

# Roma education in post-Communist Eastern Europe: Pathways for intervention to reduce levels of social exclusion

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# Roma Education in Post-Communist Eastern Europe:

## Pathways for Intervention to Reduce Levels of Social Exclusion

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### Abstract

The post-communist political shift to liberal democracies in Eastern Europe has given new hope to Romani communities scattered across the region. However, plagued by a history entangled with episodes of slavery, persecution, and extermination, many Roma remain suspicious about this transition, lacking faith that it truly extends beyond a nominal domain.

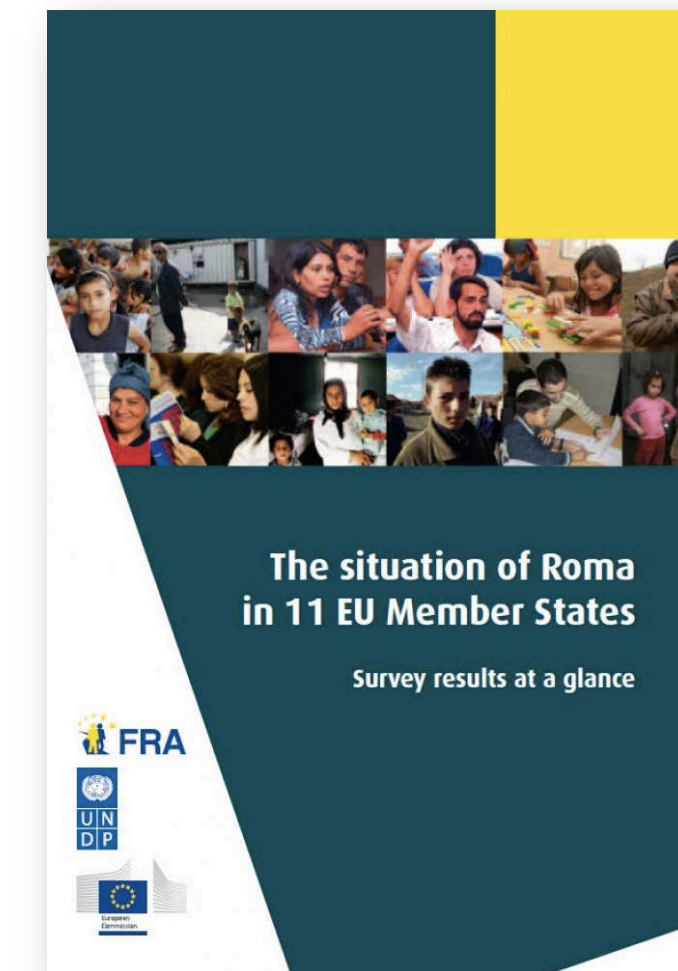
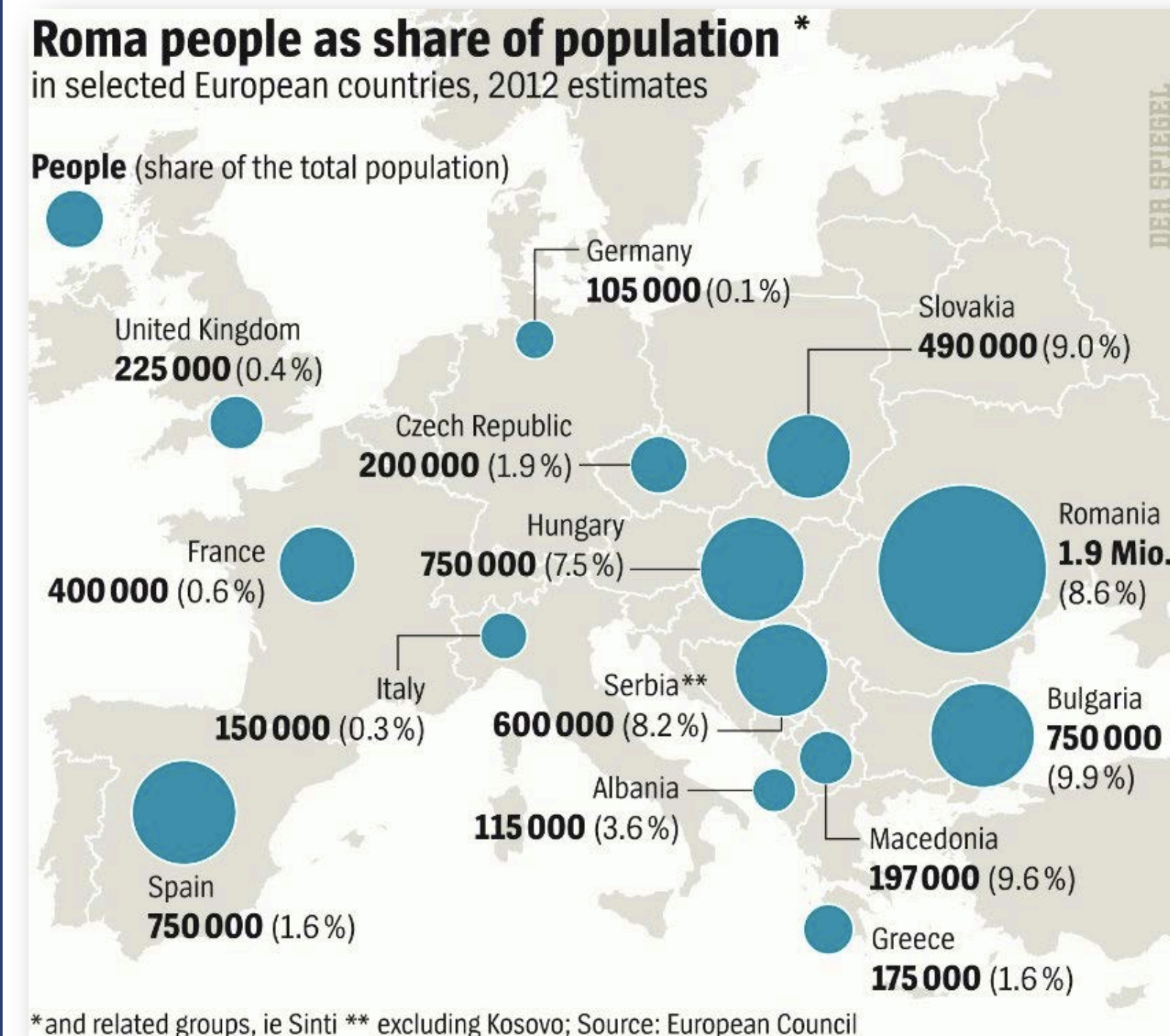
This thesis first offers a critical exploration into unpacking Roma culture - specifically their material disadvantage and discrimination - from both an abstract and realist perspective. By properly understanding the relationship between their experience with poverty and desires for cultural autonomy, forming a rational, multi-level plan to intervene becomes more accessible. Ultimately this leads to a series of policy interventions, particularly in the realm of primary and secondary education. Looking closely at this one area of the Roma experience with non-Roma institutions could provide key insights into their interaction with other overlapping exchanges, help to break down the centuries-old legacy of distrust and antagonism between the two sides, and promote a healthier environment for co-habitation.

### A Multi-Leveled Approach

- Subnational Organizations (Romani and non-Governmental Organizations)
  - Grassroots action helps to engage the wider community
  - Ability to lobby at the European level for their causes, especially if the nation-state is not responsive to their ideas and claims
- State-Level Intervention
  - Enacting antidiscrimination laws and introducing affirmative action programs
- Supranational Oversight
  - Applying pressure on states to enact change
  - Example:* European Union and conditions for accession (political/economic/social)

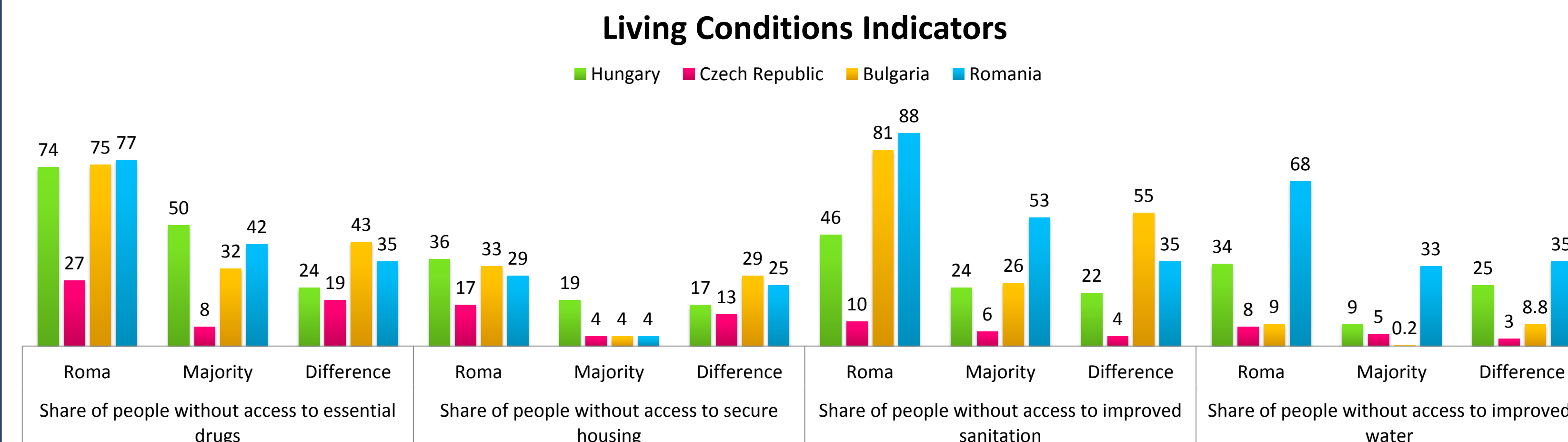


Romani children at an Italian elementary school  
(Source: *i-Italy*)



Educational Attainment of Roma in Selected East European Countries					
Country	Illiterate	Primary	Middle/Trade	Secondary	Postsecondary
Bulgaria (Roma)	8.5	36.7	46.2	7.8	0.9
Bulgaria (Bulgarians)	0.2	3.0	22.6	54.0	20.2
Bulgaria (Turks)	2.3	16.0	55.0	24.6	2.0
Czech Republic				2.5	
Hungary	9.4	78.3	10.4	1.5	0.2
Romania	22.0	33.7	42.2	3.9	0.7
Slovakia (Roma)				2.8	
Slovakia (non-Roma)				38.0	

Zoltan Barany, *The East European Gypsies*, p. 171



Maria Spirova and Darlene Budd, *Eastern European Roma in the EU*, p. 63

### Policy Interventions

#### Increasing Parental Involvement

- Provide literacy and adult education programs to reduce parents' hesitation and skepticism towards formal education
- By involving the wider family in the education process it can help to promote learning from within the established education system but in a manner that reflects the norms of Gypsy culture

#### Incentive Programs to Increase Attendance and Performance

- Helps to improve educational equity by allowing Roma students to reinvest in needed school materials
- Transforms the culture of schools and attitude of students towards academic achievement

#### Improving Schooling Flexibility and Breaking Down Institutional Rigidity

- Incorporate more 'hands-on' learning techniques to make a connection to traditional community-based learning
- Integrate additional cultural educational activities, which highlight Romani culture from a more positive perspective
- Turn toward the Head Start program as a model

### Conclusions and Implications

- Education can facilitate upward economic and social mobility, helping individuals to break poverty cycles
- However this must be coupled with other policies; if there is discrimination in labor markets or limited opportunities for post-secondary education, skills and formal qualifications will fail to translate into improved living conditions and reductions in social exclusion



Romani children at a camp in Montenegro  
(Source: Romedia Foundation)