roma. Roma are mostly mentioned in disadvantaged social contexts and the crime section. Media reports on crime often cite ethnicity when a Roma person commits a crime, reflecting the discriminatory nature of media representations.¹¹⁷ In 2008, as a result of degrading media representations portraying Roma in the newspaper *Medijmurje*, the Ombudsman reported this to the Croatian Journalists' Association; the journalist was reprimanded and the newspaper monitored.¹¹⁸

1.10.4 Roma associations and community groups organise various cultural events to celebrate certain days (Djurdjevdan or the traditional spring festival for Roma), commemorate the suffering of Roma during World War II in the village of Ustica near Jasenovac (2nd of August), and promote the World Day of the Romani language (5th November) and International Romani Day (8th April). In addition, Roma organisations and individuals publish their own magazines (e.g. 'Romano čaćipe' or 'Roma Truth' and 'The Future') and print Roma books. Some manage community centres that are partly funded by the Council for National Minorities.¹¹⁹ The diversity and richness of Romani culture can be seen in the positive promotional work of the Roma cooperative *Djurdj*; the group runs tours of a Roma house near Bjelovar that contains exhibits of Romani culture, history and traditions.¹²⁰

1.11 Civil society and NGO engagement in favour of Roma

1.11.1 In Croatia there are currently 145 registered Roma civil society organisations. Of these, perhaps half are operational and only a dozen are very active for a variety of reasons usually connected with funding and sustainability. The Office of Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities in Croatia states that the sizeable number of Roma organisations

114 Tatalović, 2001, p. 97.

115 *Ibid.*, pp. 97–103; Tatalović, 2008, pp. 33–35.

116 UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2009, Concluding observations – Croatia, CERD/C/HRV/CO/8; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2005, Concluding comments of the Committee (paras. 178-209), A/60/38(SUPP); UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2004, Concluding observations – Croatia, CRC/C/15/Add.243; European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2012.

117 Kanižaj, 2006, pp. 68, 97, 127–128; Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 98.

118 Croatian Journalists' Association, 2012.

119 Council for National Minorities of the Republic of Croatia, 2013, pp. 40–44, 68.

120 Kelava, 2012.

and associations has not significantly improved the socio-economic status of Roma.¹²¹ Furthermore, Roma associations are faced with issues related to a lack of capacity and skills to design and implement projects, which hampers their ability to obtain funding. In the context of an economic crisis and recession, state and local governments have reduced their financial support to Roma associations, which is why some have been unable to maintain the same levels of activity. Moreover, particular Roma leaders manage more than one association, which raises questions about whether the work of these Roma associations sufficiently covers the needs of the wider Roma community. The under-representation of Roma women and Roma youth, particularly educated members, is apparent in a number of these associations.¹²²

1.11.2 General guidelines for improving cooperation between state bodies and Roma NGOs were recommended in a study by the Centre for Human Rights in collaboration with the Association of Roma entitled 'Roma for the Roma of Croatia' (2011 and 2012).¹²³ Recommendations include increased funding for Roma NGOs, the development of guidelines for further design and administration of projects in the form of long-term continuous programs, as well as support to strengthen the capacity of Roma NGOs and improve the approach of institutions in dealing with them.¹²⁴ Some institutions such as the Office of the Ombudsman proposed to improve the inclusion of Roma representatives and councils in the policy-making process and planning at the local level, in local and territorial (regional) units of self government.¹²⁵ State authorities claim that they will allocate funds more efficiently, with the aim of empowering Roma participation in social, cultural and public life in order to reduce the gap between Roma and the majority population.¹²⁶

121 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 97.

122 *Ibid.*, pp. 97–99; Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, n.d.

123 Novak, Pecnik and Bajrić, 2012.

124 *Ibid.*, pp. 33–34.

125 Office of the Ombudsman, 2014, p. 33.

126 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, pp. 96, 106.

CHAPTER 2

Overview of Health, Social and Education Services and Impact on Roma Groups

2.1 Overview of the health care system

2.1.1 Political changes during the transition following independence from socialist Yugoslavia led to the radical reform of the entire system of public services, including health care. Currently, the Republic of Croatia operates a social health insurance system that is regulated by the Health Care Act,¹²⁷ the Compulsory Health Insurance Act¹²⁸ and the Voluntary Health Insurance Act.¹²⁹ According to the Health Care Act, the Croatian health care system is established upon principles of inclusion, continuity and equal access for all.¹³⁰ Croatian citizens have a right to primary health care over their lifetime,¹³¹ and the healthcare network throughout the Republic of Croatia should ensure equal access to health care.¹³² Supplementary and private health care insurance is available to those able and willing to pay for it on a monthly basis.¹³³ The state is the main provider of health care to vulnerable groups and the Health Insurance Act identifies categories of vulnerable individuals who have the right to health insurance, including the unemployed, persons over 65 years, pregnant women, children under 18 years, students, war veterans, wounded military personnel and the chronically ill and disabled. Health provision for these groups is partly cross-subsidized from payroll contributions and additionally funded by transfers from the central government budget and from county budgets.¹³⁴ To ensure equality of access to all citizens, health care providers contracted through the Croatian Institute for Health Insurance operate within the framework of the national health care

127 *Official Gazette*, 150/08, 71/10 and 139/10.

128 *Official Gazette*, 150/08, 94/09, 153/09, 71/10, 139/10, 49/11 and 22/12.

129 *Official Gazette*, 85/06, 150/08 and 71/10.

130 See Article 11 (Principles of Health Protection) of Health Care Act.

131 See Article 13 (Principles of Health Protection) of Health Care Act.

132 See Article 14 (Principles of Health Protection) of Health Care Act.

133 Health care insurance includes basic, supplementary and private health care insurance. Basic health care insurance is compulsory and consists of the right to health care and the right to financial benefits (including sick and maternity leave payments or transport costs). More specifically, compulsory health insurance includes: primary health care, specialist health care, hospital care, the right to use medicines included in the basic and supplementary lists of the Croatian Institute for Health Insurance, the right to use dental prosthetic assistance and dental prosthetic substitutes, the right to orthopaedic and other aids as well as the right to health care abroad. See <http://www.hzzo.hr/obvezno-osiguranje/pravo-na-zdravstvenu-zastitu>

134 Voncina et al., 2006, p. 23.

network. The network determines allocation of public financial resources between the 21 units of regional self-government (20 counties and the City of Zagreb), according to morbidity, mortality, demographic characteristics and other factors.¹³⁵

- 2.1.2 In the Republic of Croatia, there are three levels of health care.¹³⁶ The Croatian National Institute of Public Health (CNIPH) plays an important role in public health planning, monitoring and evaluation. The Institute prepares epidemiological analyses and supports health promotion and illness prevention programs. Control of quarantine and the prevention and control of communicable diseases, non-communicable diseases, delivery of immunisation programs, environmental protection measures and the monitoring of drinking water and other health risks are undertaken through the compulsory notification system and through inspections.¹³⁷

2.2. Access to and use of health services by Roma families

- 2.2.1 The socio-economic situation of the Roma population adversely determines their access to health care, which considerably increases health risks and drastically reduces life expectancy. As mentioned before in this Report, only 1.4% of Roma adults are aged 65 or above, compared to 16.8% of the majority population,¹³⁸ which indicates a markedly lower life expectancy amongst the Roma. Inadequate housing, poor living standards, low levels of education, poverty and other factors all have a significant negative influence on the health and wellbeing of Roma and their families. Not only do processes of exclusion and social marginalisation limit Roma's access to health-care services, these adverse social conditions contribute to inequities that further widen the gap between Roma and the remainder of the population. Information on the health status and health care of Roma is not systematically collected or available from the Croatian Institute for Public Health or the Croatian Institute for Health Insurance, since data on health and other data related to the health care system are not disaggregated by ethnicity.
- 2.2.2 In an earlier study, it was shown that approximately 10% of Roma who live in the Republic of Croatia do not hold Croatian citizenship; 6–7% are foreign citizens (with identity documents from other countries) whilst 3% do not possess any identity documents,¹³⁹ which directly affects the ability of these Roma to access health insurance and other normal rights related to citizenship. According to members of the Roma community, access to health care services is further hampered by the fact that the Republic of Croatia has in recent years repeatedly changed laws and regulations related to accessing health protection.¹⁴⁰ In a research study on the health status of Bayash communities (266 persons in Baranja; 164 persons in Medjmurje) in Croatia, only 40% in Baranja and 67% in Medjmurje had any health insurance.¹⁴¹ More recent research in 2009 conducted in the settlement of Kuršanec found that 9.8% of the respondents had no access to basic health care.¹⁴²

135 *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

136 Primary health care includes: general practice, school medicine, hygienic and epidemiological care, dental care, emergency health services, occupational health, primary health care of women and children, community nursing and pharmacies. It is provided by health institutions irrespective of ownership: health centres, institutions for emergency medical care, institutions for home health care, pharmacies and private practice offices. Secondary health care includes specialist-consultative health care, hospital health care in general and specialised hospitals and health resorts. Tertiary health care includes most complex forms of health care in the field of specialist activities in clinics and state health institutes. CBS, 2013b, p. 525.

137 Voncina et al., 2006, pp. 20–21.

138 CBS, 2013d, p. 19.

139 Kušan and Zoon, 2004.

140 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 62.

141 Škarić-Jurić et al., 2007, p. 712.

142 Šlezak, 2010a, pp. 148–149.

2.2.3 According to the Health Insurance Act, Croatian nationals and foreigners with permanent residence in the Republic of Croatia can apply for health insurance on the basis of employment, through a family member who has health insurance, within 30 days following termination of employment or within 90 days following completion of education. It has been reported that Roma often cannot apply for health insurance on these grounds so they apply in accordance with social welfare regulations.¹⁴³ Among the Roma, it has been reported that there is a noticeable lack of health-insured persons primarily because a number of them do not have citizenship and/or are unemployed.¹⁴⁴

In the RECI+ Croatia Study almost one-fifth of the sample (18%) of 135 respondents at five different locations did not have any health insurance. When asked about the other adult members (253) in their households, respondents reported that almost a quarter of these adults (22.5%) did not have health insurance of any type.

2.2.4 These findings are similar to findings of the UNDP, World Bank and European Commission survey conducted in the Republic of Croatia in 2011, which reported 83% of Roma adults over age 16 had health insurance, compared to 97% amongst the non-Roma population.¹⁴⁵ In the same study, 36% of the Roma respondents reported that they had no access¹⁴⁶ to a doctor when needed, within the last 12 months.¹⁴⁷ With regard to the affordability of medicines, the survey showed that there were 69% more cases of medicines being inaccessible due to cost, in the Roma sample.¹⁴⁸

2.2.5 Although health care insurance includes the right to use medicines included in the basic and supplementary lists of the Croatian Institute for Health Insurance, recent restrictions translate into the potential exclusion of people who cannot afford the more expensive and advanced treatments, including Roma.

2.2.6 At the national level, infant mortality has gradually declined from 7.0 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 2002, to 3.6 per 1000 live births in 2012, which is slightly lower than the EU average of 4.0.¹⁴⁹ According to the World Health Organization's (WHO) *World Health Statistics Report 2013*, the estimated mortality rate in the Republic of Croatia for children younger than five years was 5 per 1,000 live births in 2011, which is below the WHO European Region average (13 per 1,000 live births).¹⁵⁰

2.2.7 Although data disaggregated by ethnicity is unavailable, there are some official indicators of a higher rate of infant mortality amongst Roma communities. Besides the poor health of Roma in relation to the rest of the population, there are significant differences between members of the Roma community; children and women are a particularly vulnerable category compared to men.¹⁵¹ A high number of Roma infant deaths

143 Ministry of Health, 2012, p. 259.

144 It should be noted that other types of health insurance are available to the unemployed. See http://www.uljppnm.vlada.hr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=256:zdravstvena-zatita&catid=10:nacionalni-program-za-rome&Itemid=89

145 The UNDP/WB/EC survey was conducted on a random sample of Roma and non-Roma households living in areas with higher density (or concentration) of Roma populations in the EU Member States of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and the non-EU Member States of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova and Serbia. In each of the countries, approximately 750 Roma households and approximately 350 non-Roma households living in proximity were interviewed. See Mihailov, 2012, p. 36.

146 Accessibility here is not only referring to financial or physical access but also covers quality of services.

147 Mihailov, 2012; UNDP, WB and EC, 2011, p. 39.

148 This was shown using a disparity measure calculated as a percentage of the difference between Roma and non-Roma cases of no access (Mihailov, 2012, p. 36).

149 CNIPH, 2013, p. 35. See also <http://data.euro.who.int/hfad/b/>

150 WHO, 2013, pp. 51, 59.

151 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 64.

(40.9%) are caused by sudden infant death syndrome and various types of respiratory diseases, most commonly pneumonia, compared to the 5% average in Croatia for these conditions.¹⁵² This data suggests that Roma infant mortality should be specially monitored because significant numbers of Roma infant deaths are caused by conditions that are usually avoidable and could be prevented by simple measures.¹⁵³ As many as 50% of Roma infants who later died were not medically treated before their deaths and died outside of health institutions; in 63% of cases these infants died at home. In comparison, of Croatian infants who later died, 95% were in a hospital following treatment.¹⁵⁴ In a study in the Roma Kuršanec settlement, the infant mortality rate was as high as 27.7‰ cumulatively between the years 2000 to 2008.¹⁵⁵ This is in stark contrast to the average infant mortality rate of 6.9‰ between 2000 and 2005. A number of studies suggest the infant mortality rates among some Roma communities are higher than the national average, with one suggesting the rate might be three to four times the national average.¹⁵⁶ The data for Roma seems to be associated with poorer living conditions in terms of housing, sanitation, low educational attainment and poverty.¹⁵⁷

2.2.8 To determine the health of Roma infants and preschool children, a detailed study was conducted in the County of Sisak-Moslavina between 2007 and 2008.¹⁵⁸ Based on data from outpatient clinics, Roma children under 7 years of age required curative health care more (11.7 visits a year) than other children (6.69 visits a year), while the number of visits among Roma and non-Roma school aged children is almost the same. The most common diseases among Roma infants and preschool aged children include respiratory diseases and acute respiratory infections, followed by ear infections and intestinal infectious diseases, patterns that are consistent with the general population of non-Roma Croatian children. Congenital anomalies were found among 4.12% of Roma children compared to 2.5% of non-Roma children, while impaired vision, hearing and neurological damage was observed in 3.13% of Roma children compared to 3.75% of non-Roma children.¹⁵⁹

The RECI+ Croatia Study results show that the living environments in some Roma settlements are unsafe and have detrimental effects on the health of inhabitants, especially children. For example, a focus group in Medjimurje pointed out that health hazards in their settlement include rubbish dumps throughout the settlement, lack of safe drinking water and stray and sick animals.

It is normal that our children are sick with diarrhoea, bronchitis, vomiting, breathing problems, coughing. There is a lot of ... rubbish here. (Tanya, 29, mother of four children)

This is an ecological bomb in the settlement [regular council rubbish removal was stopped a number of years ago], especially during the summer months when the temperature goes up to 40 degrees; this is one of our biggest problems in this settlement. (Mayor of Medjimurje)

2.2.9 **Nutrition and immunisation** A systematic review of primary health care data in 2013 shows that 71.8% of infants in the Republic of Croatia were exclusively breastfed until 2 months of age. However, this figure decreases to 58.2% after the first three months and to 19% after six months with the introduction of complementary (bottle) feeding.¹⁶⁰ Based on data from medical examinations, the share of malnourished infants was 1.2%, while the share of overweight children was 3.2% in 2013.¹⁶¹ The implementation of

152 Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2011, p. 73.

153 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

154 *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

155 Šlezak, 2010a, p. 85.

156 Ministry of Health, Republic of Croatia, 2012.

157 European Commission, 2014, p. 41.

158 Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2011, pp. 33–34.

159 *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

160 CNIPH, 2014, p. 110.

161 *Ibid.*, p.110.

preventative measures is planned within the *National Health Care Strategy 2012–2020*¹⁶² and the *National Strategy for Children’s Rights in the Republic of Croatia from 2014–2020*.¹⁶³

In the RECI+ Croatia study, 40% of Roma households cannot afford to eat meat, fish or a protein equivalent (eggs, dairy products, grains, beans, lentils) every second day.*

* This is one of the nine items used to determine Severe Material Deprivation, a composite indicator incorporating housing and economic deprivation and one of the key indicators for Europe 2020 (see <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/>).

- 2.2.10 At the national level, analysis of vaccination coverage in 2012 was very positive as the legal minimum coverage (95%) was reached for all types of vaccinations and revaccination percentages were also high.¹⁶⁴ In comparison, there was full immunisation coverage among only 75.8% of Roma children and 6.41% had incomplete vaccination records in 2010. Non-uptake of immunisation services was recorded for 17.7% of Roma children who were not vaccinated due to low turnout at health clinics and doctors’ refusal to vaccinate children in Roma settlements.¹⁶⁵ Although children up to the age of 18 have free health cover, it has been reported in some counties that some Roma parents do not use the opportunities available to their children and some even oppose preventive measures such as immunisation.¹⁶⁶ Beyond problems of accessibility in some areas, in the absence of public health education programs by trusted Roma health mediators and mobile medical teams, there are genuine and warranted concerns among Roma parents.

In the RECI+ Croatia Study all the respondents (135) indicated that they consider immunisation important for the health of their child/ren. 125 households reported that all their children are immunised while 7 households reported that not all their children were immunised. Three households did not respond to this question.

Some focus group participants in the RECI+ Croatia study pointed out the difficulties they encounter with regard to accessing health services. They highlighted the problem of transportation; school buses to and from segregated Roma settlements do not transport adults.

I didn’t have children for them to be sick, to be stupid ... for them to die. I have eight girls. I have a six-month-old girl, and I would give my life for that child. It makes no difference that she’s my tenth child; she’s like my first. ... How will my wife take my child to the doctor for vaccinations in this weather now? Would you walk for 3 kms with your child in this weather? (Božo, 39, father of ten children)

- 2.2.11 Gender and ethnicity have a major impact on health status, and Roma women often experience multiple discrimination and social exclusion on the basis of ethnicity, gender and social status. The health of Roma women is a key area of concern, considering socio-economic factors such as poverty, inadequate nutrition, unsuitable sub-standard housing and a lack of access to health services. Their health status is worse compared with the health status of Roma men and much worse when compared with the health status of women in the majority population.¹⁶⁷ According to Roma organisations in Croatia, about 40% of Roma women have no health insurance.¹⁶⁸

162 Ministry of Health, Republic of Croatia, 2012.

163 *Nacionalna strategija za prava djece u Republici Hrvatskoj od 2014. do 2020. godine*, 2013.

164 CNIPH, 2013, p. 197.

165 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 64.

166 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 62.

167 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

168 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

In the RECI+ Croatia study 21% of the women in the sample reported that they did not have any health insurance, except during pregnancies. Strikingly, at one location (Darda), half of the women who participated in the study did not have health insurance. As a result, they are often unable to meet the financial costs of medical examinations, treatments and medication, or the travel costs to medical facilities.

I had health care when I was pregnant but not afterwards. This is a big problem because I am very sick! [Mother and sister confirm her poor health] I have heart and digestive problems, but the doctors won't give me a health card. I don't have any money to go to a doctor so I use other people's medicines and baking soda. (A mother of ten children, age 47, who had her first child when she was 15)

- 2.2.12 An anthropological and epidemiological cross-sectional study of 'Bayash Roma' in Croatia showed that a higher maternal educational status leads to a lower number of pregnancies. The authors concluded that generally low educational levels, traditional attitudes towards female reproductive health in the community and limited access to health services, lead to an exceptionally high rate of induced abortions (especially in Baranja), which appear to be used as a means of birth control.¹⁶⁹ It has been officially estimated that about 60% of Roma women enter cohabiting relationships at the age of 13 or 14 and they become mothers by the age of 15.¹⁷⁰
- 2.2.13 A health education course was organised for Roma at the Educational Centre in Kuršanec in 2011 and 2012. This included several lectures and workshops about tuberculosis, personal hygiene, food hygiene, environmental protection, prevention of addiction, care for mothers and newborn babies, parenting and the use of antibiotics.¹⁷¹
- 2.2.14 District nurses from Čakovec visit pregnant women, new born babies, infants, preschool aged children, school children and youth in Roma settlements several times a month throughout the County of Medjmurje. They also frequently visit the chronically ill, elderly, mentally ill, disabled and alcoholics.¹⁷²
- 2.2.15 Health Education programs for Roma in Osijek-Baranja County aimed to raise awareness amongst the Roma population regarding family planning and reproductive health, and also encourage adopting measures for safe motherhood, especially among pregnant women. The project's objectives were to train Roma medical assistants, to provide gynaecological examinations for Roma women (especially those without health insurance) and to conduct a survey on the health status of Roma families.¹⁷³

2.3 Special needs and children in care

- 2.3.1 All current Croatian legislation fully incorporates the definition used in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD),¹⁷⁴ specifying that persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which, in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers,

169 Škarić-Jurić et al., 2007, p. 717.

170 Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, 2005, p. 113.

171 Information provided by the Croatian Institute for Public Health, County of Medjmurje in 2013.

172 Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2011, pp. 77–78.

173 This project that involved 213 women was supported by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in cooperation with local authorities and conducted in 2007 and 2008.

174 See Article 1 of the *Convention*, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

hinder their full and effective participation in Croatian society on an equal basis with others.¹⁷⁵

2.3.2 The *Constitution of the Republic of Croatia* directly guarantees a particular responsibility of the state to care for and protect persons with disabilities and facilitate their inclusion into social life.¹⁷⁶ The UN CRPD was ratified by the Croatian Parliament in 2007 and guarantees protection from discrimination according to the highest standards for all persons with disabilities, including children.¹⁷⁷ The UN CRPD includes detailed provisions regarding the right to education and the obligation of governments to ensure that *an inclusive system of education operates at all levels*.¹⁷⁸

2.3.3 In addition to adopting the UN CRPD, the Republic of Croatia also passed the Act on Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,¹⁷⁹ drew up a *National Strategy for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2007–2015*,¹⁸⁰ adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities¹⁸¹ and passed the Discrimination Act.¹⁸² In 2007 the government signed the Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion, designed to address poverty and social exclusion in Croatia and to modernize its systems of social protection.¹⁸³ While the Republic of Croatia has made undeniable progress in guaranteeing social rights to persons with disabilities, many other activities and areas are yet to be improved or designed.¹⁸⁴ In particular, social protection for children with disabilities and their families is particularly important because these families often face a higher cost of living and lost opportunities to earn income.¹⁸⁵ According to research results, parents of children with disabilities or neurological risks have significantly stronger concerns about the behaviour or development of their child than parents of healthy children.¹⁸⁶ In this research, parents of children with disabilities reported that they mainly pay for services needed for the development of their children as well as travel expenses to see their children and that there are long waiting lists everywhere.¹⁸⁷ Despite these needs, the new Social Welfare Act¹⁸⁸ abolished caregiver status to parents of a child with disabilities who attends preschool or school facility for more than four hours a day.

2.3.4 According to Croatia's Disabilities Registry, there are 520,437 persons with disabilities (12% of the total population).¹⁸⁹ Of all persons with disabilities, 6.5% are children (33,852) aged between 0–18 years; 61% are boys and 39% are girls. The majority of

175 The categories of persons with disabilities can be divided into: 1) persons with physical, intellectual or sensory impairments and 2) persons with mental impairments. Conditions can be further divided into: 1) visual impairment, 2) hearing impairment, 3) speech disorders, voice communications and specific learning difficulties, 4) physical disabilities, 5) mental retardation, 6) behavioural disorders caused by organic factors or progressive psychopathological conditions, 7) autism, 8) the existence of several types and degrees of difficulty in psychophysical development (*Official Gazette*, 23/91).

176 See Article 58 of the *Constitution*, <http://www.sabor.hr/Default.aspx?art=2405>

177 UN, 2006, Preamble.

178 See Article 24, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

179 *Official Gazette*, International Treaties, 6/07 and 5/08.

180 *Official Gazette*, 63/07.

181 *Official Gazette*, 47/05.

182 *Official Gazette*, 85/08.

183 Other binding international documents include the *Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006–2015* (Council of Europe, 2006) and *Recommendation CM/Rec (2011)14 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life* (Council of Europe, 2011).

184 Žganec, Laklija and Milić Babić, 2012, p. 74.

185 UNICEF, 2013b, p. 4.

186 Ljubešić, 2013, p. 93.

187 *Ibid.*, p. 211.

188 *Official Gazette*, 157/13.

189 Benjak, 2013, p. 5.

children (16,019 or 47.3%) are aged 10–14.¹⁹⁰ The highest number of registered children with disabilities was in the County of Međimurje (1,067 boys and 764 girls) in 2012.¹⁹¹ It is not possible to determine whether these are Roma children because data is not disaggregated by ethnicity. However, it should be noted that this county has the largest Roma population in the Republic of Croatia. There are regional and socio-economic inequalities with regard to care, since as many as seven counties have no capacity at all to provide services for persons with disabilities.¹⁹²

2.3.5 All families with children who have disabilities, which always creates additional stress,¹⁹³ have experienced numerous problems related to early intervention in childhood,¹⁹⁴ including: a ‘constant battle’ to find out what services are available, particularly in rural areas; a lack of co-ordination between different institutions and individual professionals; difficulty getting professionals to understand children’s support needs holistically in the context of the family; insufficient professional knowledge; and the difficulty of negotiating delays and bureaucracy,¹⁹⁵ particularly in cases where institutions and services do not share information.¹⁹⁶

2.3.6 Ensuring access to inclusive education for children with disabilities is a constitutional right and a legal obligation of the state. Full inclusion in free primary and secondary education is guaranteed to children with disabilities,¹⁹⁷ but practical reasons have been cited as to why legislation is not being fully implemented.¹⁹⁸ These include a lack of financial resources, inadequate understanding of disability in social and educational settings, absence of cooperation between differing government systems, and a lack of respect from professionals towards adopting a multidisciplinary approach. Accurate data on the degree of inclusion in an educational program for children with disabilities within each county is unknown, as methods of data collection differ and do not provide an accurate representation of the current state of affairs. This reality represents a significant gap in data surrounding Roma children with disabilities.

2.3.7 The Croatian *Constitution* specifies that ‘physically and mentally disabled as well as socially neglected’ children are entitled to special care, education and welfare.¹⁹⁹ There were 3,504 children in preschool educational groups for children with disabilities at the beginning of 2011/2012 school year (349 in the 0–3 group; 1,256 in the 3–5 group; 1,725 in the 5–7 group; and 174 in the 7+ group).²⁰⁰ The *Law on Preschool Education* specifies priority enrolment for children with disabilities in kindergartens. However, the organisers of kindergartens have the power to determine who has priority and in many cases enrolment of children with disabilities is only possible if there are ‘suitable conditions’ for their enrolment.²⁰¹ There are still problems related to the length of preschool programs for

190 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

191 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

192 These include the Counties of Koprivnica-Križevci, Međimurje, Sisak-Moslavina, Požega-Slavonia, Virovitica-Podravina, Osijek-Baranja and Lika-Senj (MHSW, Republic of Croatia, 2010, p. 33).

193 UNICEF, 2013b.

194 Košiček et al., 2009, pp. 1–14.

195 Ljubešić, 2004, pp. 57–60.

196 Košiček et al., 2009, pp. 1–14.

197 These are guaranteed in The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, National Strategy for Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2007–2015 (*Official Gazette*, 63/07), Act on Education in Primary and Secondary School (*Official Gazette*, 87/08, 86/09, 92/10 and 105/10) and the State Pedagogical Standard of Primary and Secondary Education (*Official Gazette*, 63/08).

198 OECD, 2007.

199 Article 64/3, see <http://www.sabor.hr/Default.aspx?art=2405>

200 CBS, 2012, p. 94.

201 Moreover, there are no regulations in State Pedagogical Standards for preschool education regarding ‘suitable conditions’, which may mean that children with disabilities have no advantages (Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities, Republic of Croatia, 2013, p. 80).

children with disabilities that are only one to two hours a day in kindergartens that do not have a separate group for children with disabilities, despite parents' requests for longer daily programs. There is also a lack of trained educators and other specialists.²⁰² Funding to engage additional employees, as specified in the National Pedagogical Standard, is not generally available, since this depends on local authorities and their budgets.

- 2.3.8 Children with disabilities are educated in mainstream schools through regular, individualised or special programs, or in special schools with adapted programs and appropriate rehabilitation and social support, depending on their disability.²⁰³ The number of pupils with disabilities integrated into mainstream primary schools was 14,931 (9,552 boys and 5,379 girls) at the end of the 2010/2011 school year; 14,707 children successfully completed a grade.²⁰⁴ During the same school year, 2,009 children and youth with disabilities were enrolled in 61 special schools.²⁰⁵ Available statistics indicate that in the 2013/2014 school year, at a special school for children and youth in Čakovec, two-fifths of the pupils (41.12%) were Roma although it is recognised that in this particular case the percentage of Roma in the county in question (5.4%) is significantly above the national ratio of Roma to non-Roma populations.²⁰⁶ Regarding the right to inclusive education, it has been noted that students with profound or complex disabilities are often sent to special educational institutions before all other forms of support and possibilities at mainstream schools have been explored.²⁰⁷
- 2.3.9 Despite the legal and other requirements for inclusive education, there is an absence of laws and by-laws that can clearly determine the principles of education for pupils with disabilities. Specifically, there is an absence of: principles of inclusive education that specifically state a commitment to the acceptance of diversity; support individual approaches to student needs; plan individual learning programs from the student's ability and level of attainment; ensure conditions and support that will deliver the highest levels of education; ensure that decision-making during the period of the child's education takes place in the best interests of the child; and support a child's inclusion as well as schooling closer to home.²⁰⁸ Further, since local education authorities frequently lack the financial means to fund teaching assistants and other forms of student support, students with disabilities do not have equal opportunities to access inclusive education throughout the Republic of Croatia.²⁰⁹
- 2.3.10 According to social welfare data, most persons with disabilities under the age of 21 (95%) live with their families, while 3.7% live in an institution and about 1% in foster homes.²¹⁰ The number of children with disabilities who live in public institutional care fluctuated between 2000 and 2010 (from 2,777 to 2,206).²¹¹ One of the main aims of *The National Plan of Deinstitutionalisation 2011–2016* is to decrease the number of children with disabilities in permanent or weekly accommodation by 40% and to develop family-based forms of accommodation and services.²¹² Roma children with disabilities in institutional care have little chance of finding a foster family or being adopted, due to

202 Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities, Republic of Croatia, 2013, p. 79.

203 See articles 2 and 12 respectively (*Official Gazette*, 23/91).

204 CBS, 2012, p. 17.

205 *Ibid.*, p. 19. This includes schools for children and youth who are mentally or physically disabled, visually or hearing impaired, or have behavioural disorders or combined disabilities (CBS, 2012, p. 17).

206 This is a special school for children and youth with mental disabilities, visual impairments, physical disabilities, speech disorders and autism located in the County of Medijmurje, which has the highest share of Roma (41.12%). This data is from UNDP, 2014.

207 Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities, Republic of Croatia, 2013, p. 20.

208 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

209 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

210 Benjak, 2013, p. 61.

211 UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS, *TransMONEE 2012 Database*, available at <http://www.transmonee.org/>

212 MHSW, Republic of Croatia, 2010, p. 4.

prejudice and general stigmatisation of the Roma population.²¹³ To ensure that Roma children have the right to quality family care, the Forum for Quality Foster Care and the UNICEF Office for Croatia launched a project called 'Development of Foster Care for Roma Children'. The project includes training for foster parents (particularly within Roma communities, to ensure that children grow up in the tradition and culture of their birth) and professionals, exchange of experiences, individual work with foster parents and raising awareness among foster parents, professionals, and the general public. This project is being conducted in the County of Medjmurje, the County of Varaždin and the County of Istria.²¹⁴

- 2.3.11 Although all children in Croatia are entitled to free health care and quality services until age 18, it has been reported that Roma children with disabilities are more frequently institutionalised than children from the majority population who face the same challenges.²¹⁵ Precise statistics are not available, as data about institutionalisation is frequently not disaggregated by age, gender or ethnicity.²¹⁶ Generally, poorer living conditions and segregation of Roma communities due to discrimination and marginalisation hinder children's progress. Very few resources are dedicated to developing early intervention services for Roma children, who also have little access to preschool education. Accordingly, a much higher percentage of Roma children are diagnosed as having light mental disabilities, which translates into a subordinate position in the school system and considerably reduces their life opportunities for quality education and eventual employment.²¹⁷ Among the total Roma population in general, social welfare rights in the form of benefits and access to social services support for persons with disabilities are sought to a smaller degree than other social welfare benefits and rights. When help for Roma children with disabilities is not sought by their families, this may indicate a complex set of negative attitudes and experiences Roma have encountered toward children with disabilities within their communities.²¹⁸ This also might be caused by a lack of public information about such benefits and/or a lack of responsible outreach to marginalised families with children with disabilities.

2.4 Overview of social welfare and housing policy

- 2.4.1 In 2011, the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion indicator showed that 21.1% of the population in Croatia was at-risk-of-poverty (after social transfers), 14.8% faced severe material deprivation, and 17.0% lived in a household with very low work intensity. All in all, 32.7% of households experienced at least one of these hardships (the fifth highest proportion among the EU²¹⁹ Member States)²²⁰ and 3.5% faced all three.
- 2.4.2 Studies have shown that Croatian Roma are poorer than the majority population in the Republic of Croatia and that the material and financial circumstances of Roma populations are far worse than populations defined as living in absolute poverty in Croatia.²²¹ Poverty and social exclusion are prevalent among Roma and their families even though they are entitled to social welfare support in the Republic of Croatia. The seriousness of the impact of poverty on Roma communities was highlighted in a 2014

213 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 76.

214 See <http://www.unicef.hr/show.jsp?newscontainer=197695&page=146930&singlenewsid=197614>

215 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 65.

216 This also applies to children and youth without adequate parental care and neglected children.

217 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 65.

218 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

219 EU 27 refers to the 27 Member States of the EU until 30 June 2013; EU 28 includes Croatia, which became a member on 1 July 2013 (CBS, 2013c, p. 56).

220 CBS, 2013c, p. 34.

221 Šućur, 2005b, pp. 365–390.

report by UNDP, UNHCR and UNICEF, which states that 92.3% of Roma families live in relative poverty and 9% live in absolute poverty. The same report comments on the low levels of income for many Roma families.²²² A lack of access to adequate health care, low levels of education resulting from exclusion or segregation in the education system,²²³ very poor and sub-standard housing conditions²²⁴ and low employment rates on account of discrimination in the labour market, are some of the principal factors that, in a cause and effect relationship, contribute to persistent marginalisation and involuntary Roma dependence on social welfare benefits. This situation results in a majority of Roma children living in poverty.

- 2.4.3 The social welfare system in the Republic of Croatia is regulated by the Social Welfare Act and related regulations.²²⁵ Public and private social protection expenditure in Croatia was equivalent to 20.8% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2010. This is around one-third lower than the level of social protection expenditure in the other 27 EU Member States, which average 29.4% of GDP.²²⁶ Benefits in the social welfare system include a guaranteed minimum allowance, assistance for housing costs, assistance for firewood, one-time assistance, personal disability allowance, allowance for help and care, (parent) caregiver status benefit, unemployment benefit and various social services.²²⁷ The guaranteed minimum allowance²²⁸ is granted to individuals or families that do not have the means to meet their basic needs through work, income from property or otherwise. The amount of support allowance in the past depended on the number of family members, their ages, abilities and other characteristics of the family, which means that the amount of assistance for support of multi-member families was not the same.²²⁹ However, this has changed. The new law directly affects large families because the guaranteed minimum allowance (2014) is capped at 3,017 HRK regardless of family size.²³⁰ This policy is likely to have a very negative impact on Roma families given the known size of many Roma families; the law may well be judged to be discriminatory.
- 2.4.4 The latest statistics show that the at-risk-of-poverty rate²³¹ for two adults with three or more children was 25% in 2011.²³² With regard to the further development of services for children and parental support, it is important to point out that the Republic of Croatia is among the countries with a less developed sector of services for children. Of the total budget available to support families (parental allowances, child benefits and preschool education financing), only one-third is used to finance services for children.²³³ Eurostat data shows that in 2010, the Republic of Croatia allocated about 1.6% of GDP to investments for the family and children (compared to 2.3% in the EU 27 Member States), placing it in the lower group of post-socialist and Mediterranean countries characterised

222 UNDP, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2014, pp. 33–35.

223 *Ibid.* The report provides important data on education. Only 46.5% of Roma have attended secondary school compared to 83.3% for the rest of the population.

224 UNICEF, UNDP and UNHCR, 2014.

225 *Official Gazette*, 73/97, 27/01, 59/01, 82/01, 103/03, 44/06, 70/07, 157/13.

226 CBS, 2013c, p. 44.

227 Article 25, Social Welfare Act (*Official Gazette*, 157/13).

228 This minimum allowance replaces support allowances from the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth, allowances from the Ministry of Veterans and extended unemployment benefits from the Ministry of Labour and Pension System.

229 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2011.

230 The guaranteed minimum benefit for households cannot be higher than the gross amount of the minimum wage in the Republic of Croatia. See Article 30(4) *Official Gazette*, 157/13. See http://www.mspm.hr/pitanja_i_odgovori/koliko_iznosi_zajamcena_minimalna_naknada

231 At-risk-of-poverty rate is a percentage of persons with the equivalent income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. The threshold is calculated for the population as a whole and is expressed in terms of the equivalent income taking into account the size and content of a household.

232 CBS, 2013b, p. 198.

233 Babić, 2013, p. 256.

by lower levels of spending on financial programs for children and the family.²³⁴ This is well illustrated by a recent cut in welfare spending on the family, which has negatively impacted Roma families, particularly Roma families in isolated rural settings. It is an automatic reduction of welfare care payments to families who own a car.

- 2.4.5 In Croatia, the overall employment rate for persons aged between 15 and 64 was 50.7% in 2012, the lowest among all EU Member States and 13.5 percentage points below the EU 27 Member States' average.²³⁵ The unemployment rate in Croatia rose from a pre-crisis low of 8.4% in 2008 to 15.9% by 2012, while in EU 27 Member States the unemployment rate increased from an average of 7.1% to 10.5% during the same period.²³⁶ Likewise, the long-term unemployment rate (those out of work for one year or longer) in Croatia was 10.3%, which was more than double the EU 27 Member States' average of 4.6%.²³⁷
- 2.4.6 Studies have shown that high unemployment rates and long-term unemployment characterise Roma populations throughout Croatia, forcing them to be heavily dependent on social welfare benefits in order to survive. The evidence seems to suggest that this has been a damaging feature of Roma communities for some time. A survey conducted in 1998 confirmed that 70% of Roma families did not have one member in employment.²³⁸ A representational study of Roma households (969) in 2004 showed that 74.2% of the total sample reported that social welfare benefits were the most important source of income; only 17.6% reported that formal employment was the most important source.²³⁹ More recent data on Roma unemployment rates in the EU 27 Member States clearly shows that in most Member States (excluding Croatia) the number of Roma saying they are unemployed is at least double the number of non-Roma. In some Member States that are not dissimilar to Croatia, the rate was 4 to 5 times more Roma than non-Roma saying they are unemployed.²⁴⁰ Reports indicate that over three-quarters of the Roma population (78%) receive a support allowance in the County of Medjmurje, which has a population of about 6,000 Roma out of a total population of 111,000.²⁴¹ In another example that reflects a high degree of dependence on this type of social assistance, about 90% of households in one Roma settlement in the same county (Kuršanec), depended on support allowance as the main source of income between 2000 and 2008.²⁴² Data on the recipients of various forms of social assistance are released monthly, but since they are not disaggregated by ethnicity, newer data on the number of Roma welfare recipients are not available.

234 *Ibid.*, p. 254.

235 CBS, 2013c, p. 64.

236 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

237 *Ibid.*

238 Štambuk, 2000, pp. 296-297.

239 Štambuk, 2005.

240 European Commission, 2011, p. 17.

241 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 73.

242 Šlezak, 2010b, p. 83.

In the RECI+ Croatia study 46% of all Roma households reported that social welfare benefits (child allowance, social assistance and maternity leave) were the main source of income for the household, while almost all households (87.41%) were beneficiaries of some type of social welfare. Correspondingly, only 9% of respondents reported that they were employed or self-employed. Focus group participants highlighted problems exercising social welfare rights and obtaining one-time assistance because of restrictions and strict rules regarding eligibility for social welfare (e.g. ownership of a car or property).

We're not allowed to do any private work like collecting bottles or iron, they have banned everything, we're not allowed to own a car [as recipients of social benefits]. The Centre for Social Welfare has denied us everything. Anyone who has a car even if this is 30 years old and the car is not worth more than 1,000 HRK ... they immediately calculate how much you need to live on. I have eight children and 1,000 HRK doesn't last us for more than three days. (Stanislav, 45, father of ten children)

Research participants on social welfare with no source of income also highlighted the hardships of meeting children's needs.

This is insufficient [2,150 HRK in total: child allowance 600 HRK and social benefits 1,550 HRK] to cover the costs of books/stationery, meals at school, school excursions, personal hygiene, food, clothes, shoes ... this is just not enough to cover all of these costs! (Jelena, 33, single mother of two children)

Poverty ... children simply cannot have all that they need ... shoes, clothes ... for school. Children go to school and they can't have a lot of things they need because of poverty. (Sunčica, 25, mother of six children)

Apart from reports on the inadequacy of social welfare benefits, focus group participants discussed a lack of sensitivity and misunderstanding among social welfare staff. Social welfare staff often shifted responsibility for solving social problems to a Roma community representative.

To obtain a wider understanding of social exclusion, the RECI+ Croatia Study used one of the Europe 2020 indicators that measures deprivation using a 9-item scale that covers issues relating to economic strain, durables, and housing and environment of the dwellings (see http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe_2020_indicators_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion).

A research sample of 135 Roma households throughout Croatia reflected the following findings:

- Half of all households in the sample (50%) are severely materially deprived. At the national level, 14.8% of Croatian society as a whole faces severe material deprivation.*
- More than one-fourth (27%) of all households in the sample are materially deprived.
- About two-fifths of all households in the sample cannot afford to pay rent, mortgage or utility bills (40%) or keep their home adequately warm (36%).
- The majority of households in the sample cannot afford to pay unexpected expenses (83%) or go on holiday for one week (90%).
- Around half of the households in the sample (53%) cannot afford a car and more than one-fourth (27%) cannot afford a washing machine. Almost one-fourth (23%) reported that they cannot afford a telephone.

* CBS, 2013c, p. 34.

- 2.4.7 With regard to housing, there are no specific duties or obligations for the state to provide housing for socially vulnerable groups. In Croatia, 9.7% of the population face severe housing deprivation,²⁴³ the sixth highest rate among the EU 28 Member States.²⁴⁴ Many Roma families undeniably face the challenges of severe housing deprivation in the Republic of Croatia. The Croatian Government has implemented continuous measures to legalise Roma settlements that are illegal; formalising, for example, six Roma settlements in the County of Medjimurje as part of the EU Phare 2005/2006 program and Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) 2008.²⁴⁵ According to the available data, there were 190 Roma settlements in 1991 and this number decreased to 171 settlements in 2001.²⁴⁶ Despite this positive trend, 14 counties that have Roma settlements in need of spatial planning and infrastructure were identified between 2004 and 2012.²⁴⁷
- 2.4.8 A few studies have focused on features of Roma settlements and housing such as social and technical infrastructure, as well as the aspirations and needs of Roma populations in relation to housing. As mentioned earlier, research was conducted in 2004 amongst 969 households in 43 settlements that were predominantly or exclusively inhabited by Roma, in 11 counties throughout Croatia. Results showed that most of the housing in these settlements was characterized by a combination of problems including sub-standard construction, proximity to sources of air and/or sound pollution and isolated segregation that proved detrimental for access to education, medical care, shops and other public amenities. These settlements also demonstrated inadequate shelter, over-crowding in homes, poor sanitary conditions deriving from a lack of basic infrastructure facilities, and a lack of adequate maintenance and repairs.²⁴⁸

The RECI+ Croatia Study of 135 households at five research locations has shown that many Roma families face a combination of housing problems that seriously threaten their wellbeing. Apart from inadequate, unsafe construction and over-crowding, 5% of households in the sample do not have electricity (not counting those with unsafe and unauthorised connections), 24% do not have a safe water supply and 77% are not connected to a sewer system. Just under one-fifth (16%) do not have a kitchen situated in the main part of the house, and are thus subject to all the attendant dysfunctions of a key living space being separate and detached from the house. In addition, almost half of the households in the sample do not have an indoor toilet (45%) or an indoor shower or bath (41%).

Our children cannot be neat and tidy when they come to school ... where can they wash themselves? I have a flood at home. How? I don't want my child to get pneumonia! I don't have anywhere to wash, I don't have clean clothes. What's the point of washing if I don't have clean trousers, shirts, something ... we don't have a bathroom ... this is our biggest problem. (Antun, 39, father of ten children)

2.5 Overview of education services

- 2.5.1 In 2008, the new *Primary and Secondary Education Act* was adopted.²⁴⁹ The main goals of primary and secondary education were specified as follows: to ensure a systematic approach to teaching, stimulating and enhancing pupils with basic academic, lifelong

243 The severe housing deprivation rate is the proportion of persons living in a dwelling that is considered to be overcrowded (based on the number of rooms and the household's size and composition in terms of age and gender), while having at the same time at least one other aspect of housing deprivation (such as the lack of a bath or a toilet, a leaking roof, or considered to be too dark) (CBS, 2013c, p. 33).

244 CBS, 2013c, p. 43.

245 Office of National Minorities, Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2011, p. 3.

246 Pokos, 2005, p. 40.

247 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 77.

248 Štambuk, 2005.

249 *Official Gazette*, 87/08, 86/09, 92/10, 105/10, 90/11, 5/12, 16/12, 86/12, 94/13.

learning and vocational competencies; to equip pupils for living and working in a changing social and cultural context to meet the demands of the market economy, modern information and communication technologies as well as scientific developments and achievements; and to train students for lifelong learning. According to the *National Curriculum Framework*, knowledge, education and lifelong learning are the fundamental drivers of both Croatian societal development and the personal development of every individual. The basic characteristic of the *National Curriculum Framework* is a transition to a system based on competence and student attainment (learning outcomes), unlike the previous system, which focused on curriculum content. The Government of the Republic of Croatia is committed to the 'development of a knowledge based society'²⁵⁰ and its curriculum framework is based on the following thirteen principles:

1. high quality education for all
2. equal educational opportunities for all
3. compulsory primary education
4. horizontal and vertical social mobility
5. inclusion of all pupils in the education system
6. scientific foundation
7. respect for human rights
8. competence and professional ethics
9. democracy
10. independence of schools
11. pedagogical and school pluralism
12. a European dimension to education
13. inter-culturalism

2.5.2 The following seven educational goals are also defined in the *National Curriculum Framework*:²⁵¹

1. to provide a systematic method of teaching that fosters and enhances pupils' intellectual, physical, aesthetic, social, moral, and spiritual development and that is compatible with their abilities and aptitudes;
2. to develop awareness among students about the preservation of the material, spiritual, historical, and cultural heritage of the Republic of Croatia as well as a Croatian national identity;
3. to promote and develop awareness of the Croatian language as a key factor in Croatian identity, systematically fostering the Croatian standard (literary) language in all areas, and at all levels of the education system;
4. to raise awareness through educating pupils about general cultural and civic values, including human rights and children's rights, facilitating children's understanding regarding living in a multi-cultural world, to respect differences, and to participate actively and responsibly in the democratic development of society;
5. to ensure that students acquire key general education and vocational competencies, enabling them to live and work in a social and cultural context of change according to the requirements of the market economy, modern information and communication technologies, and scientific knowledge and accomplishments;
6. to encourage and develop independence, self-confidence, responsibility, and creativity in students; and
7. to train students for lifelong learning.

250 MoSES, Republic of Croatia, 2011, p. 22.

251 MoSES, Republic of Croatia, 2011, p. 23.

- 2.5.3 Public expenditure on education in Croatia in 2010 was equivalent to 4.3% of the gross domestic product (GDP), as compared with an average of 5.4% for the EU 27 Member States (in 2009),²⁵² while private education expenditure in Croatia was equivalent to 0.3% of GDP, around one-third of the 0.8% average for the EU 27 Member States.²⁵³
- 2.5.4 The educational system consists of preschool, primary, secondary²⁵⁴ and tertiary education. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is conceived of as preschool education and in theory is available to children from the age of 6 months until the primary school starting age which is six or seven years old.²⁵⁵ Primary education lasts for eight years and is compulsory for all children until 15 years of age. It is divided into two four-year cycles: lower primary, with classroom teachers, and upper primary, with subject teachers. At the secondary level there are grammar schools, vocational or trade schools with courses that last from one to four years, and art schools that provide education for at least four years. Tertiary education is conducted at universities (three-cycle programs: undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate studies) or through two to three years of professional studies.
- 2.5.5 The Preschool Education Act regulates preschool education in Croatia,²⁵⁶ with nurseries and kindergartens²⁵⁷ that can be established by the state, units of local and regional self-government (cities, municipalities and counties) and other legal entities. Under the existing regulations, early education services²⁵⁸ are intended for children aged from six months to the school starting age of 6 or 7 years old.
- 2.5.6 The basic goal of preschool education is aimed at 'ensuring optimal conditions for the successful education and holistic development of every child' and the development and improvement of skills (such as creativity, self-confidence, resourcefulness, problem-solving abilities, construction and maintenance of quality social relationships, development of communication skills and self-assessment of the children's own behaviour).²⁵⁹ Formal preschool education is considered to be complementary to informal education in the family.²⁶⁰
- 2.5.7 At the beginning of the 2012/2013 school year 128,046 children were enrolled in preschool programs (girls made up 47.9%).²⁶¹ Most children (114,394 or 89.3%) were in full day programs, whilst 1.8% (2,274) were in shorter programs and 8.9% (11,378) were in the preparatory pre-primary year programs. Of the total number of children enrolled, 18.7% were under 3 years of age.²⁶² The number of children in full-day and shorter preschool programs has been steadily increasing from 88,000 in 2001 to 95,000 in 2005 and 115,247 in 2011/2012.²⁶³ More specifically, in 2011/2012, around one-fifth of children (21%) aged 0–3 were in nurseries, corresponding to the situation 20 years ago.²⁶⁴

252 CBS, 2013c, p. 48.

253 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

254 Act on Education in Primary and Secondary School (*Official Gazette*, 87/08, 86/09, 92/10, 105/10, 901/11, 16/12, 86/12).

255 Primary school education is obligatory in the Republic of Croatia for children who are age six by 1 April of the current school year.

256 *Official Gazette*, 10/97, 107 /07, 94/13.

257 Nurseries are for infants from six months until three years of age while kindergartens are for children between the ages 3–7.

258 More detail about preschool education services and programs is provided in Chapter 3.

259 Muraja and Antulić, 2012, p. 16.

260 *Ibid.*

261 According to the 2011 census there were 296,204 children in the 0–6 age group; girls made up 48.6%. See <http://www.dzs.hr/>. Enrolments into preschool programs for the 2012/2013 school year show that this approximately amounted to 43%. This is approximate because very few infants under the age of 1 are placed into nursery care and children up to age 7 can attend kindergartens.

262 CBS, 2013e, p. 12.

263 Matković and Dobrotić, 2013, p. 67.

264 It should be noted that this decreased to 10–11% after the Homeland War but a steady increase has been recorded since 2001 (Matković and Dobrotić, 2013, p. 68).

Two-fifths of children (40.3%) aged 3–4 were included in preschool education, while this was almost the same (38.8%) for children aged 5 and over, corresponding roughly to the situation 20 years ago.²⁶⁵ Kindergarten coverage for children in the 3–4, and 5 and over age groups (approximately 40%) was almost identical between 1990 and 2011. Within the last two years, the 3 to 5+ cohort has increased to 55% because it also includes preparatory pre-primary programs that are available to children who did not have any previous preschool education.²⁶⁶ In accordance with the *State Pedagogical Standards* for preschool education,²⁶⁷ this program was designed for children who do not attend a regular program of preschool education in the year before they start primary school. In the past, this was not compulsory but this has recently changed (October 2014).²⁶⁸ This very positive development includes the compulsory preparatory pre-primary year program, which is free and will be financed by funds from local and territorial (regional) governments as well as the state budget. Regulations²⁶⁹ state that this program starts on 1 October and ends on 31 May and the overall duration is 250 hours per year for children who do not attend a regular kindergarten program.²⁷⁰ The MoSES has taken this policy development into account and in circumstances where preschool settings are not available, the provision has been located in local primary schools. The research data does not allow for a comparison to be made between urban and rural rates of preschool enrolment, but rates are likely to be higher in urban localities on account of more preschool places being available. However, it is to be reiterated that the preparatory pre-primary year is compulsory beginning with the 2014/2015 school year.

2.5.8 The enrolment of Roma children into preschool programs has increased, with some notable fluctuations, from 550 enrolments in 2009/2010 to 769 enrolments in 2013/2014 (see Table 1). Table 1 shows the absolute number of Roma boys and girls (with no reference to specific ages) in regular and preparatory pre-primary year programs, but not what these numbers mean comparatively or how they relate to wider measurable outcomes. Although the actual total number of Roma children of preschool age that should be enrolled is unknown, it is possible to determine the percentage of children actually enrolled in comparison to enrolment figures for the entire preschool population. According to data provided by the Roma Education Fund, the percentage of Roma children within the total number of children in preschool upbringing and education was 0.55% in 2009/2010, 0.79% in 2010/2011, and 0.61% in 2011/2012. According to the 2011 Census, ‘the share of Roma children aged 0–4 in the total [Roma] population was 16% and considering that the term “preschool” in Croatia covers the 0–6 age group, it can be concluded that Roma children are still highly underrepresented in preschool programs.’ These findings are consistent with the research findings in a regional study by the UNDP, World Bank and European Commission in 2011. The study found that the preschool enrolment rate (children aged 3–6) was only 21% among Roma as opposed to 48% among non-Roma living nearby.²⁷¹ The same study also found that Roma children with preschool experience attended preschool on average for 1.7 years, in comparison to non-Roma children with preschool experience who attended on average 2.6 years.

265 Matković and Dobrotić, 2013, p. 68.

266 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

267 *Official Gazette*, 63/08 and 90/10.

268 See Preschool Education Act, *Official Gazette*, 10/97, 107/07, 94/13, clause 23a, 3 available at <http://www.zakon.hr/z/492/Zakon-o-pred%C5%A1kolskom-odgoju-i-obrazovanju> and http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2014_09_107_2081.html

269 *Official Gazette*, 107/14.

270 In the past, these programs ranged in duration from 3-10 months and the number of hours considerably varied between 50–250 hours to more than 500 hours per school year (Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2013, pp. 5–11). Clearly, these programs were very different and had considerably fewer hours than regular kindergarten programs.

271 UNDP, World Bank and European Commission, 2011.

Table 1. Number of Roma boys and girls by preschool type, 2009/2010 to 2013/2014

	Total (Boys/Girls)				
	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014
Enrolments*	550	799	632	811	769
Regular program	370 (210/160)	399 (198/201)	289 (137/152)	455 (233/222)	390 (180/210)
Preparatory pre-primary year program	180 (96/84)	400 (196/204)	334 (185/149)	356 (186/170)	379 (184/195)

Source: Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2013 and MoSES database.

Note: * Enrolments at the beginning of the school year.

2.5.9 Different Roma community based kindergartens and play groups are scattered throughout Croatia, predominately in urban areas. Most cater for around 30 Roma children and depend on the support of NGOs, the County and/or city authorities and either the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports (MoSES) or the Croatian Employment Service (CES). Although their programs differ in terms of content and duration, most programs aspire to promote equal opportunities in education for Roma and encourage gradual integration into the wider community. One of the main aims is to prepare Roma children for primary school through overcoming language barriers.

In the RECI+ Croatia household survey (N=135) one-fifth (20%) of Roma participants had attended some form of preschool education. The highest share of parents who had some preschool education was in Medjimurje (27.6%) while lower participant rates were reported in the other rural locations (between 11–14%).

2.5.10 The number of Roma children registered in primary schools has increased from 4,186 in 2009/2010 to 5,470 pupils in 2013/2014 (see Table 2). Owing to this successful upward pattern of primary school enrolments for Roma pupils, the comparative percentage gap between total numbers of Roma children and their enrolment in primary education has narrowed significantly and also comparatively between Roma and non-Roma pupil cohorts. The Croatian Country Assessment conducted by the Roma Education Fund found that this gap has been reduced to a relatively small difference: Roma 87% and non-Roma 93%. In the 2012/2013 school year, Roma children throughout the Republic of Croatia were placed in 2,031 classes (1,978 mixed classes and 52 'segregated' Roma-only classes).²⁷² Some of the major problems and challenges that Roma children face regarding primary school education will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Table 2. Number of Roma boys and girls enrolled in primary school, 2009/2010 to 2013/2014

	Total (Boys/Girls)				
	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014
Primary School Enrolment*	4,186 (2,176/2,010)	4,435 (2,246/2,189)	4,915 (2,509/2,406)	5,173 (2,612/2,561)	5,470 (2,769/2,701)

Source: Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2013 and MoSES database.

Note: * Enrolments at the beginning of the school year.

272 Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2011, p. 13. Roma-only classrooms are created when all the children are predominately Roma (e.g. in Medjimurje).

In the RECI+ household survey (N=135) only 19% finished Grades 1–4 of primary school while 29% said that they started but did not finish. Nearly a quarter (24%) of the sample finished primary school.

The RECI+ Croatia Study confirmed that many Roma children do not have suitable conditions (tables/desks, lighting, heating, peace and quiet, etc.) for learning in the home environment, as their crowded and cramped living spaces are often multi-purpose.

- 2.5.11 Secondary education offers education and skills necessary either to enter the labour market or to continue on with further education. In Croatia, secondary education occurs in grammar schools (four-year schools of general education), art schools (four-year music, visual arts and design schools) or vocational schools (technical education four-year schools; three-year schools for craft, industrial and related vocations; programs for acquiring 'lower' professional qualifications).
- 2.5.12 Due to the huge discrepancy in the number of Roma students in secondary schools in relation to the number in primary schools (see data below), the MoSES has implemented a number of measures to facilitate further enrolment of Roma students. For regular secondary school students, scholarships and accommodation in student dormitories are available if needed, though the funding is conditional. Although some limited attempts have been made to encourage access and longer terms of participation in secondary education, only around 10% of all Roma children go on to finish a four-year secondary education.²⁷³ It is clear that a much more informed needs analysis is required if policy, provision and practice are going to be more successful in securing equality of access and outcomes for these young people.
- 2.5.13 The overall number of Roma children in secondary school has increased from 394 in 2009/2010 to 586 pupils in 2013/2014 (see Table 3). However, although Roma secondary school enrolments have been on the increase, a substantial decrease in each academic year can be noted compared to primary school enrolments, which seems to indicate a high dropout rate towards the end of upper primary school²⁷⁴ and lack of incentive to continue with secondary education. Specifically, data for 2013/2014 shows that the number of students in each secondary education year decreases drastically: 267 (45.5%) in year one; 177 (30.2%) in year two; 120 (20.4%) in year three; and 22 (3.7%) in year four. Many Roma students enrol in a three-year secondary education that does not require further tertiary education.²⁷⁵ In the 2010/2011 school year, 113 (67 males and 46 females) enrolled in the first year of a three-year vocational school, compared to 24 (9 males/15 females) enrolled in the first year of a four-year secondary school.²⁷⁶

Table 3. Number of Roma boys and girls enrolled in secondary school, 2009/2010 to 2013/2014

	Total (Males/Females)				
	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014
Secondary School Enrolment*	394 (166/138)	341 (177/164)	425 (214/211)	480 (286/194)	586 (327/261)

Source: Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2013 and MoSES database.

Note: * Enrolments at the beginning of the school year.

273 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 43.

274 According to the Department of School Medicine, Institute of Public Health, County of Medjmurje, 195 (13.37%) out of 1,458 children who enrolled in the first grade of primary school in 2004 did not finish primary school. According to this report, they were Roma children in most cases (Kutnjak Kiš et al., 2013, p. 59).

275 The voluntary nature of these choices has not been adequately researched as many Roma students may not have a totally free choice in schooling in that they may be pushed/encouraged/directed to go to such limited courses by teachers/schools/parents.

276 Office of National Minorities, Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2011, pp. 46–47.

In the RECI+ household survey (N=135) only a small number of respondents (8%) reported that they finished secondary school, while 3% said that they started but did not finish, indicating that very few Roma begin or complete secondary schooling. When asked what they would like for their own children, some Roma parents want their children to finish secondary education, even though they did not have the same opportunities.

I didn't have what they have, I want them to finish school ... to get a job, mostly to get a job ... then this would be the best thing that has happened in my life. (Senja, 26, mother of six children)

I would like them to finish, that means for them to go to a higher level and if this is possible for them to go to a higher level ... I will be the happiest mother. (Milka, mother of six children)

2.5.14 Between 2003 and 2011 the total number of students in tertiary education in the Republic of Croatia increased by 26.5%, while during that same period the number within the EU 27 Member States increased by just over one-tenth (11.7 %).²⁷⁷ Correspondingly, the proportion of early leavers amongst persons aged 18–24 in Croatia fell from 8.0% in 2002 to just 4.2% in 2012, a level that was around one-third of the EU Member States' average of 12.8% and situated Croatia as the country with the lowest proportion of early leavers among the EU Member States.

2.5.15 The number of Roma students in tertiary education has fluctuated from 25 students in 2009/2010 to 23 students in 2012/2013 (see Table 4). Evidently, a very small number continue with studies after secondary school even though scholarships from the Roma Education Fund and other donors, including cities' authorities, are available to Roma students (scholarship payments are variable depending on location).

Table 4. Number of Roma males and females in tertiary education, 2009/2010 to 2012/2013

	Total (Males/Females)			
	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013
Tertiary Education Enrolment*	25 (12/13)	28 **	29 **	23 (7/16)

Source: Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2013 and MoSES database.

Notes: * Enrolments at the beginning of the academic year.

** Data not disaggregated by gender.

In the RECI+ Croatia Study, none of the respondents (N=135) had a tertiary education qualification.

2.5.16 National minorities have a right to education in their mother tongue languages and scripts from preschool age to the university level. It is guaranteed by the national *Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities*. The rights of national minorities are also regulated by the general laws and acts on education.²⁷⁸ There are, in essence, six models of education for national minorities, though only three are referred to as models. It is to be noted that the models are not incorporated into the Croatian legal framework, but they are a way of organizing the realization of ethnic minority schooling within the education system. These models of organization for minority education seem to have been borrowed from the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (1992),

277 CBS, 2013c, p. 58.

278 Articles 14 and 15 (*Official Gazette*, 41/01, 55/01, 155/02).

which was ratified by the Republic of Croatia in 1997 as one of the key international documents.²⁷⁹ The models are proposed and chosen by the members of the national minorities for each location/administrative unit where they live (e.g. Serbs in the village of Markušica choose Model A, while in some other parts of the country Serbs choose Model C). The MoSES website provides helpful information on this aspect of education in Croatia. Members of national minorities can effectuate their constitutional right to education in their mother tongue and script using one of the following basic models and educational frameworks:

1. MODEL A – classes in the language and script of the national minority
2. MODEL B – bilingual classes
3. MODEL C – nurturing language and culture
4. Class framework in which the language of the national minority is taught as the language of the social environment
5. Special classes (summer school, winter classes and/or correspondence-consultative classes)
6. Special programs for the inclusion of Roma students into the educational system

- 2.5.17 Members of national minorities propose and choose a model and program in line with existing legislation and their ability to complete the program.²⁸⁰
- 2.5.18 The reference above to ‘ability to complete the program’ also includes the teaching staff. For example, Ruthenians never choose Model A, which implies the need to have the teaching staff for all subjects in Ruthenian, because it would be impossible, given that there are not enough speakers of this language. Serbs in some parts of Croatia, on the other hand, choose Model A and there are enough teachers qualified in Croatia to teach specific subject areas in the Serbian language.
- 2.5.19 Potential issues arising from the shortage of qualified teachers is highly relevant to the situation of the Roma. Even if Roma wish to exercise their de facto right to their own language in education, pursuant to the choice of the most appropriate and feasible model, it would be extremely difficult to secure this right for two reasons. One obstacle is Croatia’s exclusion of the Romani and Beyash languages from the list of languages protected by the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*. Secondly, few if any educational professionals have the linguistic competence to teach in these languages. The main reason for this unequal, and thus discriminatory reality, stems from the State’s insufficient capacity for relevant teacher recruitment and training. Given this situation, one must conclude that the legal framework in Croatia, which is able to protect the right of other minorities to be educated in their own language and script (and is seen as progressive because it guarantees protected minorities the right to be educated *in* their own language and script, which is a minority right in few countries), is not able to protect this right when it comes to Roma.
- 2.5.20 During the 2012/2013 school year, there were 10,592 children/pupils studying in national minority languages in 200 educational institutions (using Models A, B and C in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools) and 981 classes involving 1,356 teachers.²⁸¹ Most of these pupils represent the Serb (37%), Italian (30%), Hungarian (12%) and Czech (9%) minority groups.²⁸² At the beginning of the 2012/2013 school

279 The *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (Council of Europe, 1992) was ratified by the Republic of Croatia on 5 November 1997 but the list of languages claimed for Charter protection by The Republic of Croatia did not include the Romani or Beyash Languages (Romanës *Rromani-chib* and *Beyash Ljimba d’bjaš* respectively).

280 See the MoSES website <http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?sec=3154>

281 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2013b, p. 9.

282 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

year, 32 kindergartens offered the Model A program to 1,853 children who belong to either the Italian (60%), Serb (24%), Hungarian (8%) or Czech (8%) minorities.²⁸³ At the primary school level, 147 schools offered Models A, B and C to 7,010 pupils during the same school year.²⁸⁴ Most were taught in their language and script (Model A); 3,921 pupils (49% Serb, 38% Italian, 8% Czech and 5% Hungarian) in 35 primary schools.²⁸⁵ Another 28 pupils (16 Serb, 10 Hungarian and 2 Czech) had bilingual classes (Model B) in 30 primary schools.²⁸⁶ In addition, 3,061 pupils, mostly Hungarian (29%), Serb (20%) and Slovak (17%) nurtured their language and culture (Model C) in 109 primary schools.²⁸⁷ With regard to secondary schooling, 21 schools offered Models A, B and C to 1,729 pupils in the 2012/2013 school year.²⁸⁸ It is also the case that 1,516 pupils, mostly Serb (59%), were taught in their language and script (Model A), 39 Czech pupils used Model B at one school and 174 pupils, mostly Czech (36%), used Model C.²⁸⁹

- 2.5.21 Several changes introduced in the last decade have aimed at improving the quality of education in Croatia, including systems of external evaluation, compulsory national examinations and State Matriculation. The National Centre for External Evaluation of Education (NCEEE) was established in 2004²⁹⁰ and is responsible for the external evaluation of schools within Croatia's educational and training system and for conducting examinations based on national standards.²⁹¹ As improved teacher education is a key factor in improving the quality of education, in-service training aimed at improving the personal, professional and expert competence of educators, teachers, principals and other professionals who work in education, is also available.²⁹² Themes of professional development include: changes in education policy, the needs of educational workers in specific educational areas, specific aspects of child development, general professional competence, children's affective development and the protection of children's rights.
- 2.5.22 Success rates at each level of education, as well as gender differences in progress and achievement, were not available with regard to Roma pupils in Croatian schools.²⁹³

2.6 Major international agency initiatives for Roma education

- 2.6.1 The most important international initiative in the area of Roma education in the Republic of Croatia is the *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 to 2015*, initiated by the World Bank, European Union and the Open Society Institute.²⁹⁴ As part of this initiative, the Roma Education Fund (REF) drew attention to the low participation rates and lack of participation of Roma children in preschool and subsequent schooling, illustrating that education is not equally accessible to Roma children in all parts of the Republic of Croatia. Since 2010, REF has partnered with Medjimurje County's education authorities to scale-up preschool interventions throughout the county. The main objective of the 'With Preschool to Full Integration' program is to create sustainable conditions for the full integration for all Roma children into mainstream preschool and primary education

283 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

284 *Ibid.*

285 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

286 *Ibid.*

287 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2013b, pp. 12–13.

288 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2013b, p. 13.

289 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

290 *Official Gazette*, 151/04.

291 See <http://www.ncvvo.hr>

292 This is provided by the Education Teaching and Training Agency (ETTA), a public institution responsible for the provision of professional and advisory support in education in the Republic of Croatia. See www.azoo.hr

293 This data was requested of the MoSES but was said to be unavailable.

294 See <http://www.romadecade.org/index>

throughout the County of Medimurje.²⁹⁵ Through the joint efforts of seven municipalities, five schools, and two kindergartens, and with the support of the MoSES and REF, the entire cohort of children aged five-and-a-half to six years old (200 children) has been able to access preschool education (nine-and-a-half months annually, five days per week, five-and-a-half hours per day). The project also works to raise the awareness of local municipalities about Roma populations in the region and their responsibility to fulfil Roma children's rights by providing quality inclusive education, while also participating in developing national policies related to preschool education and the inclusion of Roma.

- 2.6.2 As part of an IPA program, the REF, in collaboration with the County of Medjimurje (Kotoriba, Macinec, Mala Subotica) introduced an after-school program in the school year 2013/2014. The aim of this project was to provide support for Roma and other national minorities in education as well as to strengthen the capacity of educational institutions to address the needs of Roma communities. Activities included the organisation of after-school programs in schools, practical training for students of the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb and seminars for teachers and Roma parents.²⁹⁶
- 2.6.3 Another REF project, 'Improvement of Access and Quality of Roma Education in Croatia' included a research component. REF analysed the problems Roma face in their everyday lives and how these problems impact Roma children's school performance, detailing the attitudes and roles of all stakeholders (pupils, parents and teachers), including their opinions and experiences with Roma teaching assistants and schools. The project started with the provision of quality preschool education for Roma children to improve their chances for successful integration into primary education, given that most primary schools are not inclusive institutions. The project also introduced a process for monitoring and assessment of the performance of Roma pupils based on research data, as well as recording relevant data in a special database run by the MoSES.²⁹⁷
- 2.6.4 The REF project 'Research on the Position of Roma women in Croatia, with an Emphasis on Access to Education' provided insights into conditions and attitudes related to the education of Roma women. It showed the real-life difficulties Roma women face, even beyond limited access to education, highlighting problems related to their financial circumstances (particularly taking up employment and self-employment), social welfare, housing, and other relevant factors.²⁹⁸ Roma students in Croatia have benefited from the REF Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program, which has awarded 12 scholarships since 2006/2007, including three in 2011/2012 and three in 2012/2013.²⁹⁹
- 2.6.5 The REF, in collaboration with the NGO Merlin, initiated a project called 'After-school Support and Parent's Involvement' in 2012. The main project goal is to improve life opportunities for all Roma children aged 7–15 by providing quality after-school support so they stay motivated to continue their formal learning in the Croatian educational system.³⁰⁰
- 2.6.6 In 2003 the Open Society Institute – Croatia began 'The Comprehensive Roma Education Program'. The pilot project consisted of several components, including training preschool and primary school teachers in child-centred approaches to teaching, anti-bias training and workshops on health care and other interventions. The project involved eight primary

295 REF, 2013, pp. 37–38; REF, 2012, pp. 104–105.

296 See <http://www.strukturnifondovi.hr/project/kotoribamala-subotica/produzeni-boravak-za-ucenike-romske-nacionalne-manjine>

297 Information provided by the REF.

298 Information provided by the REF.

299 Information provided by the REF.

300 REF, 2013, pp. 152–153.

schools in the County of Medjmurje and was approved and supported by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports.³⁰¹

- 2.6.7 A further distinguished project, 'Getting Ready for School', proved to be very successful, according to numerous internal evaluation reports. The project involved surveying parental attitudes and attention was given to the sustainability of the work post-project. 'Empowering Roma Parents to Support the Development and Education of their Children' was a program jointly implemented by the Open Academy Step by Step Croatia and four primary schools in 2011. The project was aimed to improve the quality of collaboration between parents and schools as well as empower Roma parents to support their children's education.
- 2.6.8 UNICEF Croatia has been particularly active in the field of child rights, education and wellbeing. Many of their research findings are confirmed in this RECI+ Croatia Study. In 2013 UNICEF published an important report on the parenting of young children in Croatia. More than 1,700 parents of children aged 0–6 years participated in the survey, which was commissioned by UNICEF to inform the new *National Strategy and Plan for Children*³⁰² (*National Strategy for Children's Rights in the Republic of Croatia from 2014–2020*). The survey showed great inequalities in the financing of community based services for parents and children. While some regions and local communities offer a plethora of services, including an 'outreach' program for the most vulnerable, other communities do not have any services. At the time of writing, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Open Academy Step by Step Croatia, is introducing a new program entitled 'Ready Together – Modelling New Transitions to School Support Program for Roma/Non Roma Children and Families in the Counties of Sisak-Moslavina and Brod-Posavina'. It is anticipated that this program will improve the life chances of many young children, including Roma. In October 2014, UNICEF collaborated with UNDP and UNHCR to publish an important report on the Roma entitled, '*Everyday Life of Roma in Croatia: Challenges and Possibilities for Transformation*'; this RECI+ Croatia Study has been audited against the findings of that report.³⁰³

2.7 Local government responsibility for health, social affairs and education

- 2.7.1 There are 21 units of regional self-government (20 counties and the City of Zagreb) and 556 units of local self-government (429 municipalities and 127 towns) in the Republic of Croatia.³⁰⁴ The *Act on Local and Regional Self Government* aims to provide local government bodies with responsibilities related to child-care, social welfare, education, primary health care, spatial and urban planning, economic development, environmental protection, traffic infrastructure, sport and culture.³⁰⁵ Local government units are financed partly by the state budget and partly by their own funds,³⁰⁶ but the number and availability of local services that are available greatly differ, especially in the area of early child-care and education. Due to the fact that the financing of education is highly decentralised

301 Cvikić, 2007, p. 68.

302 UNICEF, 2013a.

303 UNDP, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2014.

304 CBS, 2013b, p. 55.

305 *Official Gazette*, 33/01, 129/05.

306 Data for 2010, 2011 and 2012 show that the share from the state budget was 22%, 18% and 17% respectively for municipalities; for cities it was 5%, 7% and 7% for the same years. Most funds are received from taxes (income tax, estate tax and local and county taxes, including taxes on second homes, consumption tax, the tax on passenger motor vehicles, vessels, inheritance tax and gifts) as well as revenue from owned assets, income from public utility fees, contributions, administrative and residence fees, fines and other revenues. Calculated by Tereza Rogić-Lugarić, Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb. Source: Ministry of Finance. See <http://www.mfin.hr/hr/ostvarenje-prpracuna-jlprs-za-period-2010-2011>

in Croatia, the role of city governments and municipalities is crucial in addressing the challenges that are present in developing inclusive education.

2.7.2 Local and territorial (regional) governments were the weakest link during the implementation of the *National Program for the Roma* and the *Decade of Roma Inclusion*. None of the strategic documents from the *National Program* obliged local authorities to implement measures that would improve social inclusion for Roma populations. As a result, despite continuous investments by the Croatian Government in the promotion of Roma inclusion, there has not been a lasting and sustainable impact.³⁰⁷ Experience over the last decade has shown that Roma communities are not actively involved in the creation and implementation of policies and measures aimed at their inclusion or in the assessment and evaluation of the long-term effects of these policies and measures. Although Roma representatives (leaders) are involved and participate to some degree, most Roma communities remain excluded, especially Roma women, who rarely take up leadership roles and actively participate in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of interventions.³⁰⁸

307 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 24.

308 *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.

CHAPTER 3

The Early Childhood Education and Care System and the Place of Roma Children and Parents within It

3.1 The number of young children

- 3.1.1 Demographic changes contributed to a significant reduction in the overall number of preschool children (aged 0–6 years) in the Republic of Croatia from 1991 (361,000) until 2007, when the total reached 287,000 and began steadily increasing to reach 297,000 in 2011.³⁰⁹ According to data from the 2011 census, there were 212,709 children (109,251 boys and 103,458 girls) aged 0–4 years and 204,317 children (104,841 boys and 99,476 girls) aged 5–9 years in the Republic of Croatia.³¹⁰ Data from the 2011 census also indicates that there were 2,706 Roma children (1,367 boys and 1,339 girls) aged 0–4 years and 2,455 Roma children (1,234 boys and 1,221 girls) aged 5–9 years.³¹¹ The percentage of all Roma children in the 0–4 age group was 1.3% while for the older age group it was 1.2%.³¹²

3.2 Outline of early educational services (0–6 years)

- 3.2.1 According to the *National Curriculum Framework*,³¹³ the basic role of preschool education is to create conditions for the comprehensive and healthy development of children in the physical, emotional, social, intellectual, moral and spiritual realms in ways that are appropriate for the child's developmental level. The document further states that the purposes of preschool education are to provide an environment that guarantees the development of a range of abilities within every child and to improve lifelong opportunities for all children. Resources allocated to funding programs that relate to the family and child wellbeing in the Republic of Croatia significantly lag behind averages in other European

309 Matković and Dobrotić, 2013, p. 67.

310 The 0–4 and 5–9 age group categories are used in Census data.

311 CBS, 2011.

312 Although figures for each year of age are available for the whole population, this data is not ethnically disaggregated. The suspect nature of Roma data collected in official national censuses was raised in Chapter 1 (see 'Demographic data about the Roma'). According to estimates by the Council of Europe there are between 30,000 and 40,000 Roma in the Republic of Croatia (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 27) compared to the 16,975 people who identified as Roma in the 2011 census.

313 MoSES, 2011, pp. 50–51.

countries and are among the lowest.³¹⁴ Croatia also lags behind other European countries with regard to the level of involvement of children in nurseries and kindergartens. As an example, participation of four-year-olds in education grew from 41.4% in 2003 to 57.4% in 2011 in Croatia; four-year-olds' participation in education averaged 90.8% in the EU 27 Member States that same year.³¹⁵ Compared to other regions in the world, European enrolment figures in publicly supported child care and early education are relatively high. Over the last decade, the percentage of children enrolled in the final year of early education rose steadily from 85.6% in 2000 to 92.3% in 2008.³¹⁶ EU countries are now encouraged by *Education and Training 2020* to reach the target of 95% enrolment in early education from four years of age to the start of mandatory schooling. The significant importance and the benefits of additional investment in this area at the national level have not been widely recognised in Croatia, since this is not the sole responsibility of the State. Specifically, the development of preschool education is largely left to the initiatives and opportunities of local authorities, which has resulted in large regional differences in coverage for young children in early care and preschool education.³¹⁷

3.2.2 Implemented in 2008, the *State Pedagogical Standard of Preschool Education* (Article 3)³¹⁸ states that the duration of programs of preschool education can be: a whole day (from 7 to 10 hours a day); a half day (from 4 to 6 hours a day); longer in duration (from 1 to 10 days for programs, trips, etc.); or part-time daily programs for up to three hours. The document defines regular programs of varying length as comprehensive development programs of care and education for children aged six months to school age, intended to meet their needs and the needs of their parents. Special programs include: programs of early foreign language learning, musical programs, art programs, drama programs, computer programs, sports and dance programs, environmental education and sustainable development programs, religious programs, health education programs, programs for children with special health care needs, programs with parents, prevention programs as well as safety, intervention, and rehabilitation programs. Alternative educational programs can also be organised according to the concepts of Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, the Agazzi sisters, Jurgen Zimmer, Reggio Emilia and others. Public programs are organised and implemented for children with disabilities, gifted children, children of Croatian citizens abroad, children belonging to national minorities and children who do not attend a regular preschool program in the year before they start primary school. According to their specific characteristics (culture, tradition, geographical specificity, etc.), kindergartens can also develop their own educational programs.³¹⁹

3.2.3 There are significant differences in the availability and quality of early development services in different parts of the Republic of Croatia. Moreover, differences can also be noted in the overall capacity and quality of preschool education facilities, the number of educators/professionals and the fees parents and guardians are required to pay to cover the costs of nursery/kindergarten programs.

3.2.4 A number of researchers have drawn attention to the lack of an early education and care network in the Republic of Croatia,³²⁰ even though preschool education coverage has improved over the twenty years leading up to the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008. Access to services and resources for young children is largely determined by place of residence. Although inclusion of infants from six months of age into nurseries is anticipated in the *Act*, care is available to infants starting from age 10 to 11 months;

314 Babić, 2013, p. 258.

315 CBS, 2013c, p. 54.

316 Bennett, 2012, p. 19.

317 Dobrotić, Matković and Baran, 2010, p. 379.

318 *Official Gazette*, 63/08 and 90/10.

319 *Ibid.*, p.7.

320 See Puljiz and Zrinščak, 2002; Matković, 2007; Dobrotić, Matković and Baran, 2010.

this is only possible if conditions exist for this care, which is currently only available in the larger cities (Zagreb, Rijeka, Osijek, Pula and Split). According to the available data, 202 infants younger than one year are enrolled at nurseries.³²¹ Clearly, a uniform quality network for all young children is absent because the education and care of preschool age children is decentralised to the local governments, which often have significantly different fiscal capacities and priorities. As a result, there are persistent regional differences in coverage. For example, enrolment in nursery programs for children between 6 months and 3 years visibly varies from 4.7% in the County of Virovitica-Podravina to 38.6% in the City of Zagreb.³²² Similarly, the coverage of children aged 3–4 years in preschool programs varies from 13.2% in the County of Brod-Posavina to 91.1% in the City of Zagreb.³²³ Reflecting the advantages of living in the capital city, about 80% of the total number of children aged one year to the beginning of primary school were included in preschool programs (both regular programs and the preparatory pre-primary year programs in public and private preschool institutions) in the City of Zagreb in the 2012/2013 school year, with nearly 100% coverage of children in the year before they start primary school.³²⁴

- 3.2.5 A significant number of children still cannot enrol in nurseries and kindergartens because the existing facilities have inadequate capacities³²⁵ and about 5,000 preschool children thus remain on waiting lists each year.³²⁶ In particular, with regard to the situation in terms of capacity, the network of preschool education services has not radically changed (especially for the 0–3 age group).³²⁷
- 3.2.6 The number of children per teacher is one important indicator of the quality of a preschool program and fulfilment of pedagogical standards. Although the ratio at the national level (12.1 children for every teacher) has improved, there were some regional differences (e.g. 9.7 in the County of Istria compared to 18.3 in the County of Virovitica-Podravina) in 2011.³²⁸
- 3.2.7 It should be noted that preschool education nurseries and kindergartens are primarily organized as services available to working parents; children whose parents are unemployed are disadvantaged because their parents are often unable to meet the costs of this care.³²⁹ The price of preschool education ranges from 1,250 to 2,500 HRK per month for each child, while the cost of care and education for children with disabilities can be up to 5,200 HRK per month. Parents pay between 30% to 40% of their child's preschool education and care.³³⁰ Kindergartens that are established by local and territorial (regional) governments have the right to charge parents for their services.³³¹ However, prices differ from city to city and from municipality to municipality depending on fiscal capacities and the willingness to finance preschool education. Costs and percentage subsidies are also related to the size of the family, although there is again significant variation across the country.³³² Clearly, affordability is another issue that places children from different parts of Croatia in an asymmetrical and thus disadvantaged position, given the absence of uniform rules regarding parents' payment, which depends on the independent decision of each local authority.³³³ Ideally, children from families of lower

321 MoSES, Republic of Croatia, 2008.

322 Matković and Dobrotić, 2013, p. 71.

323 Matković and Dobrotić, 2013, p. 70.

324 Zagreb City Assembly, 2012.

325 Babić, 2013, p. 256.

326 MoSES, Republic of Croatia, 2008.

327 Dobrotić, 2013, p. 169.

328 Matković and Dobrotić, 2013, p. 72.

329 Dobrotić, Matković and Baran, 2010, p. 370.

330 MoSES, Republic of Croatia, 2008.

331 Preschool Education Act, *Official Gazette*, 10/97, 107/07, 94/13 article 48, paragraph 4.

332 See http://vrtciosijek.hr/?page_id=4808

333 Dobrotić, 2013, p. 178.

socio-economic status would reap the most benefits from preschool care and education, yet they are the most excluded, as evidenced by the relative overall low involvement of such children in preschool programs.³³⁴

3.3 Nursery and kindergarten teacher qualifications and training

- 3.3.1 Between 1949 and 1976, secondary school education was the prerequisite for persons who worked in early and preschool education. At the tertiary level, Early and Preschool Education began in 1969 at the Pedagogical Academy in Zagreb and subsequently became available in other cities. By 2005 a study program of two years was available at various colleges.³³⁵ In the 2005/2006 academic year undergraduate study programs of early and preschool education (for three years or six semesters) in the Republic of Croatia were available at the Universities of Zagreb, Rijeka, Split and Osijek. Upon completion, a student obtains a Bachelor of Early and Preschool Education (180 ECTS).³³⁶ With these qualifications, an undergraduate can work with infants and preschool children in nurseries and kindergartens or work in the fields of science and higher education, the public sector, government bodies or bodies of local and territorial (regional) self-government whose scope of work includes childcare and early and preschool education. In addition, in accordance with previous regulations, a two-year study program in a relevant field is still recognised as an adequate educational prerequisite for work with preschool children.³³⁷ Undergraduates can continue their studies and receive a Master's in Early and Preschool Education (120 ECTS) after completion of two years or four semesters.³³⁸
- 3.3.2 An overview of the study programs offered at the undergraduate level reveals that students have a compulsory course in inclusive education (6 ECTS in Rijeka) or inclusive pedagogy (4 ECTS in Zagreb) in their second year of study, while other universities offer elective courses on similar themes. For example, in Split students can study in their second or third year: Education for Peace and Tolerance, Education for Human Rights, or Inclusive Kindergartens (4 ECTS each).

3.4 The preschool curriculum

- 3.4.1 The focus of learning activities over the course of preschool education is directed at fostering comprehensive, healthy growth and development of the child in all areas of the child's life. The basic structure of the preschool curriculum is divided into three major categories in which children learn about 'me' (the image of oneself), 'me and others' (family, other children, the immediate social community, kindergarten and local community), and 'the world around me' (the natural and the wider social environment, cultural heritage and sustainable development).³³⁹
- 3.4.2 The traditional role of educators as the author of activities carried out with children has greatly changed. The main task has become the observation of a child interacting

334 *Ibid.*, p. 179.

335 University of Split, 2013, p. 14.

336 The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a tool that helps to design, describe and deliver study programs and award higher education qualifications. See http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/ects_en.htm

337 Specifically, the Act states that a person who has completed an undergraduate/graduate university degree or professional/specialist study of the appropriate type, or corresponding higher education, in which a higher qualification was acquired in accordance with the previous regulations, can work with children from six months old to school age. See *Official Gazette*, 94/13, Article 24, paragraph 4.

338 Graduate programs have only recently become available in the 2010/2011 academic year at the University of Rijeka.

339 MoSES, Republic of Croatia, 2011.

with other children and the creation of an environment that promotes the optimal development of each child in the group. This is one of the important features of the current official description of the preschool curriculum³⁴⁰ and indicates that there has been a shift from adult-guided learning to child-guided learning. Apart from satisfying the everyday needs of children and their development tasks, the *State Pedagogical Standard of Preschool Education* states educators should encourage the development of each child according to his/her abilities.³⁴¹

3.5 The place of Roma children in educational services

- 3.5.1 In the 2012/2013 school year, a total of 128,046 children were included in preschool education in the Republic of Croatia.³⁴² As this data is not disaggregated by ethnicity, it is difficult to estimate with accuracy the percentage of Roma children in this total. Analysis of these figures shows that most of these children (91.1%) were in regular preschool programs (whole or half day) while a smaller number (8.9%) were in the preparatory pre-primary year programs. The available data for Roma children (from the MoSES's electronic database) shows that a considerably larger percentage of Roma children attend the preparatory pre-primary year programs just before they start primary school (about 55%)³⁴³ compared to the number enrolled into regular preschool education (about 45%) over a longer duration. With a clear majority of Roma children (79%) in the 3–6 year age group not attending quality preschool provision earlier, national programs for Roma inclusion will need to target this area of action as a priority if school attainment and retention for older Roma pupils and students is to be equalized with the majority population.
- 3.5.2 Positively, the State budget and REF funding of preschool education and the preparatory pre-primary year programs for Roma children gradually increased from 2009 until 2012 (from 636,103.75 HRK to 1,929,108.06 HRK). This increase is evident in the County of Medjimurje where all Roma children are included in the preparatory pre-primary year program from 15 September until 30 June the year before they start school for 5.5 hours a day, and given a meal and free transport.³⁴⁴

3.6 Causes of low enrolment in preschool facilities among Roma children

- 3.6.1 Low Roma enrolment in preschool education that is ethnically diverse is still a predominant problem. High rates of poverty among Roma parents/caregivers translate in reality into a situation where preschool education becomes unaffordable. To increase accessibility, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports has co-funded public preschool education from the state budget since 2009.³⁴⁵ This means that the cost of preschool education for children from six months until school age is covered for Roma parents and guardians. Provided that the rest of the funds from local budgets can be secured, kindergarten provision should be free for members of the Roma minorities.³⁴⁶ However, reports indicate that co-financing since 2009 has fluctuated and only applies to a relatively small number of Roma children in integrated mixed preschool educational settings. In 2009, 113 Roma children were co-financed in 14 preschools. That number increased to 123 Roma children in the same

340 Centar zdravlja, n.d.

341 As specified in the *State Pedagogical Standard of Preschool Education*, Article 26, para 2.

342 CBS, 2013e, p. 12.

343 It was mentioned in Chapter 2 that these programs were far from uniform in that they varied in length, quality and dynamics, depending on location. In addition, there was no mechanism for securing the quality of various preparatory preschool programs for Roma children.

344 Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2013, pp. 12–13.

345 This applies to Roma children from the age of 6 months to school age. See <http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?sec=3156>

346 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 40.

number of facilities in 2010. Although this almost doubled in 2011 to 204 Roma children in 20 preschools, it decreased to 182 Roma children in 24 facilities in 2012.³⁴⁷

The RECI+ Croatia Study found that only 20% of all children (aged between six months and six years) in the Roma households surveyed were included in any kind of preschool education or the preparatory pre-primary year program. Participation is usually only in a segregated Roma kindergarten or a Roma playgroup because of either location and/or sponsorship. The exception is in Medjimurje where Roma children in the research sample participated in a preparatory preschool program for 5.5 hours each day that included free transportation and meals for one year prior to beginning primary school. Although commendable, it is insufficient, as Roma children would benefit from a longer preschool program.

3.6.2 Inclusion of Roma children into a two-year preschool program to ensure healthy, psycho-physical, socio-emotional development as well as quality preparation for school and life in the community was specified in the *Action Plan for Roma Inclusion 2005–2015*.³⁴⁸ In addition, it is to be noted that contingency provision of Roma kindergartens and playgroups, although meeting urgent community needs, is less satisfactory for the wider community than full participation in mainstream diverse preschool education.

3.6.3 Evidently, enrolment in public preschool programs that are ethnically diverse is potentially far more complex for many Roma children in terms of the additional costs and negative attitudes encountered. The fear of prejudice and discrimination is often a further hindering factor to the taking up of a preschool place. Even though Roma parents are not required to pay for fees, transportation and didactic materials, there are still other costs such as clothes, shoes, excursions, etc. that need to be considered. Insufficient capacities of preschool facilities and long waiting lists may be other reasons for low Roma enrolment in preschool education programs that are mainstream and ethnically diverse. In addition, the communication of vital and practical information about these educational opportunities for Roma children is evidently deficient despite the obligation on preschools to communicate this information to parents.³⁴⁹ As mentioned before, the findings from the UNDP, World Bank and European Commission Regional Roma survey in 2011 showed that the ratio of Roma to non-Roma children aged 3–6 in preschool facilities in Croatia was 21% to 48%, respectively.³⁵⁰ Some reasons for the under-representation of Roma children in preschool education have previously been suggested:³⁵¹

- Insufficient capacity in kindergartens;
- Lack of financial resources in the budgets of local governments and irregular funding of preschool programs;
- Lack of awareness of the need for (and importance) of long-term planning for the integration of the Roma community at the local level; and
- Lack of parental awareness about the importance of preschool education and local opportunities.

3.6.4 It has been noted that the budgets of local governments often lack financial resources to fund preschool education. As preschool education is not compulsory in the Republic of Croatia, with the exception now of the preparatory pre-primary year programs that have been recently introduced, availability depends on the financial capacity of local budgets.

347 Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2013, pp. 1–2.

348 See Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2005, p. 6.

349 *Glas Slavonija*, 2014.

350 These figures can be compared to the net enrolment rate, which was just over 60% according to national averages in 2010/2011; this may indicate that preschool facilities are underrepresented in the localities where this research was conducted. See Brüggemann, 2012, p. 32.

351 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, pp. 39–40.

It has also been observed that poor coordination between state and local authorities as well as donors in relation to co-funding preschool programs for the Roma often means that programs are short-lived and subsequently discontinued, which results in a loss of motivation among parents, teachers and children alike.³⁵²

- 3.6.5 To overcome a lack of parental awareness the *Croatian Action Plan of Roma Inclusion*, drafted within the framework of the *Decade of Roma Inclusion*, includes an objective to inform Roma children and parents about the importance of preschool education (learning Croatian, getting ready for school, improving social skills and self-regulation, overall development of the child's mental and physical abilities).³⁵³ It also includes a goal to motivate parents to encourage and support preschool education attendance, especially the inclusion of children into the mandatory preparatory pre-primary year programs well before admission to primary school.³⁵⁴ Preschool settings now also have a duty to inform prospective parents of the preschool opportunities available.
- 3.6.6 A further reason for the exclusion and segregation of some Roma young children in preschool settings is linked to prejudiced anti-Roma public attitudes on the part of some non-Roma parents. Unhindered integration of the Roma community in preschool provision at the local level is thus a challenge that seriously and negatively impacts Roma children's access to preschool facilities. For example, a group of Roma children and their parents were blocked from attending the first day of their preschool program because of a racially motivated protest by non-Roma parents in September 2012 at the primary school of Gornji Hraščan, Medjimurje. More than 40 Roma children were stopped from entering their new facility by approximately 50 adult protesters who were angry at their participation in the preschool.³⁵⁵ Although Roma children now attend the program, tensions remain.
- 3.6.7 Attendant to these causal factors in relation of poor levels of take-up of preschool opportunities by Roma families, it is to be remembered that other factors linked to abject poverty need to be taken into account. These include poor child health and challenging living circumstances with many families coping with no safe water in the home and no sanitary facilities in sub-standard accommodation.

3.7 Roma perceptions of preschool education

- 3.7.1 The qualitative research that was a major part of the RECI+ Croatia³⁵⁶ Study drew on experiences, knowledge and impressions of Roma children as well as parents and guardians in relation to early childhood care and education. Roma children seemed only to be able to recall positive experiences of kindergarten or the preparatory pre-primary year programs.³⁵⁷ They mentioned good teachers, fun times, lots of toys, good preparation for school and an opportunity to talk about Romani culture.

We learned how to count and how to write numbers and when school started, we already knew everything. (Melisa, 10)

It was nice at kindergarten, I played there and we learned to write in a notebook of letters. I played with my friends; there are a lot of toys there. (Hana, 7)

352 REF, 2007, p. 21.

353 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2005, p. 4.

354 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

355 Hraščani, 2012.

356 See Annex 1 for detailed research methodology.

357 The question in the interview with children was formulated as a very open question: Can you tell me about kindergarten? Probes, for example, included: What did you do? What did you learn? What were your teachers like? Can you describe your friends?

3.7.2 When parents and guardians were asked about their children's preschool education, both positive and negative experiences were mentioned. Overall parent satisfaction was noted and the following were mentioned as positive experiences for their children: development of their children's skills and knowledge, regular meals, dedication of teachers, socialising with children from the non-Roma population and a respect for differences. Many parents and guardians talked about preschool education as good preparation for school, because children learned Croatian and how to read, write and draw. In addition, they mentioned that their children learned all about hygiene.

It's better because when children start school they know the alphabet and they know how to count, they can tell the difference between numbers, letters ... they can tell the difference, so it's easier when they start, and they get used to going and mixing with friends, so kindergarten means a lot. (Silvija, mother of seven children)

The kindergarten is close, we have a Roma kindergarten and this is an advantage for us because these children already know how to speak Croatian. And then when they start Grade 1 they are ready like other citizens. (Damijan, father of four children)

3.7.3 Besides learning new skills and acquiring different types of knowledge, free hot meals were also mentioned as another advantage.

They have meals and fruit, everything. It's just not a kindergarten, it's a play group but they learn a lot. (Veronika, mother of four children)

3.7.4 Socialising with children from the majority population as well as learning respect for differences were also mentioned. This refers to experiences Roma children had in mixed, inclusive kindergartens where all children are integrated and different cultures, traditions and customs are respected.

Her friends [referring to oldest daughter] they come here, they play, they sleep over; this means that they really mix. She doesn't hang out with Roma children but she has her own circle of friends. (Pavel, father of three children)

He went to a normal kindergarten ... that means he was among all children, he wasn't segregated. (Alisa, mother of three children)

3.7.5 There were also negative experiences. These included socio-economic and institutional barriers as well as discrimination. Parents and guardians reported that the costs of attending public preschool facilities were too great for Roma families who are often unemployed and recipients of social welfare.

Who can send their children to kindergarten? We don't have enough to feed our children today ... who can pay for kindergarten? (Milena mother of four children)

Not us, we're not in a position ... to pay for this ... if I was employed, if we were working, if we had more money, then yes, but we are helpless. We can't do anything. We are satisfied that they go to a preschool program ... with what they have for free. (Renata, mother of three children)

3.7.6 Parents and guardians were critical about the preparatory pre-primary year programs that are supposed to focus on preparation for school. They thought that their children spent most of their time playing and did not learn enough to prepare them adequately for school. Some complained that these programs are also too short.

Why don't they write? Why don't they draw? Why don't they learn from books? Preschool programs are just for playing ... they colour in a little, draw a little and that's all! (Emil, father of seven children)

- 3.7.7 Another institutional barrier was highlighted among parents with children with disabilities. They reported a complete absence of relevant information. Realising the importance and benefits of early childhood education for her child with a disability, a mother paid 430 HRK a month for two years without knowing that these costs could have been co-financed. Another parent reported further complications.

Not a single kindergarten will accept a child that cannot walk; he has to have his own personal assistant that you need to pay for, this is 1000 HRK a month. There are no possibilities for these children. (Senka, mother of three children)

- 3.7.8 Discrimination was another issue that instils fear among Roma parents for the safety of their children.

There was a problem last year ... they [non-Roma parents] didn't want our children to go with their children. I didn't feel that good about this. I didn't want to beg and I started to fight with those people until they let our children go to kindergarten. (Emil, father of seven children)

3.8 Readiness of Roma children for school

- 3.8.1 Findings³⁵⁸ conclusively show that there are gaps in the early childhood care and education system that disproportionately have a negative impact upon Roma children.

In the RECI+ Croatia Study, none of the children at one location were included in any type of educational service prior to primary school. This Roma settlement is only 5 kms from Sisak (population 47,768), the administrative centre of the County of Sisak-Moslavina.

Between 2006 and 2009, children from this settlement did have access to preschool education, including transportation. This preschool education was evaluated by those in the local research sample as a positive experience with manifold benefits.

I have to say that these generations of children [who attended preschool education] were more prepared and achieved better results from the very beginning of their schooling compared to generations before them and after them who didn't have this opportunity. (Principal)

- 3.8.2 Roma children who are included in some kind of preschool education usually attend for a shorter period just before they start school. In the past, the preparatory pre-primary year programs were not compulsory;³⁵⁹ they varied considerably in content as well as duration, and there were no mechanisms for ensuring and maintaining quality provision by either internal or external monitoring and evaluation, or both. On the whole, this places Roma children in a disadvantageous position that undoubtedly has a negative impact on

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358 The UNDP/WB/EC regional Roma survey (2011) points to the benefits of preschool for Roma children. For example, Roma children currently in preschool have better cognitive outcomes, and those who attended pre-school are much more likely to complete secondary school than Roma children from the same communities and with similar backgrounds who have not attended preschool. They are also much less likely (33% reduction in the Czech Republic and 70% in Slovakia) to be enrolled into special needs primary schools designed for children with learning disabilities. See World Bank, 2012, p. 7.

359 This changed on 31 August 2014. See *Official Gazette*, 10/97, 107/07, 94/13 Article 23.a.

their educational careers and future success. Moreover, a large majority of Roma children have poorer, less educated and unemployed parents and face further obstacles related to inferior chances in education, health and overall wellbeing.³⁶⁰ Reports have also indicated that Roma children's enrolment into first grade can be delayed on the basis of poor test results, which are mostly caused by their limited knowledge of the Croatian language.³⁶¹ Indisputably, some kind of preschool education for Roma children is fundamentally important, as this markedly improves their readiness for primary school. This was confirmed in an evaluation of the preschool program 'With Preschool to Full Integration', which was conducted in the County of Medjmurje and supported by REF in the 2011/2012 school year. Significant progress was noted in the areas of language, hygiene, and socialisation at all preschools that implemented this program, with the exception of a few cases (families in extremely poor socio-economic situations and children with certain disabilities). Significantly, results showed that there was better reproduction of materials in the Croatian language at the final assessment, compared to the initial assessment at the beginning of the program. Specifically, after a year children were able to understand instructions in Croatian without the presence of Roma assistants compared to initial tests that required a Roma assistant.³⁶²

3.8.3 A number of positive measures have been implemented at the primary school level to bridge gaps and improve Roma pupils' progress and achievement. These include extra tuition in Croatian, employing Roma teaching assistants and MoSES funded after-school programs.

3.8.4 In July 2010 Parliament amended the Law on Primary and Secondary School Education in which Article 43 states that schools are under an obligation to provide special assistance to enrolled children who do not know or who have an insufficient command of the Croatian language.³⁶³ The legislation provides the legal basis for introducing tests specifically designed to evaluate the command of the Croatian language. A panel of experts proposes the appropriate form of assistance and the curriculum to be followed for each child, which is submitted for a final decision by the regional education authority.³⁶⁴ The number of Roma boys and girls who received extra tuition for Croatian has fluctuated since 2010 (see Table 5). Most pupils received extra tuition in grade 1 (34.1%) and in grade 2 (20.1%) and mostly in the County of Medjmurje (62%, 79%, 60% respectively) for the listed years. Nevertheless, in a recent survey in the County of Medjmurje conducted among Roma pupils in upper primary grades (between 5th–8th grade), almost a third (29.8%) had trouble understanding Croatian³⁶⁵ which is of concern since a language barrier is a very significant obstacle to the quality of educational experience and outcomes for Roma in the higher school grades.

360 This was confirmed in the RECI+ Croatia Study (N=135): over half of the participants reported that their households are severely materially deprived, 8% had a secondary level of education (which was the highest level amongst participants) and 91% were unemployed.

361 REF, 2007, p. 10.

362 Evaluation of With Preschool to Full Integration program, see NCEEE, 2012.

363 *Official Gazette*, 87/08, 86/09, 92/10, 105/10, 90/11, 5/12, 16/12, 86/12, 94/13.

364 European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2012, p. 19.

365 Lapat and Šlezak, 2011, p. 86.

Table 5. Number of Roma boys and girls who received extra tuition for Croatian, 2010/2011 to 2013/2014

	Total (Boys/Girls)			
	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014
Primary Grades (1–8)	555 (289/266)	700 (341/359)	*	511 (251/260)

Source: Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2013 and MoSES database.

Note: * Missing data.

3.8.5 Improving access and assisted transportation is another way of bridging gaps and improving Roma pupils' progress and attainment during education. In 2000, the primary school in Kuršanec organised transport to school for Roma pupils even though the school is only two kilometres away from the Roma settlement. Organised departures and arrivals resulted in a considerable reduction in the number of pupils who did not attend school between 2000 and 2008. Research results showed that organised transportation significantly accelerated this change in school attendance.³⁶⁶ In situations where there is no local preschool provision, the MoSES has recently made provisions that require municipalities and or regional governments to facilitate access to the preparatory pre-primary classes in nearby preschool or primary school settings by the provision of free transport. While this is to be welcomed the policy is in some cases a hostage to unexplained delays and with no accountability for a reluctance or failure to implement.

Assisted transportation was available at two locations in the RECI+ Croatia Study to improve access to primary school. Although a bus stop was located at the entrance of one of the Roma settlements, the other was quite a distance away and access was extremely dangerous for children.

There are no ramps! You've seen them [children] crossing over the railway tracks ... it's bad when children go to school, a child doesn't look ... the train doesn't give a signal and then what? (Ružica, mother of six children)

3.8.6 A problem with regard to the inclusion of Roma children in primary school is frequently said to be related to Roma children's weak knowledge of the Croatian language. However, it is not always recognised in schools that Croatian is, in most cases, a second language for Roma pupils.³⁶⁷ It is also not always recognised by the authorities that Roma pupils and their parents have to cope with negative and prejudiced attitudes on the part of schools with the result that they often suffer de facto educational exclusion. This situation has been significantly helped since 23 Roma teaching assistants (12 males and 11 females) have been employed at various schools. Most of them (21) are financed by the MoSES, while two are financed by local authorities.³⁶⁸ These teaching assistants help Roma pupils and class teachers in the lower grades of primary school and usually mediate between the school and families in the community. In relation to qualifications, these teaching assistants must have completed their secondary school education and have a good knowledge of Croatian as well as the Romani dialect spoken in the area. The importance of Roma teaching assistants was mentioned by a number of school staff and Roma parents in the RECI+ Croatia Study.

366 Slezak 2010a, pp. 116–117.

367 In the RECI+ Croatia Study research almost a half of the households (46%) reported that their families speak Ljimba d' baš; slightly fewer (41%) stated that they speak Romani chib as their first language. Only a small percentage (13%) spoke Croatian as their first language, while 86% spoke Croatian as a second language in the household.

368 Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2013, p. 12.

They have been essential in our work and we insisted on having them as teaching assistants at our school. They are very important for creating good connections with the settlement ... the flow of information from school to parents is faster. Then they are very important in the classroom. ... They are really good as aides in the school buses because our children are exposed to more dangers when they have to travel all the time. They also maintain general order and discipline, help out at school, on trips, in extracurricular activities ... they are very, very important to us. (Primary school principal)

They are all positive, all positive [referring to Roma assistants]. They are good towards the children and work well with them. (Fabijan, father of seven children)

She [referring to Roma assistant] has been with us for more than 10 years at school. She is with them all the time and if our children don't know something they ask her in the Romani language and she tells them in Croatian. This means that they have to answer the teacher in Croatian. I'm really satisfied with her ... at first we thought that nothing would come of it, she didn't know how to tell parents about certain things, but slowly. ... Today, she is like a teacher! I know that she helps us a lot ... with learning Croatian, or if anything happens at school, she tries to solve this. If my child doesn't know something she comes here to my home. (Stanislav, father of seven children)

3.8.7 Another measure is after-school care that has steadily become more available to Roma pupils since 2008/2009 (see table 6). In the 2008/2009 school year, 229 Roma children were a part of this program compared to 357 in 2013/2014. At the beginning of the 2013/2014 school year, most Roma pupils (73%) that were a part of this program were attending the lower grades of primary school: grade 1 (28.5%), grade 2 (21.8%), and grade 3 (22.4%). These MoSES funded programs of after-school care are very beneficial for younger pupils, as teachers provide extra tuition, help with homework or conduct revision during this time. This is also of great benefit to some children who may not have suitable conditions at home for optimal private study.

In the RECI+ Croatia Study, only one of the schools offered a free after-school program (introduced in autumn 2013 in Medjimurje); another school used to operate a free program but now charged a monthly fee of 150 HRK. The other three schools did not offer an after-school program at all.

I'm so sorry that this is no longer available [for free] to Roma children. I'm terribly sorry because this meant so much to them. ... At after-school care they got exactly that quality ... because at home when they do their homework they ask their parents but they are never really sure if this is correct, while at school they have this security. (Lower primary school teacher)

3.8.8 MoSES funded after-school programs for Roma children are often unavailable due to lack of classroom space and teaching staff.³⁶⁹ An opportunity to get extra help with homework, participate in cultural and sporting activities with peers as well as a hot meal, which often cannot be guaranteed in the family, would be very beneficial to many Roma children.

Table 6. Number of Roma boys and girls in after-school care, 2008/2009 to 2013/2014

	Total (Boys/Girls)					
	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014
Primary Grades (1–8)	229 (124/105)	229 (125/104)	340 (183/157)	256 (141/115)	367 (183/184)	357 (191/166)

Source: Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2013 and MoSES database.

369 Brajša-Žganec et al., 2011, p. 48.

- 3.8.9 Evidently, these programs do not reach all of the Roma children who need extra help to compensate for what they may have missed in their earlier preschool years, despite the MoSES's supportive role in trying to improve coverage for Roma children.
- 3.8.10 In addition, a number of general drawbacks have been noted in the education system, that have consequences for all socially deprived and national minority children in the Croatian education system. The most important are: low motivation among teachers and lack of an efficient reward system for their work; no specific training program for the management of educational institutions; no specific advanced training for teachers (child-oriented methods, education for equality and against prejudices, bilingual teaching, inclusion, etc.); inadequate spaces and poor working conditions in schools; outdated schools; out-dated pedagogical standards that allow overcrowded classes; shortages of expert professionals in schools; and inadequate cooperation between schools and parents as well as local health care and social welfare institutions.³⁷⁰
- 3.8.11 As a result of these gaps, the achievement of Roma pupils is generally low. A study among 4th and 6th grade pupils (1,193 total pupils) at 24 primary schools in eight counties in the Republic of Croatia showed that Roma pupils (about one-third of the total sample) had lower grades compared to the majority pupil population. The average grade among Roma pupils was 2.49, while it was 4.0 among the majority pupil population.³⁷¹ The data does show, though, that the number of Roma boys and girls who repeated a primary school year decreased between 2010/2011 and 2013/2014³⁷² (see Table 7). Repetition mostly occurs in the fifth year of upper primary (28.5%) and in the first year (18.4%). This data also shows that more boys repeated a year than girls (between 55–60% of boys and 35–40% of girl).

It is very important that Roma children do not repeat a grade when they first start school in lower primary because repetition often means that they are older than others in the class ... they are no longer with their peers ... away from the children they started with in year one and then of course there are more problems. (Primary school teacher)

Table 7. Number of Roma boys and girls who repeated a year of primary school, 2010/2011 to 2013/2014

	Total (Boys/Girls)			
	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014
Primary Grades (1–8)	587 (348/239)	604 (331/273)	431 (258/173)	428 (235/193)

Source: Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2013 and MoSES database.

- 3.8.12 Even though higher enrolment rates are evident over the past few years, not all enrolled Roma children finish primary school. Most Roma pupils leave school when they turn 15 years (the age one can legally leave school) though at age 15 many are behind grade level. Premature school dropout frequently occurs during the transition from classroom-based to subject-based education, in the fifth year. Data indicates that the number of Roma boys and girls who left school increased between 2008/2009 and 2011/2012³⁷³

370 REF, 2007, p. 20.

371 NCEEE, 2010, p. 18.

372 In comparison, the number of secondary school students who repeated a year increased from 20 in 2010/2011 to 52 in 2013/2014.

373 Similarly, the number of secondary school students who left school increased from 57 in 2010/2011 to 67 in 2011/2012.

(see Table 8). The MoSES database does not indicate when Roma pupils leave school (age or grade) or the percentage of Roma pupils who do not finish primary school. In addition, the number of missed classes per year, data about progress and achievement, economic status and amount of support (financial, food, books) and participation rates in extracurricular activities were not obtainable.

Table 8. Number of Roma boys and girls who left primary school prematurely, 2008/2009 to 2011/2012

	Total (Boys/Girls)			
	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012
<i>Primary Grades (1–8)</i>	136 (68/68)	144 (69/75)	173 (101/72)	189 (102/87)

Source: Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2013 and MoSES database.

- 3.8.13 Clearly, based on all the aforementioned data and feedback, it is essential to include Roma children as soon as possible into early childhood education and care services both to facilitate their successful integration into the formal education system and to ensure that any measurable comparative weaknesses are minimised by quality preschool teaching and learning prior to the commencement of primary education. Overcoming language barriers and implementing measures to improve achievement and reduce rates of repetition and dropout are crucial priorities, considering the long-term implications of successful participation in quality education in terms of social inclusion and employment. Moreover, early education is a key to breaking the intergenerational cycle of social exclusion and poverty and a powerful tool to ensure Roma children can avoid immediate disadvantage when they begin primary school.

CHAPTER 4

Challenges

4.1 The context of challenges related to Roma inclusion in education

4.1.1 Since the implementation of the *National Program for Roma* (2003), *Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015* and *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020* some progress has been achieved for Roma populations in the Republic of Croatia. Efforts have concentrated on including more Roma children in education, as well as improvements in health care, employment rates and housing, while at the same time, the preservation of Romani culture, tradition, language and customs has been taken into account. Specifically, given that education is recognised as a crucial factor for improving the situation of the Roma population, and consistent with the *Declaration of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015*, programs are being implemented to facilitate the inclusion of Roma children in the educational system at all levels. Correspondingly, the largest improvements have been noted in the sphere of education³⁷⁴ after nearly a decade of initiatives based on the *National Program for the Roma* and the *Decade of Roma Inclusion*. However, this does not mean that all challenges and obstacles have been overcome. The level of education among Roma communities is still very low, such that the average number of years spent in education is significantly lower compared to the majority population.³⁷⁵ Significantly, a large majority of Roma children are not included in quality early childhood education and care services from an early age. Specific challenges that relate to Roma inclusion in education, including preschool education, will be discussed in this chapter. The RECI+ Croatia Study results show that the Roma are socially excluded in many ways and that this exclusion encompasses deprivation across economic, social and political spheres of life.

4.2 Poverty and living conditions

4.2.1 Prior to any discussion on Roma inclusion in educational services, living conditions and their impact on children must be taken into account. Multiple poverty factors are particularly pronounced among Roma and inescapably have an enduring negative impact on children of all ages, particularly the youngest. In the RECI+ Croatia Study, most of the Roma households have low levels of different types of capital³⁷⁶ that adversely

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374 Compared to the other priority areas (health, employment and housing) of the *Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015*.

375 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 39.

affect the ways in which they can look after their families and themselves. Only 9% of all respondents were employed or self-employed while 46% of all households reported that social welfare benefits were the main source of income and almost all households (87.41%) were the beneficiaries of some type of social welfare. There were also low levels of cultural capital in relation to formal education: 17% of respondents had no schooling; 48% had only attended some years of primary school; 24% had finished primary school and only 8% had finished secondary school. Clearly, cultural capital as well as the role of prejudice and economic exclusion shapes employment possibilities that in turn determine the amount of economic capital available to Roma families.

- 4.2.2 Low levels of economic and cultural capital, inadequate/unsafe housing, lack of amenities and space, and poor child nutrition are examples of multiple poverty factors in family environments that are likely to contribute significantly to educational disadvantage and maintaining the obstacles Roma children and young people face in terms of attending and successfully completing school.

... if there are no conditions at home for doing homework, if seven of them live in a small space. ... Everything is done there: the cooking, baking, smoking, changing babies, sleeping ... all seven of them! How can a child learn and be at peace? (School principal)

- 4.2.3 Incontestably, the enduring impact of multiple poverty factors have a negative impact on children and their engagement with education, especially those levels of education that are non-compulsory such as preschool³⁷⁷ and secondary education, as well as on overall progress and achievement in education. This is a key challenge that demands a wide-ranging number of actions across all sectoral fields.

- 4.2.4 Eviction and inability to purchase properties at one location is a problem that has major consequences for children and the continuity of their educational experience.

They evicted a family with seven children, as if those people didn't live here ... as if they didn't have children who went to school, preschool, kindergarten. ... They didn't ask these people where they were going to go with seven children; they're not interested in this! (Tihomir, father of six children)

- 4.2.5 Besides poverty and poor living conditions, social, moral and environmental security, including child safety, are issues for many Roma families. Results from the RECI+ Croatia Study show that there are specific challenges in particular locations where Roma live that threaten children's overall wellbeing and security. These include:

- Health hazards in living environments (rubbish, vermin, stray and sick animals, contaminated unsafe water, inadequate sewage disposal, etc.)
- Absence of safe spaces for children/youth in settlements (for organised activities, play, sports, socialising, etc.)
- Absence of safe access for children to transportation for getting to school (unsafe and unregulated traffic, lack of traffic lights at pedestrian/school crossings, manned gated rail crossings, lack of regular police patrols, under-aged dangerous drivers, etc.)

376 Bourdieu (1986) claimed that an individual's position in a social space is not defined by class but by the amounts of capital he/she has access to. He distinguished four different forms of interconnected, interdependent and context-specific capital that together constitute advantage and disadvantage in society: economic, cultural, social and symbolic (pp. 241–258).

377 Ideally, preschool should be longer and more comprehensive than the compulsory preparatory pre-primary programs.

- Negative role models and behaviour in living environments (crime, alcohol, drugs, gambling, corporal punishment, etc.)

4.3 Home and community environment

4.3.1 Contact with non-Roma populations is characteristically weak, considering that the Roma frequently live in segregated and isolated Roma settlements and have low rates of employment in the formal labour market. Findings show that to make ends meet, some Roma participate in temporary, seasonal work and the collection of waste materials, such as metal, glass and paper. Recently, this type of work has become less lucrative because the recession has resulted in more people being engaged in these activities and there is stronger competition for waste materials as well as new restrictions and tighter controls on this type of work. As a result of their exclusion from the formal economy and low levels of cultural and social capital as well as exclusion as a result of prejudice and discrimination from the majority population, many Roma remain in their settlements and are thus not fully socially or economically integrated into mainstream society. This exclusion is more pronounced in Roma settlements in rural areas as they are often more physically segregated from the majority population.³⁷⁸ Generally, access to information and support is limited since there is a marked absence of services/activities within Roma settlements that are isolated. In most cases, immediate family members and other members of the local Roma community make up the social capital network. In addition, findings show that access to a computer or the internet is highly variable, depending on location.

4.3.2 A comprehensive early childhood service that pays particular attention to parents/ caregivers and works with other community services is unavailable in Roma settlements. A regular liaison with family services and/or social services for children would considerably help disadvantaged families at risk. This could bring about significant empowerment in terms of positive parenting, quality support to children in (early) education and increasing parents' competencies to compensate for low levels of education. For example, RECI+ results consistently show that although parents/ caregivers would like to help their children with homework, they are unable to do so because they do not know 'how' and often have to rely on older children to teach younger members of the family.

Only when this younger one doesn't know something then she [referring to her 15-year-old daughter who left school in Grade 6] helps him. I would help him ... but I can't when I'm illiterate, how can I help him? (Nikica, mother of six children)

4.3.3 Results from the RECI+ Croatia Study show that specific challenges in the home and community environments threaten children's access and happy and successful integration into quality early childhood education and care. These may include:

- Lack of adequate family support (financial, employment, information, social, moral, etc.);
- Lack of local (e.g. mobile outreach teams of professionals) educational services for adults (provision of information about preschool educational opportunities [despite the obligation on preschools to provide this information to parents], 'how' to teach their children, job training and community improvement) and child tuition to build confidence and delight in positive learning experiences;

378 In this study, three of the five locations were segregated. All three of them were rural; the other two were urban.

- Lack of information and education for parents/caregivers (parenting skills, child development, hygiene and health, childcare, nutrition, potential safety hazards in the household, optimal environments for growing children, optimal learning environments for children, educational games, etc.);
- Lack of knowledge and awareness about new support to Roma families in terms of free access to preschool educational places; and
- An apparent lack of confident cultural and ethnic identity manifest in a seeming reluctance on the part of some parents/caregivers to preserve Roma cultural customs (language, folk dance and music, traditional crafts, cuisine, etc) and to support the intergenerational transfer of this knowledge to their children.

4.4 Role of Roma women, mothers and caregivers

4.4.1 Gender inequality is a key part to this challenge. Roma women often suffer triple discrimination: for being Roma, for being poor and for being women. Roma women are extremely vulnerable as they are often exposed to greater social exclusion than Roma men and to greater segregation than women in the majority population. Reports have shown that the exclusion of Roma women is evident in the sphere of employment, education, healthcare and housing. Moreover, Roma women have limited access to social welfare and assistance, financial services and participation in public and political life.³⁷⁹ Data on employment in general shows a very low employment rate among the Roma population, but the employment rate of Roma women is even lower. Reports have also shown that the educational structure of Roma women is lower than that of Roma men, which is usually the result of gender discrimination within the Roma community.³⁸⁰ As Roma mothers are closely connected to children in terms of their upbringing and education, it is important to separately consider as a further challenge the extent and impact of Roma women's social exclusion.

4.4.2 Analysis of the research interviews in the RECI+ Croatia Study shows that early marriage and/or social responsibilities related to childcare and domestic duties contribute to the high levels of illiteracy and low levels of education among Roma girls and women. 'Early marriage' and multiple childbearing are socially prescribed within some communities; for the whole sample of 96 Roma women the average number of children was 4.47 and their average age at first birth was 18.33 years.

4.4.3 In addition to early family responsibilities, low educational skill is a further hindrance to Roma women. Most of the women were unemployed (91%) and had never worked in the formal economy. Evidently, Roma women are particularly vulnerable in terms of educational opportunities, as traditional roles and multiple childbirth ties them very early to the household and to childcare responsibilities. However, their access to information and support is even more limited, since there is a marked absence of services/activities within Roma settlements. As a result of social responsibilities towards the family and traditional values, young girls are often deprived of an education at an early age.

4.4.4 Evidence from the RECI+ Croatia Study is encouraging in terms of the marked increase in participation of Roma girls in formal education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The wellbeing of the family, and especially of children, is closely related to the mother's level of education, so gender inequality in access to education is of special concern and these are thus important improvements. Moreover, such changes may enhance mothers' aspirations regarding the education of their children, especially their daughters.

379 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 79.

380 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

- 4.4.5 During focus group discussions in the RECI+ Croatia Study, general consensus regarding the ideal age to start preschool was around four years of age.
- 4.4.6 Roma men at some locations were especially opposed to the idea of publicly provided early care; this pattern clearly reflects stereotypical gender expectations. Moreover, some women voiced discomfort about institutionalised care since it was their view that this is not compatible with Roma ideals of 'proper' motherhood. A mother of seven children said that she would be abandoning her children if she took them to a regular preschool facility and would not be a 'good' mother if she 'left them' at such an early age.
- 4.4.7 On the whole, focus groups at three of five locations evaluated nursery or preschool facilities as a good form of care and early education, but parents were unable to enrol their children due to unemployment, financial reasons (high cost of attending kindergartens irrespective of assistance with fees) and a lack of available pupil places in preschool settings. Progress and achievement at school can be markedly improved if children are included in early childhood education and care services. However, there are many challenges still present in this aspect of policy, provision and practice.

4.5 School success and integration

- 4.5.1 Early education services from an early age in public integrated preschool facilities are often inaccessible to many Roma children for a number of reasons that have been discussed in this report. Formal educational experience for Roma children usually occurs just before they start primary school, which does not adequately prepare them for school. In many ways, Roma children are disadvantaged from the start and are more challenged in relation to school success and integration compared to children from the majority population. In addition, there are a number of other challenges related to poverty and wellbeing that need to be taken into account.

Children simply can't have what they need to wear, shoes ... for school. Children go to school but they can't have a lot of what they need because of poverty. (Zdravka, mother of two children)

- 4.5.2 The vast disparity between local governments in the extent and quality of early education services provides no guarantees to young Roma children of access to quality early childhood education and care. Although primary school is free in the Republic of Croatia, there are many additional and associated costs that Roma parents are frequently unable to meet. Many of these costs are also incurred by participation in early childhood education and care services. These include the cost of clothes, shoes, some extra-curricular activities and school excursions. Inability to meet these costs often translates into feelings of exclusion as well as the incapacity to succeed. There is no uniform regulation regarding the co-funding of these necessities. For example, books and food³⁸¹ are free for primary school children in Zagreb but in other places this largely depends on the fiscal capacities of local governments and the efficiency of social services.

My child didn't get books until the fourth month [two months before the end of the school year due to the inefficiency of the Centre of Social Welfare]. So, of course my child wasn't able to learn and follow what was going on in class like everyone else. ... and then, my child, of course, failed the year. And that is the worst thing that can happen. (Miljenko, father of seven children)

If I had money now, I would give it to my children for meals at school [which cost 90 HRK per month for each child] ... but I haven't. I can't pay for that! (Ornela, mother of eleven children)

381 Meals at school are available to children whose parents are beneficiaries of family support or unemployed.

4.5.3 Motivation among Roma pupils is reported to be another factor that invariably has an impact on school success and integration. In trying to understand this apparent lack of motivation on the part of some Roma children to go to school, the RECI+ Croatia Study tried to investigate possible causal factors within the schools themselves that appear to present a challenge to acceptance, access, regular attendance and satisfactory levels of attainment. Regarding motivation from teachers, a Roma boy said that teachers do not motivate pupils when they just say 'You've got a bad mark, fix it!' Instead, he said that teachers need to talk to their pupils and encourage them to get a better mark so they do not fail the grade. Failing a grade in the upper grades of primary school is quite risky because this is when most pupils approach 15 years of age, when they no longer have to be at school. Unwelcoming responses and subliminal prejudiced attitudes on the part of teachers in preschool settings have an equally negative impact on young children in terms of their desire to attend and feel confidently open to happy and successful learning.

As for teachers, I'm not satisfied. They don't encourage children, especially Roma children, they don't encourage, they don't make an effort. (Pavel, father of three children)

The system is strict and rigid and does not recognise any special conditions for minorities. Those who are a part of an adapted program, the system recognises this, and a lot of Roma here are a part of this program, which means that they have a reduced curriculum and that teachers by law must reduce the workload. (Psychologist at a primary school)

4.5.4 A study among 140 teachers and nine other school professionals investigated the extent to which teachers working with Roma children possess intercultural competence. This study was conducted in seven primary schools with high numbers of Roma pupils in the County of Medjmurje. Results indicate the need for the further development of intercultural competence and language teaching competence through professional teacher training.³⁸² Nearly 40% of the respondents had never visited a Roma settlement and 56.4% of respondents felt they were not sufficiently trained to carry out intercultural education.³⁸³ The teachers and school professionals in the sample had a negative view in relation to the introduction of elements of Romani culture into teaching, particularly with regard to Romani language and history. Almost two-thirds (62.4%) felt their school does not need to introduce electives such as the history and culture of the Roma and Romani language; 84.6% felt that Croatian pupils should not have to learn these subjects.³⁸⁴ These attitudes and teachers' lack of intercultural training underscore why the availability of in-service training is crucial for the success and integration of Roma pupils. In another recent evaluation, a large share of teachers who have taught or teach in multicultural classes had not participated in any in-service training at all in the previous two years.³⁸⁵

4.5.5 Two recent international projects aimed to improve the competence of teachers, teacher assistants and principals who work with students of migrant origin and/or those who speak insufficient Croatian.³⁸⁶ The programs are 'Strategies of Learning and Teaching Croatian as a Second Language (2011–2012)' and 'SIRIUS: European Policy Network on the Education of Children and Young People with a Migrant Background'. However, informed sources pointed out that these projects did not include preschool teachers and

382 Šlezak and Lapat, 2012, p. 301.

383 *Ibid.*, p. 302.

384 Contrastingly and encouragingly, 86.6% thought that teachers should be trained to work in multicultural environments, that teachers working with the Roma should be familiar with cultural specificities in the Roma community (92.6%), that Roma history and culture should be studied (61.7%) and that schools should encourage cooperation between Roma parents and Croatian pupils (89.9%).

385 The evaluation evidence did not include an assessment of the availability, quality or disposition of relevant in-service training opportunities.

386 Communication with Educational Teacher and Training Agency (ETTA).

further assessed that many preschool teachers are not currently competent enough to work with Roma children who have very poor or no knowledge of the Croatian language, which consequently largely diminishes the positive impact of the preschool experience.³⁸⁷

- 4.5.6 A further challenge in the education system is the prejudiced bullying of Roma children and their parents in educational institutions and in the larger community. Primary school children often face various forms of discrimination, most commonly bullying among peers and racial/ethnic insults from pupils of the majority population towards peers of different minority ethnic backgrounds. These damaging experiences often make Roma children feel excluded and are quite detrimental to their self-esteem, which is a prerequisite for school success and social integration.

Older boys from school tease me, irritate me ... they say: 'you're a Roma, you're a cigan ...' some dirty words. (Danijel, 12)

- 4.5.7 Segregation is another challenge and a form of discrimination that further distances and divides Roma children from non-Roma children; these artificial boundaries inevitably hinder school access, success and integration. Although the Office for National Minorities Report mentions segregated classes (52 Roma-only classes compared to 1,978 mixed classes),³⁸⁸ there is qualitative research evidence from the RECI+ Study that segregation also exists within classrooms and it was further claimed by some Roma pupils that segregation in classrooms also influences their success and social integration.

Our teacher arranges us according to colour. ... When we had to do a comprehension task she put all the Roma pupils together and the Croatsians separately ... first of all, she asks all the Croatsians and then if there is some time left, she asks us. (Dario, 13)

- 4.5.8 As a result of all these obstacles to school success and integration, many Roma children 'drop out' early. Concerns surrounding this issue are also sometimes relevant in the context of Roma children attending preparatory pre-primary year classes. Although precise and recent numbers for early school drop-out rates are not available, pupil drop-out in Croatia nationally is relatively low. According to Eurostat data for 2006 this rate was 5.3%, which was a significantly lower drop-out rate than that of many European countries and significantly lower than the EU 27 Member States' average (15.3%).³⁹⁰ Since Croatian law stipulates compulsory schooling until age 15, the numbers of drop-outs from primary education do not include those children who cease schooling after age 15. According to findings from the 2011 survey by the UNDP, World Bank and European Commission, the share of Roma (aged 18–22) in the category of 'early leavers' was 87% compared to 31% for the non-Roma population living in close proximity.³⁹⁰ Most respondents categorized as 'early leavers' indicated 'being sufficiently educated' as the main reason they were no longer attending school.³⁹¹

... the largest oversight of local authorities or state authorities ... is that every year hundreds of Roma children drop out of the system [primary school education] and no one does anything about this! (Roma NGO representative)

387 Communication with Open Academy Step by Step Croatia.

388 Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, 2013, p. 13.

389 Miličević and Dolenc, 2009, p. 14.

390 Brüggemann, 2012, p. 48. This is defined as not attending school and did not complete education higher than lower secondary or short-term upper secondary.

391 *Ibid.*, p. 72.

4.6 Implementation gaps

- 4.6.1 Although measures of the *National Program for Roma (2003)*, *Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015*, and the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020* have been adopted and are being implemented, there are still numerous gaps in policy, provision and practice. The implementation of Roma inclusion measures is characteristically unsystematic and slow.
- 4.6.2 The preparatory pre-primary year programs are a good example of the haphazard way in which measures are implemented. The previous non-compulsory programs were not standardised; they varied in length, quality and dynamics, depending on location. As a result of unsystematic implementation, a number of Roma children were excluded. In addition, there were no efficient national mechanisms for monitoring progress among Roma children who attended these programs. Likewise, the current national strategy is a very ambitious compilation of goals. Full realisation of measures will require continual and additional activities as well as the significant allocation of additional funds. Clearly, a major problem is that there are inadequate resources and allocation of resources is also unsystematic and potentially discriminatory. Evidently, there is a lack of both horizontal (between and within ministries) and vertical coordination (between ministries and local government), with regard to co-financing to ensure that everyone has equal access. Since the education and care in public integrated preschool facilities is decentralised to the level of local governments (with different fiscal capacities) and primarily accessible to children whose parents are employed, Roma children are often excluded. Generally, more coordinated effort from and between state bodies as well as local authorities is required to ensure access to quality education, including preschool, for all Roma children.

It is a fact that when it comes to Roma children more effort, more education ... inclusion of additional persons who would help them during that initial period is required. Education facilities are not equipped in an adequate way with the necessary services, pedagogically, psychologically. (Roma NGO representative)

- 4.6.3 One significant gap in policy and provision that hinders many Roma young children from accessing quality early childhood education and care is the lack of available pupil places in kindergartens and other preschool settings. Organisational and administrative obstacles in many localities lead to a shortage of preschool places, long waiting lists and a lack of effective communication in terms of the dissemination of vital and practical information about educational opportunities despite the obligation on preschools to provide this information to parents. The unhindered integration of the Roma community in preschool provision at the local level is a challenge that seriously and negatively impacts Roma children's access to quality preschool facilities.
- 4.6.4 A further challenge with implementation relates to the lack of uniform monitoring and evaluation of the quality of preschool educational settings. Many Roma children (especially from urban areas) are usually included in Roma-only kindergartens and separate Roma playgroups if these facilities are close to where they live. Although these preschool facilities were positively evaluated by both Roma parents and children in the RECI+ Croatia Study, they were also criticised for not providing more than a babysitting service, which raises the issue of quality and the lack of mechanisms for raising standards of provision. Ensuring the quality of these programs in the absence of public, integrated early education services, is thus another challenge.³⁹²

392 The RECI+ Croatia Study methodology did not include full assessment and analysis of the nature of provision within these institutions.

The problem in these NGOs is that they are very fragmented in Croatia, in fact most of these Roma NGOs function at the level of one family, usually an extended family ... this becomes a question of whether this is a conventional kindergarten or child care of an extended family. (Roma NGO representative)

- 4.6.5 It should be noted that the RECI+ Croatia Study confirmed that the Roma often have weak ties to institutions and to the people who control them. Moreover, there is wide variation in the needs of different Roma communities and Roma representatives, particularly Roma women, are virtually absent from decision-making processes related to education. To improve policy, provision and practice related to schooling, focus group participants suggested that representatives from the Roma population could be employed in local administration, health services, social welfare centres, the police, etc. to help the Roma to realise their rights.

I would employ Roma where Roma have the most problems! They have the most problems in social welfare. As a priority, a Roma person needs to be employed there, someone who is educated, who has some experience in this area ... and then a lot of problems could be solved in a much better way. (Denis, father of four children)

- 4.6.6 The RECI+ Croatia Study highlights a number of key problems that disproportionately affect Roma. These include: poor living conditions, grinding poverty, low levels of education and employment, poor support in home and community environments, poor health conditions, etc. In sum, the Roma have very limited access to different forms of capital that in turn determines their marginalised position. The State has a responsibility to see these problems as they really are and to resolve them accordingly. However, there is a lack of accurate data that reflects the real situation. The 'actual' size of the Roma minority in the Republic of Croatia is still unknown. Moreover, there is little statistical or research data on the Roma especially in the areas of education, social welfare and health. Policies that would directly benefit Roma communities are undermined by the lack of ethnically disaggregated data that would allow a sharper focus on identified inequalities of access, usage and/or distribution. Without collection of ethnically disaggregated data, the effectiveness of existing measures will remain unknown and progress in Roma inclusion cannot be seriously evaluated.

- 4.6.7 Although there are national indicators on Roma participation in education and the MoSES provides information on enrolment, repetition of grades, access to extra tuition and after-school care, etc. for the different levels of education, the total number of Roma children who should be enrolled at each level is not publically available. Moreover, the available data does not show the actual ages of children in particular preschool groups, grades or years spent in preschool/primary/secondary school or when children started school. Success rates for each level of education as well as gender differences in progress and achievement are also not available. In short, there is an absence of vital information on the actual impact of educational programs on Roma children and their families. National data that allows ethnic disaggregation should not only provide numbers but also child/pupil results as indicators of the quality and effectiveness of education, for Roma children. Without this type of reliable, quality evaluative, gender/age-sensitive data and research, policies are unlikely to be effective.³⁹³

393 A recent report commented on the problems linked to data collection in Croatia. See <https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocslImages//Sjednice/2014/186%20sjednica//186%20-%203.pdf>

4.6.8 The situation for Roma is not solely dependent upon their acquisition of cultural or financial capital because racism and xenophobia create an environment of discrimination in Croatia that negatively affects most Roma on a daily basis. Roma inclusion depends on changes in the attitudes of the majority and success cannot be measured in terms of how 'Croatian' the Roma are willing to become.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

- 5.1.1 The *RECI+ Croatia Report* is intended to aid the appropriate and legally competent authorities in ensuring the development of unhindered and equal access to quality early childhood education and care services for Croatian Roma children, through advocacy rooted in credible and informed research. The Conclusions and Recommendations of this Report thus aim to guide the appropriate authorities and agencies (including civil society organisations) with responsibility for promoting social inclusion, improved access to goods and services and social cohesion in the Republic of Croatia. This assistance is seen as complementary to, and supportive of, the current efforts being undertaken by the Government of Croatia and international organisations to give special attention to the difficult position of the Roma population, which is evidenced by their economically, geographically, culturally and politically marginalised status. Interconnected and multi-causal, these negative factors create a closed circle of social exclusion from which many Roma are unable to exit without significant support.
- 5.1.2 The justification for the Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (RECI+) Croatia Study is well founded. There is a growing body of robust international evidence surrounding the importance of investment in early childhood education and care. Investment in early childhood development is linked to direct beneficial returns in the form of fairness and social justice, the protection of children's human rights and economic returns in the medium and longer terms.
- 5.1.3 The strength of the RECI+ Studies is their inclusive approach. The authors of this report are confident in their belief that the health, wellbeing and education of young children demands a holistic and systemic approach that sees the interconnectedness of the multidisciplinary elements that impact the lives of infants and young children, their families and their communities. For this reason, the attendant recommendations in this Report encompass issues of health, housing, social welfare, education and other relevant matters, such as discrimination and segregation, that condition the circumstances and the quality of Roma children's early childhood education and care. This approach is compatible with many of the reports produced by the European Union and the Council of Europe, and this approach is also reflected within the Republic of Croatia's own *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*. It is to be noted that the latter key document has been formally welcomed by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.³⁹⁴

394 Concluding Observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, Geneva, 19 September 2014.

- 5.1.4 The absolute need to ensure Roma children have equitable opportunities to access high quality, child-centred kindergartens and preschools in their early years is a central priority of the Sponsoring Agencies, who are indebted to the research work of the team at the Institute of Social Sciences, Ivo Pilar.
- 5.1.5 The legislative and professional framework for education in the Republic of Croatia provides for the development of a modern knowledge based society. The underpinning values include: a commitment to provide high quality education for all; equality of educational opportunities for everyone; mandatory general education with the involvement of all children in the education system; respect for human rights and the rights of the child; and the development of intercultural curricular and teaching that positively recognises and welcomes diversity. In relation to interculturalism, the National Framework Curriculum clearly sets out to ensure that all pupils qualify for life in a multicultural, multi-ethnic world and are able to develop respect and tolerance for human difference.
- 5.1.6 The legal infrastructure for early childhood education and care in the Republic of Croatia is robustly inclusive by intent. The preschool learning and care of young children between the ages of six months through to their enrolment in mandatory primary school is seen to be rightly part of the education system. Compliance with various international Conventions clearly stipulates that the State is responsible, and obliged to provide learning and care provision for all children of preschool age. Such commitments and responsibilities are confirmed and fortified under the Preschool Education Act.³⁹⁵
- 5.1.7 Despite the commendable and encouraging legislation and multiple Convention background, the equal inclusion with dignity and respect of Roma children in education, including preschool provision, is demonstrated by this Report and others to be unsatisfactory. There are still a multitude of challenges at all levels of the education system that create obstacles for these children's access to such services and provision.³⁹⁶
- 5.1.8 This RECI+ Croatia Study highlights the significantly lower level of resources allocated to programs that support the family and child wellbeing in the Republic of Croatia, compared to other European countries and the EU Member States' average. Evidence also demonstrates that Croatia lags behind other European countries in regard of the level of participation of children in nurseries and kindergartens.
- 5.1.9 One of the most relevant findings from the RECI+ Croatia Study is that only 20% of all Roma children aged between 0–6 years in Roma households included in this study are accessing any kind of preschool early childhood education and care programs or preparatory pre-primary year programs in their communities.³⁹⁷ The recently introduced mandatory aspect of this latter provision will undoubtedly improve the situation and it is welcome that in circumstances where preschool settings are not available, the provision is located in local primary schools.
- 5.1.10 Part of the reason for the exclusion and segregation of many young Roma children in preschool and kindergarten settings, where they do have access to these services, is related to the reported prejudiced anti-Roma attitudes of many non-Roma parents. There are, of course, many other complex causal factors which have been covered in the body of this text. However, the lack of social inclusion of Roma families at the local level

395 Preschool Education Act, *Official Gazette*, 10/97, 107/07, 94/13.

396 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 38.

397 As previously mentioned, this was confirmed in a study conducted by UNDP, World Bank and the European Commission that focused on the social and economic development aspects of Roma communities in Croatia and the region. The rate of preschool enrolment of children in the 3–6 age range was 21% for Roma and 45% for non-Roma (UNDP, WB and EC, 2011).

is a challenge that seriously and negatively impacts Roma children's access to quality preschool facilities.

- 5.1.11 The findings also conclusively show that there are significant disparities in levels of provision in the early childhood care and education system that disproportionately have a negative impact upon Roma infants and children. In conducting the RECI+ Croatia Study, it was discovered that none of the children at one location were included in any type of educational service prior to primary school.
- 5.1.12 Previous reports have also indicated that Roma children's enrolment into first grade can be delayed on the basis of poor test results, which are said to be mostly caused by these children's limited knowledge of the Croatian language. Indisputably, however, preschool education for Roma children is fundamentally important, as this markedly improves their readiness for primary school.
- 5.1.13 These RECI+ Croatia Study findings are confirmed by an honest assessment made in the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*: 'The data show that Roma children are insufficiently included in the system of early childhood education and care'.³⁹⁸
- 5.1.14 In the light of these assessments and the RECI+ seminal research findings, it is worrying that there is a mismatch between the current structure and practice in preschool provision and the equitable participation in that system of Roma families with young children. The Sponsoring Agencies and the authors of this Report offer Recommendations in the knowledge that there is a serious desire and intention on the part of the Republic of Croatia to improve the levels of Roma participation in early childhood education and care services. The recommendations in this Report are thus offered in the strong belief that they are in the universe of the possible. This belief is fortified by the positive and specific commitments contained within the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020* and the recent positive developments initiated by the MoSES.³⁹⁹ It is thus important that direct action and interventions continue to be made as soon as possible by all key stakeholders. These Recommendations attempt to provide a plan for various improvements in policy, provision and practice that will be required to achieve a more equitable level of access to high quality preschool education for Roma children.
- 5.1.15 It is to be noted that many of the Recommendations strongly indicate that in the interest of equality, policy developments need to seek ways of funding services centrally, albeit sometimes indirectly.⁴⁰⁰
- 5.1.16 The Recommendations take due account of Croatia's bleak economic reality, but also recognize that the national and internationally respected principles of human rights and social justice cannot be compromised. The situation of Roma in most countries of Europe, including the Republic of Croatia, represents a serious fault-line in the commitments to human rights, democracy, the rule of law and social cohesion, such that responsible actions are morally and politically unavoidable. These Recommendations thus support the ambitions of the *National Strategy for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2014–2020)*.⁴⁰¹ Furthermore, they are founded on the ratified Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Republic of Croatia's commitment to allocate adequate budgetary resources in accordance with Article 4 of the Convention for the implementation of children's rights and, in particular, to increase the budget allocated

398 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2012, p. 39.

399 *Ibid*, pp. 39–40.

400 UNICEF, 2013a.

401 Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2014, *National Strategy for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2014–2020)*.

to social sectors and address disparities on the basis of indicators related to children's rights.⁴⁰²

- 5.1.17 In fulfilling its statutory and Convention duties and responsibilities, and the further active implementation of the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*, the following recommendations need to be considered and addressed:

5.2 Recommendations for central Government Ministries/offices and particularly, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports – first step priorities

- 5.2.1 Given the finding in this RECI+ Croatia Study, that relevant communications and information regarding preschool opportunities are failing to reach many Roma families, despite an obligation on preschools to provide prospective parents with such information, a formal review should be undertaken by the legally competent authority to identify any measures and changes in policy that might be required to ensure that Roma families have ready access to, and are in full possession of, all information related to preschool opportunities in their locality. This review should include an assessment of the role of Roma NGOs in this matter, for it is clear that they, with others, should play a key role in keeping communities well informed about available public services.
- 5.2.2 Given the finding that access for Croatian Roma children to quality preschool provision is frequently hampered by the juxtaposition of isolated Roma settlements and suitable local preschool provision, including preparatory pre-primary classes, the existing commitments within the national preschool policy for the provision of free transport should be routinely exercised by the legally competent authorities for the benefit of Roma communities.⁴⁰³ The MoSES is to be commended for making such provision that require municipalities and or regional governments to facilitate access to the preparatory pre-primary classes in the nearest preschool or primary school setting, by the provision of free transport. While this is to be welcomed, the policy is in some cases a hostage to unexplained delays and with no accountability for the reluctance or failure to implement.
- 5.2.3 While Roma community based provision (Roma provided/supported kindergartens or playgroups) may have many advantages, caution needs to be exercised by all providing authorities to avoid preschool provision that is *de facto* ethnically segregated. The desirable aim in all preschool provision should be to secure school and class pupil cohorts that reflect the Croatian ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity as far as possible. To achieve this aim may require a reorganisation of local provision, which again may demand home-to-school dedicated transportation with adult escort support and supervision, particularly for those Roma children living in isolated and/or segregated rural settlements. The MoSES and or other legally competent authority should review all existing preschool provision by each Municipality across the country, in the context of securing the achievement of this equality aim, starting perhaps with a special emphasis on Medimurje County.
- 5.2.4 Given the finding that young Croatian Roma children fail to benefit on an equitable basis from preschool provision prior to the compulsory preparatory pre-primary year, the MoSES, in collaboration with other relevant legally competent authorities, should give careful consideration to the policy implications of ensuring that all young Roma children, including those with disabilities,⁴⁰⁴ should be provided with two full compulsory years of

402 See Concluding Observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, Geneva, 19 September 2014.

403 Law on Preschool Education *Official Gazette*, 10/97, 107/07 and 94/13.

404 UNICEF, 2013a.

quality free preschool provision that leads naturally, and with professional support, to the preparatory pre-primary year. In this case, the children would attend a preschool setting for a minimum of half a day (five hours), five days per week during the school semesters, and for this to include a free hot meal and transport as required. The possibility of securing international financial resources should be explored in the interests of initiating such a national policy in order to make a step-change in the life chances for Roma children.

- 5.2.5 Given that this Report and other research, find that after-school programs for Roma children are often unavailable due to a lack of classroom space and/or available teaching staff, and despite the duty that has been placed on school founders to make such facilities available to ensure the implementation of the national policy in the interests specifically of Roma children, a review should be commissioned by the legally competent authority to explore the extent of such opportunities, or lack of them, in both preschool settings and primary schools, and to report with recommendations on what specific measures and changes might be required to ensure that Roma children benefit on an equitable basis from after-school care and extra curricular activities. It is important for Roma children in the preparatory pre-primary year to have an opportunity to participate in cultural and sporting activities with peers, as this would be very beneficial to many Roma children in terms of social growth and Croatian language development.
- 5.2.6 Given the finding that many of the hindrances for young Roma children to access early education and care are linked to family poverty, the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth, together with the Office for Human Rights and Rights of Minorities which is coordinating the implementation of the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*, and any other appropriate legally competent authority, should jointly and urgently seek to identify the necessary financial resources, so that routine payments in kind could be made to Roma families in need, to facilitate regular attendance at preschool institutional settings, including the preparatory pre-primary year settings. This might include the provision of grants/vouchers for shoes and clothes and possibly transport in those areas where this particular provision has yet to be implemented. As the most recent UNDP, UNHCR and UNICEF (2014) report reminds the reader, that poverty operates as a 'series of causes and effects in the process of exclusion and discrimination in education, social and health care, employment, housing and obtaining the status of citizenship'.⁴⁰⁵

5.3 Recommendations for local government – second step priorities

- 5.3.1 The RECI+ Croatia Study findings confirm that Roma children's participation in quality preschool education and care is too frequently prevented on account of families living in substandard and makeshift accommodation that lack basic services and facilities necessary to keep young children safe, clean and healthy and get them ready on a routine basis to attend preschool facilities. Minimising hindrances of this nature is clearly a very complex issue. Pursuant to the Environmental Protection Goal and Objectives in the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*, urgent contingency measures need to be adopted by Municipalities and all other relevant legally competent authorities, and with support from central government funding, to ensure that all Roma families with young children have adequate facilities (e.g. safe water sources, modern in-house sanitary facilities and sufficient resources for heating, cooking and lighting) as a temporary contingency measure until alternative 'legal' and suitable accommodation can be secured.

405 UNDP, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2014.

- 5.3.2 The MoSES and or other relevant legally competent authorities, should collaborate with appropriate and proven training providers to initiate a centrally funded directive requiring all Municipality Education Departments to devise and implement a program of in-service training for all staff (including teachers, assistants, mediators, cooks, caretakers, gardeners, etc.), in every form of local preschool provision, on anti-bias, social justice and ethnic equality in education.
- 5.3.3 The MoSES, and or other relevant legally competent authorities, should initiate a centrally funded directive requiring relevant Municipality Education Departments in districts with Roma settlements to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of fully integrated preschool pupil places available for Roma children, in addition to providing to all preschool institutional settings clearly communicated guidance regarding legal duties to not discriminate against Roma parents seeking admission for their child(ren).
- 5.3.4 A major new professional initiative: the appointment of specialist advisors to work in counties/municipalities with significant Croatian Roma settlement. The MoSES in collaboration with all relevant legally competent authorities, and pursuant to the prescriptions of the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020* for the Education Teaching and Training Agency (ETTA) to train specialist educators to work with Roma children, should initiate a centrally funded directive requiring relevant Municipality Education Departments and other relevant legally competent authorities in districts with significant Roma settlement to appoint sufficient numbers of well-trained specialist ECEC advisors (pursuant to Education Objectives 1–7 in the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*) to assist in preschool institutional settings with Roma children in order to: a) improve the quality and standards in early childhood development and education; b) place particular focus on assisting preschool settings to orientate their policy, provision and practice towards an intercultural perspective; c) stress the importance of play in early childhood development; d) be welcoming and accepting of pupils’ first language(s) and for these to be celebrated and used as far as possible in teaching and learning; e) assist staff in preschool institutional settings to develop professional skills of behaviour management that respect the rights of the child and seek to prevent violence against children in the home; f) develop professional skills related to raising the expectations of teachers, assistants and parents of the children’s capabilities; h) appreciate the need for all teachers and assistants to have opportunities to develop knowledge and skills so they can include within their repertoire of professional responsibilities teaching all children the Croatian language; i) aid the senior management of preschool settings to establish the routine process of a curriculum audit in the interests of ongoing curriculum development and, if needs be, the inclusion of teaching and learning that will promote the knowledge, skills and understanding that would foster in all children, a sense of, and love for, equality, diversity, peace and human rights; j) formulate where necessary outreach strategies for securing the institutional acceptance, access and regular attendance of young Roma children from isolated and marginalised communities;⁴⁰⁶ k) formulate strategies to engage with, and involve fully, Roma parents in the life and work of the preschool, on a foundation of building trusting and mutually respectful relationships; l) in addition, to help teachers and assistants in preschool settings develop informed strategies and routines for building the confidence and capacities of Roma parents in the education of their own children, as occurred with the delivery of the well designed “Getting Ready for School” and “Parenting with Confidence” programs (a longer term aim when resources permit would be to scale up these initiatives across the country to improve families’ collaboration with health and social care workers to enhance parenting skills with a strong focus on early childhood development and care); m) stress the importance of recruiting teachers and/or assistants with Roma ethnic backgrounds,

406 *Ibid.* The report confirmed that the central funding of many services is required to irradiate the patchwork of local provision.

training them to be fully professional and deploying them to be supportive and engaged with all children in the preschool setting irrespective of ethnic background; n) stress the importance and facilitate the furthering of continuous professional development for all staff in early childhood education and care settings and for regular in-service training that allows for the dissemination of new knowledge and the sharing of professional skills and experience (possibly aided by REYN)⁴⁰⁷; and o) advise teachers and assistants in preschool settings with Roma children on the development of strategies for establishing mobile toy/story book libraries and the professional modelling of educational play, which can make valuable contributions to parents' confidence and ability to engage with the early childhood development and education of their own children.

5.3.5 The RECI+ Croatia Study findings confirm that Roma children's participation in quality preschool education is too frequently prevented on account of families living in impoverished, unsafe, unhygienic and unhealthy neighbourhood environments. Municipalities and other legally competent authorities have a key responsibility in this context, particularly in relation to the maintenance of residential community infrastructure such as roads and walkways, safe water sources, sewage disposal and regular collection of household waste. Punitive sanctions in accordance with existing laws, should be imposed by central government on those Municipalities that fail to comply with these basic requirements of sound public health and environmental safety for Roma communities.

5.3.6 The RECI+ Croatia Study findings confirmed that Roma children's participation in quality preschool education is too frequently undermined, on account of the fact that most Roma parents, particularly mothers, have a very low level of educational attainment. Literacy levels are significantly low in Roma communities generally. As reflected in Objective 7 of the Education Goal and Objectives in the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*,⁴⁰⁸ it is known that the level and quality of parenting skills on the part of poor and marginalised families crucially depends upon the education levels of parents. In recognition of this fact, the MoSES in collaboration with other relevant ministries, the ETTA, the NCEEE and national and local Roma NGOs, should initiate a centrally funded directive requiring all relevant Municipality Education Departments in districts with significant Roma settlement to recruit (from the community), appoint, pay and train 'Roma Community Learning Champions' (both women and men) for each Roma community/settlement. Their role would include promoting youth and adult literacy and lifelong learning within the Roma community, and providing advice and access to educational courses and training on the topics of basic literacy, relevant vocational training, personal safety (including the management of incidences of racism and discrimination), community empowerment and leadership, volunteering, the exercising of rights, and cultural and political engagement. The education of women and mothers should be a particular focus. The existence and role of Roma NGOs should be seen as important in the support and development of this recommendation.

5.4 Recommendations related to educational reform and data collection – third step priorities⁴⁰⁹

5.4.1 Given the relatively poor Roma participation rate in all forms of early childhood education and care, and in the interests of Roma equitable inclusion in preschool provision, a formal review should be initiated by the MoSES to consider the status of ECEC within

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407 Romani Early Years Network (REYN) is a network of emerging and established professionals and para-professional working with Roma communities in the field of Early Childhood Development (ECD). REYN is hosted and managed by the International Step by Step Association in partnership with Open Society Foundation's Roma 'Kopaci' Initiatives of the Early Childhood Program (OSF/ECP).

408 Government of the Republic of Croatia. 2012.

409 A number of these recommendations are part of the national education policy. See *Official Gazette*, 124/14.

the overall education system, with the objective of identifying any measures or changes necessary to ensure that the same level of importance is awarded to this sector of education as all the other phases of education including primary and secondary schooling. This might include the possible need for central government to make further rebalancing of budget allocations in education by investing more heavily in preschool education and care provisions.⁴¹⁰ It is acknowledged, however, that there have been recent positive movement in this direction initiated by the MoSES.

- 5.4.2 The MoSES and or relevant legally competent authority should formally commission a review and audit of the current quality of preschool provision and practice in terms of curriculum and programs of study, resources, teaching/pedagogy and learning, assess its current compliance with, and match to, the best international examples of ECEC (such as those in the United Kingdom's Early Years Foundation Stage), and make any recommendations necessary to secure the required improvements and their sustainability.
- 5.4.3 The MoSES, in collaboration with other legally competent authorities, should review and publicly report on the national structure and capacity of school inspections to ensure independent, regular and specialist inspection of all preschool institutional settings in the interests of assessing and evaluating outcomes and ensuring targeted improvements, pursuant to the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*,⁴¹¹ and raised standards of access, attendance and attainment by all children and particularly by children from disadvantaged and/or marginalised backgrounds, including Roma. Inspection reports must be seen as central tools for the official monitoring and evaluation of education provision in the Republic of Croatia, but more importantly, for the effectiveness and efficiency of the strategies aimed at Roma inclusion in quality preschool and early education. Inspection results should be reported publicly with transparency and full professional rigour, and without fear or favour. Such a review process should also assess the recruitment and training needs of inspectors and the inspection skills and competences demanded in relation to educational inclusion including inter-cultural education and the teaching of the Croatian language as a second and/or additional language.
- 5.4.4 Following the necessary transposition within the nominated context of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* and the availability of qualified personnel, the teaching of Romani languages in the early years should become a component of the inter-cultural approach to education, in order to strengthen children's self-identity and esteem and to improve the levels of representation of Roma people as language teachers in the Croatian education system.
- 5.4.5 Given that there is no legal barrier to the collection of data by ethnicity in the Republic of Croatia, the MoSES should collaborate with the Central Statistic Bureau, the Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, the Agency for Data Protection, and other legally competent authorities, to devise and implement strategies to systematically collect educational data that allows for disaggregation by ethnicity (rather than by culture and socio-economic characteristics), gender and age in ways compatible with the *Constitution of the Republic of Croatia* (Article 37 outlines guarantees regarding safety and secrecy of data), pursuant to those already listed in the Framework for Monitoring Progress in the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*. Collection of educational data, beyond allowing for disaggregation of data by ethnicity, gender and age, should document the percentage ratio of all household

410 UNICEF, 2013a. The UNICEF survey confirmed the need for enhanced national investment in quality early childhood and parenting programs.

411 *Ibid.*, pp. 38–49.

members of preschool age who are participating in preschool education, their standards of attainment and their declared first language, as well as the percentages of pupil preschool and school attendance. Such data is essential if the above recommendations are to be realistically monitored and evaluated for their overall effectiveness. The policies and strategies adopted should take account of the need for regular and systematic data collection so that ongoing analysis may be conducted in order for any necessary changes or refinements to policy, provision and/or practice to be made without undue delay.⁴¹² It is acknowledged, however, that a number of important steps in this direction have been taken in recent years by the Republic of Croatia pursuant to the goals of the *Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015*.⁴¹³

- 5.4.6 The Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities and the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, together with any relevant legally competent authorities, pursuant to the Framework for Monitoring Progress Goal and Objectives 1–4 in the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*,⁴¹⁴ should commission research that will identify and recommend the broad policies required to boost the confident, voluntary ethnic self-ascription of Roma people in the Republic of Croatia, so that national census data is more accurate and the policy and fiscal demands for Roma inclusion can be more accurately known, mapped and assessed. The complex nature of the legalisation of Roma citizenship is rightly addressed within the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*.
- 5.4.7 The Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, the Agency for Data Protection and any other relevant legally competent authority should, pursuant to the aforementioned Goal and Objectives 1–4, provide legal direction and guidance to all Government Ministries, Municipalities and other relevant state agencies/offices and other legally competent authorities regarding the standardised routine and any special collection of data on Roma communities (including gender and age) across all the sectoral fields including health care, employment and economic inclusion, housing and living conditions, environmental conditions, education (including preschool education), social welfare, child protection (including the numbers of Roma children looked after by state institutions), the justice system, and levels of societal cultural and political inclusion and participation. Such data will encourage and facilitate inter-sectoral cooperation and inclusive policy developments.
- 5.4.8 It is further recommended that the responsible Secretariat of the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020* should add the additional recommendations contained within this Report to the aims and objectives of the said strategy, and closely monitor their implementation with clearly defined success criteria.

5.5 Recommendations related to poverty reduction and health care – fourth step priorities

- 5.5.1 The RECI+ Croatia Study findings confirm that Roma children’s participation in quality preschool education is too frequently prevented on account of family poverty, which is a symptom of unemployment and economic exclusion. This serious casual factor, as a central hindrance to Roma children’s participation in preschool education should be addressed, pursuant to the Employment and Economic Inclusion Goal and Objectives 1–7 in the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020* and in cognisance of the

412 Open Society Foundations – Roma Initiatives, *‘No Data-No Progress’*, New York 2010.

413 See *Official Gazette*, No. 103/03 and its amendments *Official Gazette*, 118/06 and *Official Gazette*, 41/08.

414 *Ibid.*, pp. 120–123.

National Strategy for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2014–2020). In addition, to improve the competitiveness and employability of Roma men, women and young people, the Croatian Employment Bureau, together with any other relevant legally competent authority, should formally address the reality of prejudice and discrimination facing Croatian Roma in the labour market in the Republic of Croatia. A comprehensive draft of measures needs to be designed and robustly implemented with the aim of enhancing Roma employability and employment opportunities and thus reducing the stress, pain and lifelong damage of absolute family poverty.⁴¹⁵

5.5.2 The RECI+ Croatia Study findings confirm that Roma children's participation in quality preschool education is too frequently prevented on account of families living below the poverty line for reasons related to the problematic eligibility of some claimants and the reported inadequacy of some public welfare payments. It is encouraging that the Goal and Objectives surrounding Social Welfare (children, youth, women, the elderly, the disabled and all vulnerable to the risks of human trafficking, sexual exploitation and other forms of violence with an emphasis on women and children) within the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*⁴¹⁶ are being seriously addressed.

5.5.3 The RECI+ Croatia Study findings confirm that Roma children's participation in quality preschool education is too frequently prevented on account of the poor health of many of the children. The primary causal factors include Roma families having problematic access to adequate health care services because of cost factors, (including immunization programs), eligibility issues, lack of health education that would improve Roma families' knowledge of healthy lifestyles, service delivery issues (e.g. isolated and segregated rural settlements), unhygienic living environments and discrimination exercised by some health care practitioners. Pursuant to the Health Care Goal and Objectives in the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*⁴¹⁷, the *National Health Care Strategy 2012–2020* (which pays special attention to protecting the health of preschool children),⁴¹⁸ and the *Strategy for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Republic of Croatia (2014–2020)*,⁴¹⁹ the objective of raising the health of infants and children needs to remain a critical area of focus. It is to be welcomed that the latter strategy initiative, adopted on the 17th December 2014, includes a series of measures targeted on the health of mothers and children. These commendable planned actions need to be implemented without undue delay. In addition, the Croatian National Institute of Public Health in collaboration with any other relevant legally competent authority, should address the urgent necessity to develop a program through which it will comply with its statutory duty to monitor and evaluate the provision of continuous and coordinated health protection for Roma infants and children through visiting home care services, pediatricians, general practitioners / family physicians and the epidemiological service of the Institute of Public Health in collaboration with the social welfare centres. Relevant in-service training programs for all health practitioners should be an essential element of delivering good health services to Roma communities.

5.5.4 The RECI+ Croatia Study findings confirm that Roma children's participation in quality preschool education is too frequently undermined on account of the exercise of prejudice and discrimination on the part of the majority population. This is often manifested in restricted access to quality preschool provision in settlements, and planned or *de facto* organisational segregation. Pursuant to the Elimination of Discrimination Goal and

415 UNDP, UNHCR and UNICEF, 2014, p. 120.

416 *Ibid.*, pp. 70–80.

417 *Ibid.*, pp. 59–69.

418 Ministry of Health, Republic of Croatia, 2012.

419 Strategy for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Republic of Croatia (2014-2020). See https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/ZPPI/Strategije/STRATEGY_COMBATING_POVERTY_SOCIAL_EXCLUSION_2014_2020.pdf

Objectives 1–4 contained within the *National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020*,⁴²⁰ the appropriate and relevant legally competent authorities, in collaboration with the Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, should seek ways to be able to provide adequate core funding for rights and community support-orientated Roma NGOs to: monitor and report instances of ‘hate speech’, ethnic prejudice and related acts of discrimination; support and counsel victims; provide specialist legal and financial advice and relationship counselling services, including support and guidance in regard to domestic violence and child-rearing without ‘smacking’;⁴²¹ and, in addition, ensure that this work has a particular focus on all educational policy, provision and practice matters.

420 *Ibid.*, pp. 112–114.

421 UNICEF, 2013a.

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ANNEX 1.

Research Methodology

The RECI+ Study conducted in Croatia is part of a wider set of country studies to explore and document the experiences of Roma children and their families with early childhood provision. It therefore broadly adopts the methodological approach developed for previous Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (RECI) studies (Bennett, 2012). However, some important new elements to the Croatian Study have been introduced after careful consideration of the experiences with the previous studies. RECI studies are based on the combined analysis and interpretation of multiple data sources relevant to the situation of young Roma children, their families and communities. These sources are located at different levels of the early childhood education, care and development (ECEC/ECD) system. At the macro-level, sources include national and international policy documents and publicly available data such as demographic and socio-economic data, figures on enrolment at various levels of the education system, etc. A critical analysis of these documents provides the necessary context for the micro-level part of the study: the documentation of the 'lived experience' (van Maanen, 1998) of children and families from participating Roma communities in five locations in Croatia.

While this two-pronged approach has been a key feature of all RECI studies to date, an important new element was introduced to the study for Croatia. Members of Roma communities that would become research sites for the RECI+ Study were involved in the research process from the very beginning. It is not unusual for community representatives to be involved in research as key informants and to facilitate access to the community. However, methodological control usually remains solely with the university based researchers. At the beginning of the RECI+ research process in Croatia, academic members of the research team (based at the Ivo Pilar Institute, Zagreb), together with preschool and primary school teachers from the research locations and community representatives who would join the research team as Roma research assistants, embarked on a joined social justice training provided by Korak po Korak (the Open Academy Step by Step Croatia). A further methodological workshop was organised, which enabled the research team to test/examine/analyse the developed research questions that were relevant to the local communities as well as to the wider research informed advocacy purpose of the study. That process, too, facilitated the 'fine-tuning' of research instruments to establish and use the most appropriate tools in local contexts.

The RECI+ Croatia Study involved qualitative research that included fieldwork observations, surveys, in-depth interviews and focus groups. As outlined in the Introduction of this Report, the main aims of this project were to depict the complex

situation of Roma children and their families in Croatia, and to document best practices as well as the gaps and hindrances related to Roma children's access, attainment and progress in education. To achieve this, the study had to extend its scope beyond the immediate ECEC and ECD practices and allow the wider social, economic and cultural context to enter the picture. This critical contextualisation made it possible to detect the 'real' problems experienced by Roma children and their families, and to identify the challenges they face on a daily basis.

Members of the core research team are based at the Institute of Social Sciences, Ivo Pilar in Zagreb, Croatia: Lynette Šikić-Mičanović, Ph.D., supervisor (Anthropology); Marija Geiger Zeman, Ph.D. (Sociology); Danijel Vojak, Ph.D. (History); Ivana Radačić, Ph.D. (Law); Marica Marinović Golubić, M.A. (Sociology); and Tihana Štojs, M.A. (Sociology). Maja Štambuk, Ph.D., consultant, (Sociology) and Tea Sertić M.A. (Sociology), supported the team as external collaborators.

Roma research assistants joined the Institute's research team at an early stage of the process: Senija Seferović, Suljo Seferović, Dragoljub Nikolić, Stanoje Nikolić, Stanoje Todorović, Radovan Balog, Dejan Oršoš, Duško Kostić, Jovica Radosavljević, Jovana Petrović, Branko Đurđević, Veli Huseini and Suada Avdi.

The Roma research assistants accompanied researchers from the Ivo Pilar Institute at each field site and facilitated access into Roma households. They also supported the surveys on demographic features of households/families and provided translations when necessary, as well as interpretations of the collected data from an 'insider' perspective that enabled the non-Roma members of the research team to reframe their interpretations as necessary. The Roma research assistants participated in discussions about collected data with the research team, facilitated feedback from the community to the researchers, made suggestions related to the conduct, focus, and direction(s) of the research and identified possible tensions and problems in the field.

The Croatian research team worked closely with OSF consultants Dr. Adrian Richard Marsh, Professor Mathias Urban and Arthur Robert Ivatts OBE, along with the senior management team of the Open Academy Step by Step Croatia: Nives Milinović, Sanja Brajković and Asja Korbar.

Fieldwork began September 2013 and ended mid-November 2013 and was carried out at five different locations: Kozari putevi, Capraške poljane, Parag, Darda and Vodnjan/Galižana. These locations were chosen to capture the heterogeneity (in terms of language, religious, cultural, social and historical differences) of Roma populations that live throughout Croatia.

Research sites cover areas with significant Roma populations as well as rural and urban locations.

The research instruments used in this study included eight different types of questionnaires and eleven different interview guides as well as a focus group format. To learn about experiences and perspectives on issues relevant to Roma children's education, many different people including children were included in this research study. This reflects a holistic approach that does not view children's inclusion in education as separate from other spheres. Most of the fieldwork for this research study was conducted in Roma communities with Roma parents/carers, children and leaders. Research was also conducted at preschools and primary schools with principals, pedagogues and teachers. Members of the wider community such as social workers, local authority representatives, health workers and Roma NGOs were also included in the research sample.

The duration of fieldwork at each site was five days and was always conducted by five researchers from the Institute at each site. Between 25–30 questionnaires were collected at each location. In addition, seven interviews with parents/guardians and seven interviews with their children were conducted at each field site. Parents/guardians who were interviewed received gift vouchers valued at 100 HRK and their children received picture books, colouring books, colouring pencils donated by UNICEF and Step by Step. Following this part of the research, focus groups were conducted at each site with parents/guardians of kindergarten/school aged children (excluding community members who were part of the interview sample). Focus group participants also received a gift for their children.

To share insight into the main research instruments used in this study, a short overview of two interview formats will be described. Interviews with Roma parents/carers consisted of questions related to their i) personal educational experiences; ii) children's early childhood experiences; iii) children's preschool/school experiences; iv) parental involvement in education; v) homework; vi) learning at home; and vii) parental expectations and aspirations. Interviews with children that required parental consent consisted of questions related to i) their past preschool experiences; ii) present school experiences; iii) parental involvement; iv) homework; v) learning at home; and vi) children's aspirations. They were also asked to do drawings of their home/particular rooms/settlement and kindergarten/school that were followed by conversations and explanations about these drawings.

Wider Sample

4 questionnaire/interviews with preschool principals
4 questionnaire/interviews with preschool teachers
5 questionnaire/interviews with primary school principals
5 questionnaire/interviews with primary school teachers
4 questionnaire/interviews with local authorities
4 questionnaire/interviews with social workers
1 questionnaire/interview with a health worker
3 questionnaire/interviews with Roma NGOs

Five questionnaires/interviews for each category reflect a full response rate. There were only four questionnaires/interviews with preschool principals and teachers as there were no Roma children at one location. It should be noted that it was most difficult to obtain data from health professionals.

Methodological Outlook

Involving members of Roma communities in the research process at an early stage was an important development in the Croatian RECI+ Study. The social justice training required and enabled both academics and community representatives to reconsider their frame of reference and challenged the university based members of the team to position themselves in relation to issues of inequality, injustice and exclusionary racism. This is a crucial step away from the 'comfort zone' of traditional academic research. It no longer allows researchers to maintain an epistemological and methodological distance from the researched. It will be important, for future RECI+ Studies, to carefully evaluate the experience in order to develop a fully participatory approach. It will be necessary, too, to review the epistemological underpinnings of the research and, for example, to learn from work carried out using indigenous methodologies in other parts of the world (Merton et al., 2012; Smith, 2012).

ANNEX 2.

Population Data

Table 9. Population by Ethnicity, 1900–2011 Censuses

	Roma	Republic of Croatia
1900	7,207	2,400,766
1910	12,267	2,621,954
1921	12,241	2,739,888
1931	14,284	4,024,601
1948	405	3,779,858
1953	1,261	3,936,022
1961	313	4,159,696
1971	1,257	4,426,221
1981	3,858	4,601,469
1991	6,695	4,784,265
2001	9,463	4,437,460
2011	16,975	4,284,889

Sources: *Statistički godišnjak kraljevine Hrvatske i Slavonije [Statistical yearbook of the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia] No. 1, 1905, (1913), Zagreb, pp. 24–35; Statistički godišnjak kraljevine Hrvatske i Slavonije [Statistical yearbook of the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia] No. 2, 1906–1910, (1917), Zagreb, pp. 23–24; Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva od 31 januara 1921 god. Sarajevo [Definite results of 31 January 1921 census], (1932), Sarajevo p. 2; Godišnjak banske vlasti Banovine Hrvatske: 1939–26. kolovoza-1940, (1940), Zagreb, p. 297; CBS, 2013d, p. 11.*

Table 10. Roma and Total Population by Religion, 2011 Census

	<i>Roma</i>	<i>Republic of Croatia</i>
<i>Catholics</i>	8,299	3,697,143
<i>Orthodox</i>	2,381	190,143
<i>Protestants</i>	62	14,653
<i>Other Christians</i>	177	12,961
<i>Muslims</i>	5,039	62,977
<i>Jews</i>	—	536
<i>Oriental Religions*</i>	2	2,550
<i>Other Religions, Movements and Life Philosophies</i>	124	2,555
<i>Agnostics and Sceptics</i>	25	32,518
<i>Not Religious and Atheists</i>	255	163,375
<i>Not Declared</i>	144	9,018
<i>Unknown</i>	197	12,460
Total	16,975	4,284,889

Source: CBS, 2013d, p. 17.

Note: * This category includes Hinduism, Vaishnavism / Hare Krishna movement, Taoism, Baha'i, Shinto and other Eastern religions. This information is from CBS, 2011.

Table 11. Roma and Total Population by Gender and Age, 2011 Census

			0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24
<i>Roma</i>	<i>Males</i>	8,542	1,367	1,234	1,220	906	680
	<i>Females</i>	8,433	1,339	1,221	1,199	919	717
	<i>Total</i>	16,975	2,706	2,455	2,419	1825	1,397
<i>Republic of Croatia</i>	<i>Males</i>	2,066,335	109,251	104,841	120,633	124,918	133,455
	<i>Women</i>	2,218,554	103,458	99,476	114,769	119,259	128,203
	<i>Total</i>	4,284,889	212,709	204,317	235,402	244,177	261,658

			25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54
<i>Roma</i>	<i>Males</i>	651	578	493	390	356	251	
	<i>Females</i>	588	535	474	388	344	266	
	<i>Total</i>	1239	1113	967	778	700	517	
<i>Republic of Croatia</i>	<i>Males</i>	147,416	149,998	143,984	143,603	152,446	157,981	
	<i>Women</i>	141,650	144,621	140,770	143,330	155,115	162,521	
	<i>Total</i>	289,066	294,619	284,754	286,933	307,561	320,502	

			55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84
<i>Roma</i>	<i>Males</i>	181	126	46	35	22	3	
	<i>Females</i>	185	117	70	42	15	9	
	<i>Total</i>	366	243	116	77	37	12	
<i>Republic of Croatia</i>	<i>Males</i>	153,750	127,851	89,364	88,912	66,456	35,999	
	<i>Women</i>	158,068	144,889	112,638	123,489	109,070	72,105	
	<i>Total</i>	311,818	272,740	202,002	212,401	175,526	108,104	

			85-89	90-94	95 ≥
<i>Roma</i>	<i>Males</i>	2	1	—	
	<i>Females</i>	5	—	—	
	<i>Total</i>	7	1	—	
<i>Republic of Croatia</i>	<i>Males</i>	12,415	2,580	482	
	<i>Women</i>	35,226	8,178	1,719	
	<i>Total</i>	47,641	10,758	2,201	

Source: Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2011.

Table 12. Roma and Total Population by County, 2011 Census

County	Roma	Total population
<i>County of Zagreb</i>	258	317,606
<i>County of Krapina-Zagorje</i>	3	132,892
<i>County of Sisak-Moslavina</i>	1,463	172,439
<i>County of Karlovac</i>	26	128,899
<i>County of Varaždin</i>	711	175,951
<i>County of Koprivnica-Križevci</i>	925	115,584
<i>County of Bjelovar-Bilogora</i>	391	119,764
<i>County of Primorje-Gorski kotar</i>	1,072	296,195
<i>County of Lika-Senj</i>	21	50,927
<i>County of Virovitica-Podravina</i>	14	84,836
<i>County of Požega-Slavonia</i>	13	78,034
<i>County of Slavonski Brod-Posavina</i>	1,178	158,575
<i>County of Zadar</i>	12	170,017
<i>County of Osijek-Baranja</i>	1,874	305,032
<i>County of Šibenik-Knin</i>	22	109,375
<i>County of Vukovar-Sirmium</i>	253	179,521
<i>County of Split-Dalmatia</i>	8	454,798
<i>County of Istria</i>	858	208,055
<i>County of Dubrovnik-Neretva</i>	11	122,568
<i>County of Međimurje</i>	5,107	113,804
<i>City of Zagreb</i>	2,755	790,017
<i>Republic of Croatia</i>	16,975	4,284,889

Source: CBS, 2013d, pp. 22–59.

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Roma Education Fund

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www.romaeducationfund.org

UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS

Palais des Nations
CH–1211 Geneve 10
www.unicef.org/ceecis

Roma Early Childhood Inclusion+