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

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Persistent link: http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:106776

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2016

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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 underlines the relationship between their experience with poverty and discrimination, especially if the nation-state is not responsive to their ideas and claims.

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)

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

Educational Attainment of Roma in Selected East European Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Illiterate</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Middle/Trade</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Postsecondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria (Roma)</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria (Bulgarians)</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria (Turks)</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia (Roma)</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia (non-Roma)</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Living Conditions Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Roma</th>
<th>Majority</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Roma</th>
<th>Majority</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Share of people without access to essential drugs</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Share of people without access to secure housing</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of people without access to secure sanitation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of people without access to improved water</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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