



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
ADVOCATE OF THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY



SPECIAL REPORT – SELECTED CHAPTERS

Challenges in the Education of Roma Children and Youth

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Special Report – Selected Chapters

Ljubljana, January 2026

FOREWORD BY THE HEAD OF THE ADVOCATE OF THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY

Dear Readers,

On average, only around one in ten Roma children in south-eastern Slovenia complete primary-level education. This finding prompted the preparation of a special report on the challenges faced in the education of Roma children and youth.

A number of documents demonstrate that, in our society, significant importance is attached to achieving equal status for Roma children alongside other children, and that sustained efforts are being made to this end.

So, where does the problem lie? Why, despite good intentions, investments made and numerous measures implemented, has the situation not improved?

As this special report shows, one of the reasons is that the State does not monitor the effectiveness of the measures it implements. Among the recommendations addressed to the competent authorities is, once again, the need to collect and analyse data on the learning progress of this group of children and youth as early as possible. The introduction of performance indicators and measurable targets is also proposed. Only on the basis of such data will it be possible to determine whether the measures adopted by the State effectively reduce inequalities or what further improvements or additions may be required.

Public opinion surveys conducted by the Advocate regarding discrimination in Slovenia indicate that tolerance towards the Roma community has decreased among the general public since 2020. The level is lowest precisely in the part of the country where Roma children already face the greatest difficulties in accessing education. Tolerance towards a minority is also linked to the majority's sense of security.

As long as the majority feels threatened, progress in coexistence will be difficult to achieve. Therefore, a prerequisite for improving the education of Roma children and youth is to ensure the safety of all other residents living alongside Roma. Their repeatedly expressed concerns and hardships must be acknowledged. Solutions need to be introduced to enhance their sense of security and to counter feelings of marginalisation.

Miha Lobjnik
ADVOCATE OF THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY

Ljubljana, January 2026

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SUMMARY OF THE SPECIAL REPORT

Roma children and youth are much more likely than their non-Roma peers to experience poverty and social exclusion as adults. They find it difficult to improve their situation due to the interplay of various factors. Participation in the educational process is crucial for breaking this cycle. Higher levels of education improve employment opportunities, and attending school alongside others also means greater contact and interaction with the wider community. This enables their personal development and fosters a sense of belonging to society.

The State carries out or finances various activities in the field of education for children from Roma families, yet they are still far less successful at school than their non-Roma peers, particularly in south-eastern Slovenia. According to a study by the Institute for Ethnic Studies, from 2016/17 to 2020/21, on average, as many as around thirty out of one hundred Roma primary school pupils repeated a grade, compared to one out of one hundred non-Roma pupils. The Advocate examined why this is the case and how the situation could be improved. In doing so, it also took into account the views of the Roma community, as obtained through in-depth interviews, as well as the findings of organisations working in the field of Roma education.

It was found that an important factor contributing to this situation is that Roma children are mostly not included in organised pre-school programmes before starting primary education. Pre-school education is not compulsory and Roma parents largely do not trust kindergartens as institutions, preferring to care for the youngest children themselves. Children from Roma settlements, where their mother tongue is spoken at home and Slovenian is not, therefore encounter the language in which they must suddenly be able to think, read and speak only when they enter primary school. They also encounter the structure and functioning of educational institutions for the first time. This transition is too demanding for many children. They find themselves in an extremely difficult situation, which may be further exacerbated by teasing, exclusion or a lack of understanding from their peers. Consequently, school can be an environment in which they do not feel accepted or respected.

Some Roma parents shield their children from these issues by not forcing them to attend school. They also have limited knowledge of the education system and do not attribute an important role to education in improving living conditions or escaping poverty and social exclusion. On the other hand, even parents who want their children to succeed at school do not always have the necessary knowledge, experience or resources to support them effectively. The educational outcomes of Roma children are also negatively affected by their living conditions. In parts of Slovenia where Roma families have better housing, the participation and success of Roma children in education are higher.

In drawing up the special report, the Advocate also identified inconsistencies in the support system for children from Roma families in attaining education. Data are not collected on the actual reasons for these children's learning difficulties and absenteeism, nor on the other circumstances they face that affect their educational path. Nor are data collected on the effectiveness of the implemented measures to assist these children, with the main obstacle being that these measures lack clearly defined, measurable targets. Consequently, action is less effective than it could be.

Based on these and other findings of the report, the Advocate makes several recommendations to improve the situation.

1 CHALLENGES FACED BY ROMA IN EDUCATION

The key challenges faced by the Roma community in education are:

- Insufficient participation of Roma children in kindergartens, and irregular attendance by those already enrolled;
- An excessive level of absenteeism from primary school classes;
- An extremely low proportion of children completing primary school, especially in Dolenjska, Posavje and Bela krajina;
- Insufficient command of the Slovenian language;
- A large number of children placed in educational programmes with adapted delivery and additional professional support;
- Distrust of educational institutions by Roma parents, resulting in non-cooperation or non-involvement of these parents in their children's education;
- The low level of education among Roma parents and their lack of awareness of the value of knowledge;
- Early and forced marriages;¹
- Insufficient sensitivity among school professionals to the challenges faced by Roma children;
- Insufficient training of school staff for working in a multicultural environment;
- A lack of systematic support and incentives for continuing education after primary school at secondary and tertiary levels;
- These challenges are most evident in south-eastern Slovenia.

The contents are presented below in subsections under the following areas:

- Pre-school education
- Primary education
- Secondary, vocational and technical education
- Higher education
- Adult education and lifelong learning

¹ Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for National Minorities (2021). *Priročnik o prepoznavanju zgodnjih in prisilnih porok v romski skupnosti in o ukrepanju v teh primerih.*

Available at: https://www.gov.si/assets/vladne-sluzbe/UN/SIFOROMA-4/Urad-za-narodnosti_Nacionalna-platforma-za-Rome_prirocnik_165x240mm.pdf.

1.1 Pre-school education

"To achieve success in education, children must be included in organised pre-school education as early as possible."²

1.1.1 Description of the situation

In Slovenian society, Roma children are often perceived through a prism of prejudice and misinformation. They are often stigmatised as violent and dangerous, and seen as "more grown up" than their peers. This is a consequence of stereotypes and a lack of understanding of their actual living conditions.³

The 2023⁴ Romani Early Years Network (REYN) study was carried out in eleven European countries, including Slovenia.⁵ With regard to pre-school education, the study revealed that 40% of Roma children in Slovenia did not have the opportunity to attend a kindergarten located less than two kilometres from their home.

The authors of the Slovenian part of the REYN⁶ study found that Roma parents considered issues of safety, as well as the availability and accessibility of pre-school programmes, to be key during the pre-school period. With regard to children's safety, they said that physical safety (on the way to and from the institution) and emotional safety were the most important factors. They also considered the attitude of professional staff towards their children to be very important. They said that, in order to protect their children, they sometimes preferred to raise them at home rather than enrol them in kindergarten.

The majority of Roma parents participating in the REYN study agreed that attending kindergarten supports children's development in various areas. However, some parents expressed uncertainty about kindergarten, specifically that their children would not receive the same level of care as at home. They considered it essential to raise awareness among all parents of the importance of enrolling children in kindergarten. Some parents said that they did not have information about what was going on in kindergarten and therefore did not want to enrol their children.

All research to date has assessed the work of Roma assistants in kindergartens as a very positive systemic measure.

² From the Advocate's interview with a female member of the Roma community.

³ Zaviršek et al. 2019, p. 25.

⁴ Breaking the silence. The Right of Each Young Roma Children in Europe to Develop and Thrive. European REYN Early Childhood Research Study. Exploring the Status of Young Roma Children and their Families. Available at: https://www.reyn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/REYN_Early_Childhood_Research_Study-0524.pdf.

⁵ The study was carried out in Belgium, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovakia, Croatia, Kosovo, Italy, Hungary, Slovenia, Serbia and Ukraine.

⁶ The study in Slovenia was conducted by the Educational Research Institute, the Step by Step (Korak za korakom) Centre for Quality in Education.

The 2023 analysis by the Institute for Ethnic Studies, carried out for the Ministry of Education,⁷ confirmed the need to revise the position of Roma assistants in kindergartens and primary schools. In north-eastern Slovenia they are mostly employed part-time, which limits their contact with children and parents. Headteachers in this region observe progress in the regular attendance of kindergarten and in the knowledge of Slovenian among Roma children. However, the influence of schools on knowledge of the Roma language remains minimal. In south-eastern Slovenia, Roma assistants are mostly employed full-time and work with more children, which also means a greater workload for them. The work of Roma assistants has a positive impact on enrolment in kindergarten, regular attendance and knowledge of the Slovenian language, although it is not always possible to link all effects directly to their work.

As regards the inclusion of Roma children in pre-school education, the National Programme of Measures of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Roma 2021–2030 (NPUR 2021–2030) and the Strategy for Roma Education in the Republic of Slovenia 2021–2030 state that the competent ministry commissioned a national evaluation study on the needs, conditions and possibilities of compulsory inclusion of children in one of the pre-school education programmes with a view to reducing social, economic and cultural inequalities. This was carried out in 2024.⁸ The study found that in the last three school years approximately 1,000 five-year-olds, prior to entering school, were not included in any pre-school education programme, which the study considers alarming. Among these children, Roma children are particularly overrepresented. The number of kindergartens implementing the short programme (240 hours per year) is very low. In 2018–2020 only three kindergartens implemented it, seven in 2020/21 and ten in 2021/22. Over four years, only thirteen kindergartens had experience implementing the programme.

The evaluation study concludes that these programmes are particularly important for children from socially and culturally vulnerable backgrounds, among whom Roma children, children of migrants and refugees are the most frequently represented. In areas where the Roma population is present, Roma children are mainly included in short pre-school education programmes, whereas in environments without Roma communities such programmes are generally not implemented, as municipalities consider that there is no need for them.

According to the study, a total of 43 children were included in the short programmes. Of these, 39 were children for whom Slovenian was not their mother tongue (including Roma children), and four children had Slovenian as their mother tongue. Attendance rates were low on average and varied considerably between kindergartens (from 27% to 83%), which educators attributed to socio-economic circumstances of families, distance to kindergartens and lack of transport.

⁷ Bešter, R., Pirc, J. (2023). *Analiza dela romskih pomočnikov v vrtcih in osnovnih šolah*. Final Report. School Year 2022/23. Institute for Ethnic Studies.

Available at: <https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MVI/SRI/Romi/Analiza-dela-romskih-pomocnikovINV.pdf>.

⁸ *Analiza potreb, pogojev in možnosti obveznega vključevanja otrok v enega izmed programov predšolske vzgoje z vidika zmanjševanja socialne, ekonomske in kulturne neenakosti* (2024). Ministry of Education. Faculty of Education of the University of Maribor and the Educational Research Institute.

Available at: https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MVI/SRI/SKE/ES_glavno_porocilo4_cistopis.pdf.

Professionals reported that Roma children often experience difficulties in communicating in Slovenian, as well as with concentration, attention, fine motor skills and social skills. These areas received particular attention in the short programmes through language support activities, the development of pre-reading and pre-writing skills, and the promotion of social inclusion. To this end, they also made use of the *Appendix to the Kindergarten Curriculum for Working with Roma Children*, as well as multilingual didactic materials.

Several kindergartens emphasised the importance of prior work with parents, as trust among Roma families in pre-school education institutions was often weak. In some kindergartens, contact with families was established several months before the programme started, workshops for parents and children were organised, and leaflets were prepared in their mother tongue. An effective approach was also identified in settings that involved Roma assistants and municipal Roma coordinators. Transport from settlements and small practical incentives, such as providing the children with their own slippers or backpacks, strengthened their sense of belonging to the kindergarten and provided additional motivation for their inclusion. During focus group discussions, professionals emphasised the importance of systemic forms of support, such as including Roma assistants, educators and translators in pre-school programmes, as well as providing multilingual materials.

1.1.2 Findings of the Advocate's research

Advocate's focus group research

The participants in the 2022 focus group research conducted by the Advocate did not observe differences in the desire for knowledge and socialisation between Roma and non-Roma pre-school children. They emphasised the importance of including children in kindergartens during the pre-school period, including Roma children. Early inclusion in kindergarten contributes significantly to socialisation and learning in a safe and supportive environment.

The focus group participants agreed that the presence of Roma assistants in kindergartens is key to facilitating the inclusion of children in kindergartens and to improving parental involvement. They highlighted the high motivation of Roma children to learn in kindergarten and the negative impact of poor housing conditions and a lack of parental motivation on children's participation in pre-school education.

A major obstacle to the inclusion of Roma children in kindergartens is the lack of family support. Due to poor experiences, parents often do not trust educational institutions, which makes it necessary for kindergartens to be proactive in establishing contact with parents and in including children in kindergartens. Significant differences are apparent between Roma families depending on their social status, with families that are better integrated into society being also more supportive of the inclusion of their children in pre-school education.

Advocate's online survey on educational opportunities for Roma

Responses to the online survey showed that the reasons why Roma children do not participate in kindergarten are multifaceted and include:

- The non-compulsory nature of pre-school programmes: since kindergarten attendance is not compulsory, many parents decide not to enrol their child, partly because this entitles them to a higher child benefit;
- Attendance at kindergarten is an additional financial burden for many parents, and kindergartens are often distant from Roma settlements, posing challenges in organising transport;
- Poor housing conditions: in illegal settlements without infrastructure such as water, electricity and sanitation, it is difficult for parents to ensure that children are adequately prepared for kindergarten;
- Roma parents often do not trust educational institutions due to past negative experiences and fear of stigmatisation and discrimination;
- As many parents are unemployed, they do not consider kindergarten necessary for childcare, nor do they have an established daily routine that would require their children to get up early;
- Roma generally have a different lifestyle and do not attach the same importance to pre-school education as the rest of the population does, with community connectedness being at the forefront;
- Many parents fear dangers and accidents in kindergarten, and worry that their children would not be cared for as well in institutions as they are at home.

An organisation that works daily with Roma children, young people and parents in their local community presented the reasons why many Roma children do not attend kindergarten.

"In our experience, many Roma children do not attend kindergarten due to fear or uncertainty. They primarily attend kindergartens located within the settlements. Parents have no experience of the adaptation process and, due to a lack of knowledge about setting boundaries, they do not persist in encouraging their children to attend kindergarten when they do not want to go. Parents need continuous support, mentoring and guidance, for example regarding arrival and pick-up times (ensuring the child is not late), and how to deal with the challenges of kindergarten education. The challenge of inclusion in kindergartens outside the settlements is even greater. Here, educators need to be highly sensitive and provide support to parents and children in addressing additional challenges such as a foreign language, a new environment and new situations. In both settlements, pre-school children who regularly attend our programme are also included, particularly those whose parents or siblings have already been involved in our programmes."

Respondents to the online survey highlighted the need for greater systemic support to facilitate children's inclusion in pre-school education, as well as the need for targeted programmes to be developed for specific regions. Meal subsidies in educational institutions, parental awareness programmes and multifunctional Roma centres have proved effective. Some also proposed introducing compulsory kindergarten to ensure children are socially prepared for primary education. As pre-school education is not compulsory, many families, particularly those with fewer financial resources, decide not to enrol their child in kindergarten.

Advocate's research based on semi-structured interviews

In semi-structured interviews, Roma participants emphasised the importance of early inclusion of children in pre-school education, as this supports language learning, socialisation and the development of working habits.

The main challenges they mentioned were:

- Roma parents face difficulties such as a lack of organised transport, a lack of trust in educators, and financial barriers;
- Children who do not attend kindergarten often encounter language barriers upon entering school.

The following recommendations were made:

- Municipalities should provide free transport and free access to kindergarten;
- The Ministry of Education should strengthen the training of educators and the role of Roma assistants;
- NGOs should build trust between the Roma community and educational institutions.

An interviewee, who started pre-school education two years before primary school, shared her perspective on this period:

"I think education is crucial for breaking the cycle of poverty faced by the Roma community, and I still believe it is important to start at the beginning. If we want to be successful in education, children need to be included in organised pre-school education as early as possible. This is where it all begins – where children become socialised, learn the Slovenian language and develop a work routine. A great deal is established there, their potential is discovered, and if children are included in kindergarten fairly quickly, they can also begin to develop their full potential quickly. I believe that, for me as well, everything started with education.

People often ask me how I succeeded. I have to say that I did not have much support at home, but I was always motivated and encouraged to learn; with the crucial factor being high-quality teaching staff who recognised my potential. I am eternally grateful to them, not only for believing in me, but also for helping me to start believing in myself. I realised that I am capable and could stand out as a Roma woman."

The first positive experience for Roma children must take place already in kindergarten. An interviewee, who did not attend kindergarten herself, nevertheless enrolled all three of her children in kindergarten.

"If it were possible at the time, I would definitely have persuaded my parents to send me to kindergarten, because it would have made things easier for me. I enrolled my three children, although I enrolled my eldest son a little later, when he was around three years old, because I had started working. But I enrolled the younger two immediately, at the age of one, and I enrolled my daughter in kindergarten even before she was one year old."

Some interviewees reported experiences of exclusion and peer violence. One interviewee reported that the lack of pre-school experience created language barriers, which they later overcame with the help of peers and professionals.

Participants proposed greater enrolment of Roma children in kindergartens, the creation of a positive environment, free access to kindergartens and more support for multilingual families.

One interviewee stressed:

"First and foremost, I believe that all children, including Roma children, should have equal access to organised pre-school education. This means ensuring free kindergarten attendance for Roma children, because very often it is precisely the financial aspect that represents a burden on Roma parents. As they are mostly recipients of social transfers, even in the case of subsidised kindergarten fees, even 30 or 40 euros can sometimes be too much. Free access to kindergarten would enable many families to enrol their children more quickly, easily and effectively. The second thing I consider crucial is to work on raising awareness among professionals. Many professionals working in kindergartens and schools still have insufficient knowledge of the Roma way of life and therefore treat all children the same way. I find it offensive when a teacher or educator says that all children are essentially the same. This is, in fact, the worst thing anyone can say. Every child is unique and has their own individual needs, wishes and interests. Activities, objectives and needs must be adapted for each child individually. To achieve this, it is necessary to train these professionals to respect and accommodate diversity in the learning environment better, so that they can prepare suitable materials and didactic resources. This will provide children with a multilingual, multicultural learning environment."

Proactivity, coordination and cooperation between key health, social and educational services are essential to supporting children and families from an early stage.

An interviewee who works in the field of pre-school child development emphasised:

"They would certainly become more accessible if, from early childhood onwards, the key sectors that directly influence the child's development and the development of the family were to be connected with one another. These are health care, education and social services. These three areas should work closely together and have a common goal, because when a child is born, the parents and the family are born too. At that point, as a society, we have a responsibility – if we follow child development science – to offer support mechanisms to this young family that has come into being, so that it can find its place in the life it has entered. And in this process, it is essential that these three sectors – health care, education and social services – work closely together, connect with one another and have programmes and mechanisms, as well as information that is, in a way, interconnected and able to flow between them. In other words, there should be a flow of information and tracking for those families. The family will first come into contact with the healthcare system before the birth of the child. After the birth, a community nurse or midwife will come to the home and should have extensive knowledge about the importance of play and interaction. Not only about bathing the child or how to hold it in the bath or how to feed them, but as the first professional to bring knowledge about education, play, and all these things and activities that essentially stimulate child development to the family, including Roma families. At that point, we come into contact with social services, which in most cases is the second mechanism in the country that most Roma parents encounter, and there too, i.e. in social work centres, there should be trained staff who understand child development, the importance of family, the importance of interaction, the importance of education. Is the child enrolled in kindergarten? Do you need help? How can we connect you? In other words, there must be protocols and mechanisms in place. Then, of course, there is education in kindergartens and schools, as well as non-formal education, including the many NGOs in Slovenia, each of which carries out a wide range of various workshops. This is also linked to the fact that there is a certain flow between systems, and if this were connected, if this cooperation had a mechanism, everyone would strive towards a single goal. That every child can develop their unique potential, we all must create the conditions necessary for this – including the NGO organising a cooking workshop – so that they too have the knowledge to design workshops in a way that encourages potential and allows children to develop skills and competencies. In other words, we must all understand as a society that early childhood is not just the most beautiful period of a person's life, but a period in which 95% of the brain develops, and this brain plasticity later on is no longer as flexible as it is in the first three years. This makes it all the more important that these different programmes, services and systems work together and interact."

Summary of the results of the online survey and interviews

| Issues relating to pre-school education | Recommendations |
|---|---|
| Parents often fail to recognise the importance of pre-school education. | NGOs should build trust between the Roma community and educational institutions. |
| Children do not attend kindergarten due to distance. | Provide free transport for Roma children. |
| Parents' distrust and fear of dangers or inadequate care in kindergarten. | Strengthen the role of Roma assistants and train educators to work with Roma children. |
| Lack of socialisation before kindergarten attendance. | Introduce compulsory kindergarten for Roma children to support early socialisation. |
| Poor living conditions. | Provide free kindergarten for Roma children. |
| Financial barriers. | Introduce free kindergarten for Roma children and free transport to support social inclusion. |

1.2 Primary education

"Primary school was very important to me because my teachers were very supportive and motivating. I was always encouraged to continue my education because my teachers recognised my potential."⁹

1.2.1 Description of the situation

The key findings from several research studies relating to the difficulties experienced by Roma children in primary education are summarised below. Unlike pre-school education, primary education is compulsory in Slovenia.

The 2025 IMAD Development Report concludes¹⁰ that, while the overall accessibility of education is good in an international context, it is inadequate for some vulnerable groups, with the long-term social segregation of Roma children being of particular concern. The report highlights that Roma children, particularly those from south-eastern Slovenia, had faced significant barriers to integration into the education system for decades due to limited Slovenian language proficiency, social exclusion, a lack of incentives for inclusivity, and negative reactions from the environment. On average, only around a fifth of Roma children complete primary school. Consequently, entire generations remain socially excluded, exacerbating tensions within local communities. The report also highlights systemic gaps, such as the lack of integration of Roma culture and history into curricula, and the fact that official statistics often conceal the Roma as a vulnerable group. The Roma remain among the most vulnerable to long-term poverty, which is often linked to discrimination and intergenerational deprivation. The report also highlights the lack of targeted state measures.

The analysis of the situation of Roma and Travellers in public education states¹¹ that the enrolment rate of this population in primary and secondary schools in EU Member States is low. Although there are marked regional economic, housing and other differences between different Roma and Traveller communities in some countries, such as Slovenia, Belgium and France, absence from education remains a serious and widespread problem affecting all Roma and Traveller pupils.¹²

⁹ From the Advocate's interview with a male member of the Roma community. The quote has been edited for the purposes of this report.

¹⁰ Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development (2025). *Kakovost življenja v Sloveniji – Poročilo o razvoju 2025*.

Available at: https://www.umar.gov.si/fileadmin/user_upload/razvoj_slovenije/2025/slovenski/POR2025_01.pdf.

¹¹ European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. (2006). Roma and Travellers in Public Education. An overview of the situation in the EU Member States.

Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/179-roma_report.pdf.

¹² Ibid, p. 7.

The 2022 Ministry of Education study, conducted by the Institute for Ethnic Studies¹³, analysed the performance of Roma pupils in a selection of 27 primary schools where Roma assistants were active over the six-year period from 2016/17 to 2020/21. The study compared the performance of Roma and non-Roma pupils in these schools, and on this basis, the performance of Roma pupils in north-eastern and south-eastern Slovenia.

The study revealed that Roma pupils in these Slovenian primary schools face greater challenges than their non-Roma peers, namely:

- A very high proportion of pupils repeating a grade (between 19.8% and 33.5% of Roma pupils and between 0.6% and 1.2% of non-Roma pupils surveyed), with the highest numbers among Roma pupils in the 1st and 2nd educational cycles;
- Frequent early completion of primary school in 6th or 7th grade;
- Few Roma children have successfully completed the 6th, 7th or 9th grade – on average, 21.3% of those surveyed completed the 9th grade, compared to 12.3% of Roma pupils in south-eastern Slovenia;
- Better performance of Roma pupils in north-eastern Slovenia than in south-eastern Slovenia, and better performance of female Roma pupils compared with male Roma pupils;
- More frequent decisions regarding special educational needs, and a higher number of pupils being schooled at home.

In the surveyed primary schools, the proportion of Roma pupils was around 9% of all pupils over the six-year period studied (2016/17 to 2021/22). Around 54% to 58% of all Roma pupils in Slovenia attended these primary schools.

The Ministry of Education survey on the distribution of Roma pupils by grade generally shows a significant decline in enrolled pupils from the 1st to the 9th grade, although this is most often not linear. However, the distribution of Roma pupils by grade is only an indirect indicator of their performance and inclusion in the education system, as the values of this indicator also depend on other factors, such as demographic trends and parents' decisions to postpone enrolment of their children in the 1st grade. The survey found that fluctuations or declines in this proportion among Roma pupils in north-eastern Slovenia are less pronounced than among their peers in south-eastern Slovenia. On average, only 12.3% of Roma pupils successfully completed nine years of primary education in the schools surveyed in south-eastern Slovenia, compared to 44% in north-eastern Slovenia.

An analysis of the distribution of Roma pupils by grade and gender shows higher success among female Roma pupils, as they are represented in higher proportions in the upper educational cycle of primary school.

¹³ Bešter, R., Pirc, J. (2022). *Uspešnost romskih učencev v osnovnih šolah v Sloveniji v obdobju 2016/17–2021/22*. Institute for Ethnic Studies.

Available at: https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MIZS/SRI/Uspesnost-romskih-ucencev-v-OS-v-Sloveniji-2021_22INV.pdf.

The analysis of data up to 2021 is also available at: <https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MIZS/SRI/Romi/Analiza-podatkov-o-uspesnosti-romskih-ucencev-v-OS-v-Sloveniji-INV-Bester-in-Pirc-.pdf>.

A comparison of data on pupils repeating a grade by gender reveals two phenomena. Firstly, there are no significant gender differences in grade repetition among non-Roma pupils, whereas Roma pupils tend to have a higher proportion of those repeating a grade among male pupils than female pupils.

Secondly, the proportion of pupils repeating a grade among non-Roma pupils remains relatively consistent across all grades and throughout the school years examined. In contrast, the proportion of those repeating a grade among Roma pupils fluctuates considerably across grades and school years. While the proportion of pupils repeating a grade among non-Roma pupils at national level ranges between 0.6% and 1.2%¹⁴, the proportion among Roma pupils ranges between 19.8% and 33.5%, when all grades are considered together.

The highest proportions of pupils repeating a grade among Roma pupils are found in the 6th, 7th and 8th grades, where approximately 27% to 45% of pupils in each grade failed at the end of the year (excluding the "special" 2019/20 school year).

According to data available from the 2020/21 school year onwards, for the primary schools examined, the proportion of Roma pupils with a decision regarding special educational needs was just under two percentage points lower than that among non-Roma pupils.

In the 2021/22 school year, only 1% of Roma pupils in the group of selected primary schools were permanently home-schooled. This figure is higher than that for non-Roma pupils, which stood at 0.4%.

Comparisons between the north-eastern and south-eastern Slovenia also reveal significant differences in the academic performance of Roma children in primary schools.

In north-eastern Slovenia, around 11% of pupils in the 1st grade are Roma, compared to around 6% in the 9th grade, indicating relatively stable progression through the grades. In south-eastern Slovenia, the proportion of Roma pupils in the 1st grade exceeds 17%, falling to around 3% in the 9th grade.

Fluctuations in the proportion of Roma pupils by grade are less pronounced in north-eastern Slovenia, indicating better inclusion and performance. In south-eastern Slovenia, however, the decline in the number of Roma pupils towards higher grades is more pronounced.

In north-eastern Slovenia, the proportion of Roma children repeating a grade ranges between 9.9% to 16.3%, compared to 24.3% and 42.8% in south-eastern Slovenia. This suggests that Roma pupils in north-eastern Slovenia progress more effectively to higher grades than those in south-eastern Slovenia, where a higher proportion of pupils experience failure already in their early school years. The survey also indicates that the proportion of non-Roma pupils repeating a grade is lower in north-eastern Slovenia than in south-eastern Slovenia. In north-eastern Slovenia, this percentage ranges between 0.2% to 0.6%, whereas in south-eastern Slovenia it ranges between 0.8% to 1.9%.

Projects were implemented in both areas to improve the performance of Roma pupils, such as the provision of Roma assistants. However, their effectiveness is more evident in north-eastern Slovenia. A

¹⁴ The analysis considered data from 27 primary schools attended by Roma pupils in the north-eastern and south-eastern Slovenia.

better socio-economic status and greater access to educational resources contribute to better outcomes in the north-eastern region.

Based on this survey, the reasons why Roma children are less likely to attend school in south-eastern Slovenia than in north-eastern Slovenia can be summarised as follows:

- The proportion of Roma pupils repeating grades is significantly higher, which negatively affects their motivation to attend school. A higher proportion of unsuccessful pupils leads to higher dropout rates already in the early years of schooling.
- Roma settlements are mostly legally and communally unregulated. The lack of basic infrastructure, such as access to water, electricity and organised transport, hinders regular school attendance and contributes to dropout.
- The differences between the Roma community and the majority population are more pronounced. Lower support from wider society, weaker inclusion and poorer coverage of schools by Roma assistants impact children's integration into the education system.
- The proportion of Roma children educated at home is higher, which reduces their physical presence in schools and makes socialisation more difficult.

These differences demonstrate the need for greater support and additional measures in south-eastern Slovenia to increase Roma children's participation in education and improve their performance.

As part of a master's thesis at the Faculty of Social Work of the University of Ljubljana, a survey was carried out into the work of professionals in primary schools with Roma children and their parents.¹⁵ The results showed that, of the 161 professionals who participated in the survey,¹⁶ 58% provided support to Roma pupils, primarily in the form of learning assistance. This means that Roma pupils receive this assistance, on average, once a week. In most schools where these professionals are employed (97%), Roma pupils have access to learning assistance, which is most often provided by class teachers and school counsellors. Additionally, 75% of Roma pupils in these schools receive assistance from school professionals. This highlights the positive impact of Roma assistants, who work in 59% of the schools surveyed. These assistants work alongside teachers, providing learning assistance.

Schools also seek to cooperate with Roma parents using various communication methods, such as individual parent-teacher consultations and direct communication. Nevertheless, 46% of parents in schools where the professionals who took part in the survey are present never attend individual parent-teacher consultations, highlighting the need for greater involvement. Regarding material assistance, most schools offer various forms of support, such as subsidised meals and school supplies.

According to the survey, the organisational aspects of schooling for Roma children vary widely. Most schools do not provide special preparation, but among those that do (28%), a range of approaches is used, such as personalised plans and afternoon classes.

¹⁵ Predalič, A. (2024). *Delo strokovnih delavcev v osnovni šoli z romskimi otroki in njihovimi starši*. Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljubljana.

Available at: <https://repositorij.uni-lj.si/Dokument.php?id=186241&lang=slv>.

¹⁶ A survey questionnaire, with a covering letter, was sent to all 445 primary schools in Slovenia. The exact number of schools that responded is unknown. Completion of the survey questionnaire was anonymous, and the researcher did not collect any data on the schools where respondents were employed or any personal data.

As part of the master's thesis examining the work of professionals in primary schools with Roma children and their parents, the study concludes that:

- Most Roma children receive at least some form of help and assistance (e.g. learning assistance, conversation and socialisation) from professionals in the schools where the survey participants work;
- Most assistance and support initiatives originate from teachers or school counsellors rather than Roma pupils or their parents;
- Primary school professionals are more likely to provide group-based assistance and support to Roma children than individual assistance;
- Language barriers are common and linguistic adaptations are rare;
- Roma assistants are employed at more than half of the primary schools where the survey participants work. Their role includes providing learning assistance to children, cooperating with teachers and other professionals at school, providing additional professional assistance to children, interpreting, advocacy and carrying out interest activities. They also accompany Roma pupils on buses and help with personal hygiene and gathering children in Roma settlements;
- Parents of Roma children work with school counsellors, teachers and a Roma assistant. In schools where there is a Roma assistant employed, school counsellors (62 responses) are more often involved with parents of Roma children than Roma assistants (57 responses). Professionals work extensively with Roma parents (72%). They most often interact with them in person at school during individual parent-teacher consultations or at parents' meetings, or inform them directly via email or letter, or indirectly via the child;
- 84% of professionals surveyed cooperate with external institutions and organisations in their work, but there is still very little cooperation between schools and kindergartens;
- According to professionals, Roma children in Prekmurje are better integrated into the class and school community than Roma children in south-eastern Slovenia. Furthermore, Roma children in Prekmurje more frequently engage with non-Roma classmates in the classroom and during breaks than those in south-eastern Slovenia;
- Roma children mostly complete primary education by the end of the 9th grade, and many also finish their education after the 7th grade. Additionally, male pupils tend to complete fewer years of primary education than female pupils;
- Supporting and assisting parents, strengthening trust between parents and the school, and providing joint support to the child in their schoolwork (from parents, teachers, non-Roma parents, pupils and external organisations) are important steps towards enabling Roma children to complete the full course of primary education more frequently.

Various expert studies and analyses, as well as some media publications, indicate that the situation of Roma pupils is affected by the following broader socio-economic factors:

- Poor social situation of families;
- Lack of adequate infrastructure in settlements and associated poor living conditions;
- High stratification between Roma families in specific settings;
- The presence of stereotypes and prejudices in mainstream society, among the Roma population and among professional and educational staff in educational institutions;
- Family illiteracy and low educational attainment of parents;
- Poorly developed communication skills in Slovenian and Romani;
- Insufficient adaptation and instability of the education system in meeting the specific needs of this target group.

These reasons for the poor situation are particularly pronounced in south-eastern Slovenia.

Research also highlights a lack of support and incentives from families, while parents' overly protective attitudes can hinder their children's further education, particularly for girls. Poor housing conditions and low parental employment also negatively impact educational performance.

Roma children and youth are often not sufficiently motivated to study.

As they often attend lessons irregularly, they find it difficult to follow the curriculum and perform poorly academically.

Some professionals mistakenly believe that Roma girls "grow up more quickly" and are "more mature" than non-Roma girls, thereby justifying a failure to hold Roma parents responsible for underage "marriages" and pregnancies. Some believe that Roma boys "consciously manipulate" and are more dangerous than their peers. This is because they develop survival skills while living in difficult conditions.

Roma settlements are often geographically and socially isolated, which makes it difficult for children to access quality educational programmes and learning opportunities. This can result in permanent exclusion from the education system and related social activities.

Another issue is the lack of adequate support mechanisms within educational institutions to improve the inclusion and performance of Roma people in the education system.

In an interview with a Slovenian media outlet, a Roma assistant summarised the key factors contributing to this situation. In her long-standing work with Roma children and their parents, she has observed that:

"...on the one hand, much depends on how the parents raise their children, and on the other, the encouragement children receive from their environment. Children from unsupportive environments, whether at home or in the wider setting such as educational institutions, find it the most difficult. As well as receiving little support from their parents, they often experience verbal abuse at school. They respond with resistance to education and educational institutions, and they can also respond with violence. They are often ostracised by their peers because of their appearance, smell and the prejudices their peers have internalised from home. It is difficult for a Roma child, or any child experiencing this, to integrate into educational institutions and society."¹⁷

¹⁷ Frelih, Š. (28 July 2024). *Lotiti bi se morali konkretnih sprememb. Dnevnik*. Available at: <https://www.dnevnik.si/novice/slovenija/-2683223-2683223/>.

In her article¹⁸, the headteacher of a primary school attended by Roma pupils emphasised the importance of the school's role in effectively integrating the Roma community into education. She stressed the importance of cooperation between Roma parents and teachers. The school carried out a study on the correlation between parents' cooperation with the school and teachers, and the frequency of Roma pupils' attendance. The study covered the participation of parents and teachers over a ten-year period in individual parent-teacher consultations, parents' meetings, individual interviews and teacher visits to settlements. It also reviewed the regularity of school visits and student progression over the same period. The results showed that parental involvement has a positive impact on school attendance and educational performance among Roma pupils. It was noted that Roma parents' cooperation with the school increased by 30%, which improved school attendance and progression.

Referring to the study findings, the author stated that teacher visits to Roma settlements had significantly contributed to strengthening cooperation by improving understanding of pupils and their educational circumstances. These visits had a positive impact on parents, teachers and pupils alike, making them feel more connected to school. In addition to the visits, Roma assistants who facilitated communication between parents and the school, as well as various projects aimed at working with Roma pupils, played an important role. Where parents did not cooperate, the school sought assistance from school counselling service and social work centres. Trust in the school, visits to settlements, professional teacher training and inclusion in projects are all key factors in effectively integrating the Roma community into the school system.¹⁹

The Institute for Ethnic Studies analysis of the work of Roma assistants, commissioned by the Ministry of Education, examined the role, relevance and work of Roma assistants in the 2021/22 and 2022/23 school years. The analysis highlighted the need for a systemic renewal of the role of Roma assistants in both kindergartens and primary schools. Key recommendations include improving working conditions (full-time employment and reduced workload norms), increasing salaries, providing clearer job descriptions and offering greater job stability. Continuing professional education in areas such as teaching the Slovenian language, Roma culture and communication skills is also key.

Based on these findings, the Institute for Ethnic Studies analysis recommended increasing the number of employees. Due to the excessive workload, the standards relating to the number of children per Roma assistant should be lowered, particularly in south-eastern Slovenia, where the number of children is higher. According to the Institute for Ethnic Studies analysis, fewer than ten Roma children per assistant should become the standard. Permanent recruitment would prevent high staff turnover, which reduces the efficiency of Roma assistants' work. This would enable a greater Roma assistant presence and, consequently, greater efficiency when working with Roma children and their families. It is important that employment is long-term in order to avoid frequent turnover, which reduces the effectiveness of their work.

The analysis shows that Roma assistants frequently cite low pay as the primary issue. Increasing salaries and adjusting them in line with education and experience would boost motivation and help to attract skilled staff.

¹⁸ Čengija Peterlin, I. (2017). *Vloga šole za uspešno vključevanje romskih učencev v VIZ*.

Available at: <https://pogledkrozprozor.wordpress.com/2017/09/30/vloga-ole-za-uspreno-vkljucevanje-romskih-ucencev-v-viz/>

¹⁹ Ibid.

The 2011 National Evaluation Study on the Performance of Roma Pupils in Primary School²⁰ also raised the issue of placing Roma children in adapted primary education programmes.

The key findings of the study are as follows:²¹

- Roma children should not be placed in special programmes solely because of insufficient command of the Slovenian language. In addition to other socio-economic factors, this can only exacerbate the differences between Roma and non-Roma pupils. Many Roma pupils do not meet the minimum knowledge standards despite regular attendance, which can lead to considerable difficulties.
- Roma pupils often face difficulties due to an insufficient understanding of the language of instruction rather than lower learning abilities. Labelling Roma children as children with special educational needs is not acceptable.
- The placement of Roma pupils in adapted education programmes may be linked to prejudice and stereotyping, as professionals may lack sufficient training to work with Roma pupils.
- Frequent placement in schools with adapted education programmes leads to segregation and reduces equal access to quality education for Roma pupils.

Data from the 2022 Institute for Ethnic Studies study²² show that, of the 27 primary schools studied, the proportion of Roma pupils with a special educational needs decision is just under two percentage points lower than that of non-Roma pupils. This is primarily because Roma pupils are underrepresented in primary schools in south-eastern Slovenia (3.5% in the 2021/22 school year), whereas their representation is higher in north-eastern Slovenia (11.7% in the same year).

The 2024 PRESS report on discrimination against Roma in Slovakia and Slovenia²³ also highlighted the excessive placement of Roma children in adapted education programmes, which adversely affects their educational performance.

²⁰ Vonta, T. (2011). *Nacionalna evalvacijkska študija uspešnosti romskih učencev v osnovni šoli*. Final Substantive Report. Educational Research Institute.

Available at: <https://zaprom.si/wp-content/uploads/Nacionalna-evalvacijkska-studija-uspesnosti-Romskih-ucencev-v-osnovni-soli.pdf>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Bešter, R., Pirc, J. (2022). *Uspešnost romskih učencev v osnovnih šolah v Sloveniji v obdobju 2016/17-2021/22*. Institute for Ethnic Studies.

Available at: https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MIZS/SRI/Uspesnost-romskih-ucencev-v-OS-v-Sloveniji-2021_22INV.pdf.

²³ Minority Rights Group (2024). Equality in Accessing Justice: Removing Barriers for Roma in Pursuing Their Rights in Discrimination Cases.

Available at: <https://minorityrights.org/sl/resources/equality-in-accessing-justice-removing-barriers-for-roma-in-pursuing-their-rights-in-discrimination-cases/>.

Sector-specific research shows a relatively high degree of correlation between the placement of individuals in educational institutions for children and youth with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and their nationality or ethnic origin. Earlier research found that, in Slovenia, children and youth of other nationalities are placed in educational institutions at above-average rates,²⁴ and that this applies in particular to children and youth from Roma families living in disadvantaged socio-economic environments.²⁵

In addition to the above-average over-representation of children and youth based on nationality or ethnic origin, professional literature also addresses the question of the placement of these children and youth in educational institutions from the perspective of whether alternative forms of support are available. In this respect, experts highlight the "insufficiency of placement-based interventions /of these children and youth/" in educational institutions and specifically draw attention to "the dangers arising from the removal of the child from their primary environment, the differing demands of both environments and the consequent severing of ties with the child's primary environment".²⁶

Girls and women are a particularly vulnerable group within the Roma community. The NPUR 2021–2030²⁷ states that, within patriarchal social structures, women in the Roma community are often confined to the roles of mother and homemaker. As a result, few Roma women complete primary school, as these roles are undertaken at a young age. By discontinuing schooling and taking on the roles of homemaker and mother (and not also those of employed persons), they slip into a markedly subordinate position within the community. This severely limits their ability to live independently or to escape unsustainable situations, as they are largely unaware of their opportunities and rights due to limited contact with the outside world. The NPUR 2021–2030 states that, due to their vulnerable position and their roles as the most important factor in children's primary socialisation, additional attention must be devoted to the empowerment of Roma women within social activation measures.

²⁴ Kranjčan, M. (2010). *Otroci in mladostniki v vzgojnih zavodih, stanovanjskih skupinah in mladinskih domovih*. In *Zdravje mladostnikov s čustvenimi in vedenjskimi težavami* (eds. Kranjčan and Miklavžin), pp. 33–57. Ljubljana: Ministry of Health.

²⁵ Razpotnik, Š. (2011). *Družbeni kontekst kategorije "čustvene in vedenjske motnje"*. *Socialna Pedagogika* 15/2, 103–123, pp. 114–115.

²⁶ Marovič, M. (2010). *Romi, socialni kapital ter dileme glede nameščanja romskih otrok v vzgojne zavode*. *Socialna pedagogika*, 14/2, 247–270, p. 267.

²⁷ The National Programme of Measures of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Roma for 2021–2030 Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.si%2Fassets%2Fvladne-sluzbe%2FUNK%2FNPUR-2021-2030%2F108NPROMI.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK> (pp. 37–38).

Similarly, the role of Roma women in the community was described by a Roma woman holding a master's degree in social work, who currently lives and works in Austria. In an interview with the Women's Lobby of Slovenia on 13 September 2024, she outlined the position of Roma women:

"In Roma communities, this role is understood in a highly patriarchal way. The reputation of the whole family depends on whether the woman in that family is a good wife and mother and manages the household well. Early and arranged marriages, in which young people are unable to choose their life partners, are not characteristic to all Roma communities in Slovenia. They are almost non-existent in Prekmurje. However, in communities where girls stop going to school at 12 or 13 to care for younger children and help with household chores, it is not unusual for them to take on the identity of an adult Roma woman at an early age, fall in love and marry young."²⁸

1.2.2 Findings of the Advocate's research

Advocate's focus group research

Participants said that Roma children's interest in schooling declines with age. This is linked to poorer educational performance, which is largely affected by poorer living conditions. However, it may also be linked to teachers' lower expectations of Roma children.

Focus group participants highlighted a series of problems affecting Roma children's challenges and opportunities in primary education.

During primary education, significant social differences emerge between Roma children who are more integrated into mainstream society and those living in isolation, e.g. in Roma settlements. In mainstream society, Roma are more likely to support and encourage children to participate in education.

"They go to school even when they don't know Slovenian. This shows the poor status of the family and the parents' lack of interest. This is a poor starting point; there is a lot of this in the Dolenjska region, children have no support."

The environment in which many Roma families live negatively affects their motivation to send their children to school.

"We made a lot of effort to get these children enrolled, but then they stopped coming. The problem then lies in the lack of support within the family or the wider community."

²⁸ Interview with a Roma female intellectual: It's easier for me to be a foreigner abroad than in my own country! Available at: <https://www.zenskilobi.si/novice/intervju-z-meliso-gutmann.-intelektualko-romskega-porekla-la%C5%BEje-mi-je-bit-tujka-v-tujini.-kot-tujka-v-lastni-domovini.html>.

Although they observe that it is easier for educated people, Roma do not see the point of education.

"There were periods when Roma families wanted their children to go to school. These children did not always make it to the classroom; they would hang around the school, particularly the older pupils, but they did come, the teachers brought them to the classroom. In recent years, however, we have seen a decline in interest in education, grades and the school report card. They do not even come to get the school report card; school report cards of Roma children will remain undistributed."

Roma families are often motivated to send their children to school by external factors such as social assistance and child benefits.

"Parents really need some kind of outside motivation – sending their children to school in order to obtain benefits from the social work centre. Children in the lower grades are motivated to learn to read, write and do math, but they are often among the lower-performing pupils, and their motivation gradually fades over time. Later on, especially with more advanced subjects, they start to struggle to keep up with their classmates, they lose motivation, and they start thinking, 'What's the point of this, I'm not going to get a job anyway?'"

"They do not see a future for themselves. They are also motivated by outside activities, such as football. Although they are ill, absent from school and present medical notes as justification, they regularly attend football training, as they succeed there and are driven by a different motivation to progress further. Children's motivation is gradually being destroyed, and their parents do not have any either. In smaller settlements, motivation is higher, including for attending Roma centres that include kindergartens."

Participants in the focus group stressed that not being included in primary education may result in the withholding of income, such as financial social assistance, child benefits and income support. Therefore, children attend primary school relatively regularly.

According to the participants, the incentives offered by the Employment Service of Slovenia to complete education²⁹ are an important motivator for adult Roma to complete primary school up to the 9th grade. However, they also pointed out that these incentives may have a negative effect. Some of them choose to complete primary school later in life, precisely because of these incentives, which they are entitled to as adults.

"The increased interest is primarily attributed to the school's decisive actions. We regularly reported them to the inspectorate, so they lost their benefits and had to pay fines. Primary school is compulsory; somehow, they attend primary school so that they have no problems with us. Secondary school, however, is not compulsory."

²⁹ The Employment Service of Slovenia pays education and transport allowances to participants in officially recognised study programmes for adults. These are paid on a monthly basis for the previous month, based on supporting documents submitted to prove attendance. Allowances cover travel costs (EUR 0.23 per kilometre as of 1 February 2023, from the place of residence to the place of education and back, for every kilometre travelled, provided the one-way distance is at least 1 km) and an education allowance (EUR 6.00 per day of attendance). Further information is available at: <https://www.ess.gov.si/iskalci-zaposlitve/programi-za-zaposlovanje/predstavitev-programov/formalno-izobrazevanje/>.

Participants in the focus group cited a poor outlook as an obstacle to the inclusion of Roma children in education. Roma people do not see a meaningful link between education and an improved quality of life. This results in low levels of support from family and the wider social environment for education.

Fear and mistrust of educational institutions also contribute to this lack of support. Roma parents often have negative experiences with schools, and Roma children are frequently not accepted by their peers at school, which results in strong resistance to schooling.

Participants from the focus group in south-eastern Slovenia, in particular, highlighted the rise in anti-Roma sentiment and the informal parental pressure exerted on schools to separate Roma and non-Roma children. This leads to the passing on of intolerance patterns from parents to children, which further impedes the equal integration of Roma children among peers and in society.

Dropout can also be associated with lower teacher expectations of Roma children. Although these children would like to achieve more, some teachers are satisfied with minimum standards. This, often inadvertently, indirectly reduces children's motivation. Participants in the focus group considered that teachers and school staff lack the practical and appropriate competences to include all vulnerable groups, not only Roma, despite staff themselves often believing they are sufficiently qualified.

Formal education is not adapted to the needs of the Roma, as it does not take into account the significant disadvantages resulting from their marginalisation, which are rooted in historical, social and economic factors.

"Teachers mainly see regulation in terms of sanctions, not integration. A policy of the stick, not the carrot, is not the best course."

Financial factors are an important motivator, but primarily through the principle of preventing withdrawal. Many pupils complete their education after the 6th grade with a view to continuing it at the age of majority, when they receive a financial incentive to do so. They also receive an allowance for dependant and unemployed family members.

"They go to the RIC³⁰ because they say they then get EUR 150 per month to participate in the programme. Older pupils say they have to go, otherwise they lose their status and do not receive state support."

"In principle, language is not such a problem, even when communicating with parents. Except for those who did not go to kindergarten when they first enter school. They learn at school then. The main problem is motivation, but they also indicate that they have a very poor prior knowledge. For example, even though they have completed the 6th grade, they are barely literate. They lack study habits."

The living conditions are also noteworthy, as participants in the focus group specifically pointed out that these prevent adequate preparation for schooling and the ability to do schoolwork at home.

³⁰ Novo Mesto Development and Education Centre.

Advocate's online survey

Respondents to the online survey, who were NGO representatives, pointed out that many Roma children neither complete nor attend primary education regularly.

The problems they mentioned include:

- Many children fail to complete primary school or attend it irregularly.
- Poor language skills and poor living conditions hinder their progress.
- Some children are placed in schools with adapted education programmes, which limits their opportunities for further education.

A combination of cultural, economic and social factors makes it difficult to integrate Roma children and young people into the school system on a regular basis:

- In the Roma community, school and education are not always recognised as key values. Children often do not understand the importance of education because even if they are educated, they find it difficult to find a job.
- Roma families are often multi-generationally unemployed and economically disadvantaged. Due to the need to earn money as soon as possible, some children and young people prefer to work rather than attend school.
- In informal settlements lacking water, electricity and sanitation, children find it difficult to keep up with school obligations, as they do not have adequate conditions for schooling.
- Many Roma children do not have sufficient command of Slovenian, which makes it difficult for them to follow lessons and to build relationships with classmates. For children who did not attend kindergarten, school is sometimes their first point of contact with the Slovenian language.
- They are often victims of stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination in the school environment. Due to the exclusion and humiliation they experience, many avoid school.
- Parents often do not encourage their children to fulfil their school obligations and often allow younger children to stay at home when they do not want to go to school.
- With age, Roma children and youth lose interest in school, mainly due to negative experiences within the school system.
- If parents did not attend school, this often is not perceived as a value by their children either. In addition, there are often no appropriate sanctions if parents who do not send their children to school.
- Insufficient support for parents and children in integrating into the school system, as well as the absence of learning resources and necessary adaptations for Roma children, further reduces the likelihood of school attendance.

The following measures have been considered effective so far:

- Subsidies for school and kindergarten meals;
- Roma assistants in kindergartens and schools;
- Learning assistance for Roma children;
- Various workshops for all age groups in Roma settlements.

In their view, the following measures were ineffective:

- Measures linked to making financial support conditional on certain behaviours (such as school attendance) are not effective in the long term;
- The state and municipalities are not sufficiently involved in implementing and funding programmes for the Roma community;
- NGOs only carry out activities for as long as projects are funded.

Several proposals were put forward to improve the measures:

- Provide funding for long-term projects that support the increased inclusion of Roma children and young people in education, and more broadly in society;
- Increase the majority population's involvement in activities aimed at integrating the Roma into society, and improve the majority population's participation in the Roma community;
- Provide more training for teachers on the Roma language, culture, history and identity.

The following new measures were proposed:

- Increase the involvement of Roma parents in their children's education;
- Provide more support for Roma pupils;
- Increase financial support for transport and learning materials.

The most successful organisations that participated in the survey maintained a continuous, long-duration presence in Roma communities, often for several hours or even most of the day. They emphasise that building trust and maintaining a positive attitude are the most important factors for successful work, which is only possible due to these organisations' direct presence in the environment. The option of voluntary participation in programmes is also a contributing factor, as it is essential for participants to develop their own motivation and desire to be included and participate.

One organisation that is present daily in south-eastern Slovenia, where Roma live, and carries out activities for children, young people and parents, is achieving very good results. Around 180 children in two settlements participate in their programmes, representing approximately 70% of all Roma primary school children in this local environment. Of these, two thirds progressed to a higher grade in 2023.

Respondents assessed these activities as being key to promoting the inclusion and motivation of Roma children in education. At the same time, however, they stressed the need for more support in schools, particularly in the form of improved relations and greater acceptance of Roma children. Strengthening cooperation between schools, families and NGOs is considered essential for achieving better results. Among the key reasons why many Roma children do not attend school, one surveyed organisation stated:

"According to our users' observations and conversations, parents often fail to set clear boundaries, instead allowing their children to stay at home rather than go to school. This makes it easier for them to calm their child, as they often lack the necessary skills to assert their authority. At the same time, knowledge is not recognised as a value, so there is a fear of being excluded from the Roma community if an individual is better educated and more successful in employment. Children and young people lack role models among adults, with a prevalent belief that the state and the Roma community will take care of their needs instead (leading to adult primary school programmes, increased borrowing, alienation and reliance on assistance from various humanitarian organisations and similar sources)."

The surveyed organisation also described its experience of majority population attitudes and the acceptance of Roma children in the local environment:

"Children often report negative attitudes and hate speech, even violence. Unfortunately, most of the local population in this environment has a very negative attitude towards Roma. Parents in the majority population play a significant role by passing on stereotypes about Roma to their children. Without positive peer experiences, negative attitudes, mistrust and non-acceptance are perpetuated. The programme regularly includes volunteers, including secondary school pupils, who often say at the end of their volunteering hours: 'Roma children are just like other children.' Regrettably, many educators and pupils in schools struggle to accept Roma children. This is not only an educational issue, but also an issue of relationships. When relationships are poor, this is reflected in children's wellbeing. The persistent non-acceptance and negative attitudes influence decisions to leave school rather than continue, particularly now that the topic holds national attention. They would rather attend a school for adult education or primary education for adults, where most of the other pupils are Roma and they feel more at ease. Clearly, this is not integration."

Some respondents also highlighted the frequent placement of Roma children in schools with an adapted education programme without sufficient justification, which restricts their chances of continuing their education:

"It is very difficult to focus on only one case. We have a number of children who would not attend school or successfully complete the year without our activities. A few years ago, we had a girl whose school tried to persuade her parents that she belonged in a school with an adapted programme. Following our involvement and providing support to her parents, the girl is now in the 9th grade of regular primary education, has no formal decision issued, and is considering further education."

"Roma, particularly those from south-eastern Slovenia, face serious challenges in educational institutions, where they often experience unequal treatment. These institutions take advantage of parents' illiteracy by interpreting correspondence, applications and administrative decisions in ways that favour the institutions rather than Roma children. Years ago, our association also carried out a study on this subject. The results were devastating: 100% of respondents were unaware of the procedures and decisions that placed their children in schools with an adapted programme."

Respondents considered it crucial for Roma children's motivation to complete schooling that parents recognise the importance of education and view knowledge as a value. Their support and involvement in their children's education is essential.

They also believed that children would achieve more if they had educated and employed role models around them. This would make it easier for them to understand that education offers an opportunity for a better future. A supportive and accepting environment, and the inclusion of Roma children in school and extracurricular activities, would also increase their motivation. A stronger role for teachers and professionals who believe in the potential of Roma children, as well as additional professional support, such as Roma teaching assistants, could also improve educational performance.

Providing increased financial support for children and families, as well as implementing a reward system for educational achievements, could also improve children's participation in schooling.

Integrating the principles of multiculturalism and bilingualism into the school system that takes into account both Roma and Slovenian culture would improve wellbeing, thus increasing Roma children's motivation to attend school.

Some emphasised the need to introduce stricter sanctions for parents who do not send their children to school. All considered it important that schools and local communities actively collaborate with the Roma community and encourage parental and child participation in the educational process.

One of the organisations carrying out activities with Roma children in the settings where they live summarised what would motivate children to complete primary education:

"The vision is that there are positive examples within the Roma community, showing where continuing education can lead. That by getting an education and a job, they can become independent, move away and support their families. This is not the case now. Participants in the programme and their families often report having difficulty finding a job because employers rarely hire Roma people due to their ethnicity or surname."

On key drivers, they wrote:

"We assess that short-term ad hoc measures, without prior knowledge of the situation or integration of the Roma community and those working with them with the target group directly, do not produce the desired effects. Continuity, professional work, building mutual respect and trust, and an integrated approach across all areas of life are crucial if we want people to engage, and to change their thinking and behaviour."

Advocate's research based on semi-structured interviews

Roma respondents to the survey made suggestions for improving inclusion and support for Roma children, young people and adults within the education system. These proposals aim to address the difficulties faced by the Roma community at different levels of education.

The following issues were highlighted:

- High dropout rates among Roma pupils, mainly in the final three years;
- The causes of dropping out of school include, according to the respondents, a lack of support at home and at school, insufficient integration of children due to language barriers, and financial barriers to participation in school and extracurricular activities;
- As a result, children often suffer from a lack of motivation.

The following recommendations were made:

- The introduction of tutors and mentors from the Roma community, as well as Roma assistants, in all schools where there is a need;
- Specialised training for teachers;
- Support for parents to raise awareness of educational opportunities.

It was emphasised that teachers are overloaded and lack the skills needed to work with Roma children, which limits their effectiveness. Sometimes, Roma children experience unequal and discriminatory treatment, which reduces their motivation to continue their studies even further.

Regarding solutions to dropping out, two interviewees said:

The first interviewee: *"If a child does not attend school, action must be taken immediately. There are cases where a child attends school only once a month, and this pattern continues throughout the year. At this point, the social work centre should be involved and the issue addressed. Schools do not do this, or do it very inadequately. They are afraid of having to promote a child simply to meet numerical requirements. They need to have a stricter approach to non-attendance, because too often they rely on parents – more activities for parents, more meetings that lead nowhere. If we see that a child or the parents do not follow the rules, action should be taken immediately and followed through. Even if this means that the parents will come to the school and raise their voices a little, the process should be seen through to the end. And perhaps more encouragement, with as many Roma-related activities as possible, if feasible. For Roma Day, including Roma children in different clubs and activities, involving Roma in various extracurricular groups, so that the school shows that they matter and are valued. Giving them the opportunity to express themselves in Romani, for example, if they are very proficient in the language. They can demonstrate this in front of the whole class. This will encourage and motivate them. More discussions with the headteacher, the teachers, the social worker and the school psychologist, now that the school has one. This then seems to be everything that the school can do. There are, of course, other factors – the parents, the situation at home and so on."*

The second interviewee: *".../ First, I would highlight the need to strengthen cooperation with parents. I know that teachers are making a definitive effort here, and when I'm in contact with them, I know that they are sometimes even calling me and a colleague to see what they can do. It is true that we could work even more closely with families. One issue we have observed in recent years is that intervention comes too late – children may have been absent from school for three months before action is taken. In my view, it is usually very clear when action is needed, including the potential involvement of the social work centre. Roma parents tend to place greater trust in social workers at the social work centre. Regrettably, these centres are still at times perceived as repressive bodies, which contributes to resistance, yet it remains important to take a firm stance and clearly communicate that primary education is compulsory. Not only is it compulsory, it is highly beneficial for the child, and this requires sustained, thorough and continuous effort. Earlier intervention would, in my opinion, make a significant difference. Strengthening cooperation with parents is also important. I have often observed that parents feel uncomfortable going to school, are not interested, or lack the skills and confidence to navigate the school system, or fully understand how primary education works in practice. Some have said that they were ashamed to go, did not speak Slovenian, and could not understand the teacher, or have expressed concern that their attendance might reflect badly on their child. However, if there is a positive attitude from teachers and from the counselling service, which I believe is present, parents are more willing to respond enthusiastically. They simply need to have a positive experience."*

Summary of the results of the online survey and interviews

| Issues relating to primary education | Recommendation |
|--|---|
| Many children do not complete primary school or attend it irregularly. | Increase the involvement of Roma parents and introduce tutors and mentors from the Roma community. |
| Children have poor language skills. | Provide more professional support for Roma pupils and train teachers. |
| Children lack motivation. | Introduce mentors, tutors and Roma assistants to encourage and support pupils. |
| Lack of support at home and at school. | Raise parents' awareness of the importance of education and strengthening the cooperation between schools and families. |
| Financial barriers to participation in school and extracurricular activities. | Increase financial support for transport and learning materials. |
| Poor living conditions. | Increase financial support and provide additional forms of professional assistance at school. |
| The placement of children in schools with adapted education programmes, which limits their chances of further education. | Provide more professional support and individualised approaches within a regular programme. |

1.3 Secondary, vocational and technical education

*"Secondary school gave me a lot of general knowledge. I want children to discover what they are very good at."*³¹

1.3.1 Description of the situation

Data from the 2020 Institute for Ethnic Studies study on Roma inclusion in secondary, higher and adult education³² show that the inclusion of Roma in secondary education is low, with a higher drop in enrolment in the later years of secondary education.

According to the study, which is based mainly on assessments provided by representatives of selected secondary schools³³, 133–145 Roma students attended secondary school in Slovenia in the 2017/18 school year. None of these students attended adult education institutions offering secondary school programmes.

According to the body that conducted the study, the number of Roma secondary school students was likely to be somewhat higher, as some of the schools mentioned did not respond to requests for such data, schools do not keep records of students by ethnicity, and the study did not contact institutions in regions where only a very small, dispersed Roma population lives.³⁴

The highest number of Roma students were in the Pomurska region. In other regions, Roma students were mostly enrolled in schools in urban centres, such as Maribor (Podravje), Novo mesto (south-eastern Slovenia) and Ljubljana (central Slovenia).

³¹ From the Advocate's interview with a female member of the Roma community.

³² Pirc, J., Bešter, R. (2020). Final Report within the project entitled *Roma integration in the secondary and tertiary education levels and adult education: drivers and barriers that Roma community members face in the education system in Slovenia after completing their primary school*. Institute for Ethnic Studies.

Available at: <https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MIZS/SRI/Romi/projekt-1703-CRP-Zakljucno-porocilo.pdf>.

³³ The study included secondary schools and adult education institutions from regions where, according to various studies, the vast majority of the Roma population live, or where the majority of Roma primary school pupils are enrolled in Slovenia. A total of 89 secondary schools and 12 adult education institutions in the following regions were included: Pomurska, Podravska, south-eastern Slovenia, Osrednjeslovenska, Posavska and Zasavska regions.

³⁴ Ibid.

Following completion of the study, the body that conducted the research obtained additional quantitative data from a range of sources on the enrolment of Roma students in Slovenian secondary schools. Based on these data, it was found that at least 163 Roma students were enrolled in the 2017/18 school year. Of the 87 Roma students for whom more detailed data were available (including education programmes, gender and year), the majority attended upper secondary vocational education (three years), upper secondary technical and vocational education (four years), or short vocational education (two to three years).³⁵

The largest number of Roma students was enrolled in secondary education programmes in health care, hospitality and tourism, food, and economics and commerce. Almost 60% of the 87 students were girls.³⁶

The study also found that almost half of these students (42) attended the first year, 25 the second year, 12 the third year, seven the fourth year, and only one the fifth year. The study found a decline mainly after the second year of secondary education.³⁷

According to the same study, 172 Roma students attended secondary school in Slovenia in the 2018/19 school year, while four Roma students enrolled in secondary school programmes at adult education institutions. It was estimated that the number of Roma students was most likely slightly higher.³⁸

The proportion of Roma students in the 2018/19 school year was very similar to that in the previous year. The highest number of Roma students was again in secondary schools in the Pomurska region. The remaining Roma students were mainly enrolled in schools in urban centres where Roma communities are located, such as Maribor (Podravje) and Novo mesto (south-eastern Slovenia).³⁹

These students were enrolled in 32–33 secondary schools across Slovenia. Of the 119 Roma students for whom data for the 2018/19 school year were available, the majority – as in the previous school year – attended upper secondary vocational education (three years), followed to a lesser extent by upper secondary technical and vocational education (four years), or short vocational education (two to three years).⁴⁰ The largest number of Roma students was enrolled in secondary school programmes in hospitality and tourism, economics and commerce, health care and food.

Comprehensive data, including gender and year of study, were available for 111 Roma students.⁴¹ Of these, almost 60% were girls, as in the previous year. It was concluded that the gender distribution among Roma students in Slovenian secondary schools was much more balanced.⁴²

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. One third of schools did not respond to requests for data. Schools also do not keep student records by ethnicity. Educational institutions in regions with a very small, dispersed Roma community were not contacted.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

Of the 111 students, 45 were in their first year, 43 in their second, 12 in their third and 11 in their fourth.⁴³

The schools' responses suggested that, generally speaking, Roma students did not attend secondary schools outside their region of residence.⁴⁴

The results of the 2024 study on professionals' work show⁴⁵ that most Roma children opt for two-year secondary school programmes. While almost all Roma children in primary schools, together with their classmates, are informed about secondary schools, occupations and career opportunities (vocational guidance), the professionals who participated in the study report that these activities are not adapted for Roma pupils.

The 10th report of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia on the Situation of the Roma Community in Slovenia⁴⁶ states that there is a lack of measures relating to continuing education after primary school. The NPUR 2021–2030 measures, aimed at achieving the strategic objective of *Integrating Roma into further education and equipping them with the skills and experience necessary for successful labour market integration*, and the secondary objective of *Advancing Roma integration into secondary and higher-level education* had not yet begun to be implemented by 2022.

The report states that the Ministry of Education is expected to increase its activities in this area in accordance with the adopted sector-specific strategy; however, this progress is not reflected in the Ministry of Education's or Government's documents.

1.3.2 Findings of the Advocate's research

Advocate's focus group research

Participants stated that pull factors are important for progression to higher levels of education. It is therefore necessary for professionals to actively inform and engage children in secondary school programmes, given that Roma seldom seek out information independently and are even less likely to engage proactively.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Predalič, A. (2024). *Delo strokovnih delavcev v osnovni šoli z romskimi otroki in njihovimi starši*. Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljubljana. The study was conducted as part of a master's thesis.

Available at: <https://repozitorij.uni-lj.si/Dokument.php?id=186241&lang=slv>.

⁴⁶ The 10th report of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia on the Situation of the Roma Community in Slovenia.

Available at: <https://www.gov.si/teme/romska-skupnost/> (p. 8).

Advocate's online survey

Responses from NGOs and educational institutions carrying out activities with Roma children in their local communities confirmed the situation and problems identified by the study. These responses were obtained by the Advocate through an online survey.

The problems they mentioned include:

- Many Roma pupils do not continue their schooling due to poor learning outcomes and lack of financial resources;
- Motivation and social support are significant challenges.

Their recommendations included:

- The introduction of scholarships and mentoring;
- Increasing support for Roma secondary school students.

The following key reasons were mentioned as to why many young Roma do not continue their education at secondary school level:

- They do not see the point of further education as it is not necessary in their environment and they are often satisfied with basic skills such as reading, writing and numeracy. Education and employment are not valued, as they rely on social assistance for their livelihood.
- They lack positive role models that would encourage them to learn. Their parents and immediate social environment often do not encourage them, as they themselves have no experience of higher education. In addition, past negative experiences and stereotypes regarding employment opportunities can discourage them from attending school.
- Many experience learning difficulties in primary school and do not complete their primary education, which makes it difficult for them to enrol in secondary school. Many are also placed in schools with an adapted education programme, which limits their chances of continuing their education.
- Education is linked to costs that Roma families often cannot afford. Lack of financial support and inadequate scholarship policies are additional obstacles.
- Many young Roma have low self-esteem and feel that they will not succeed in further education. Discrimination and stereotypes in mainstream society also reduce their motivation.
- They start helping parents with work, or enter employment early, as they feel that continuing their education is too lengthy and does not produce immediate results. They believe they can earn money without an education, especially abroad.
- They believe that education does not provide better employment opportunities, as employers often discriminate against Roma, even those with higher education.

One NGO working in the Roma community explained why more Roma do not continue their education in secondary schools and faculties:

"In secondary schools and faculties, there is less support for young people who need additional support, guidance and motivation compared to primary school. Even participants in our programme who are enrolled in secondary schools encounter difficulties, become discouraged and consider leaving education; however, we provide renewed guidance and, alongside the Centre for School and Outdoor Education programme, support them in returning to a path leading to the completion of their education. A lot of direct, one-to-one work is required. We have observed that secondary school students receive significant support from their parents, who are extremely proud of them. However, they are unable to provide learning assistance due to their own lack of education."

The Roma interviewees identified concrete scholarships, which would later enable employment, irrespective of their ethnic background, as key levers for improvement. The same view was expressed by respondents to the online survey.

Positive examples of educated Roma could serve as inspiration and demonstrate that success is possible. Key factors include parental and peer support, and a supportive environment. A positive attitude towards education from the family and wider community is also important.

The Roma interviewees emphasised that young Roma would also be encouraged to pursue education through an incentive-based scholarship policy, particularly company scholarships for shortage occupations.

Better housing conditions and support for teachers and professionals to effectively include Roma in the educational process – including in bilingual environments – would also increase motivation. Young Roma should be introduced to careers as added value, and encouraged to become independent and seek career guidance.

Programmes involving career guidance, practical training and connecting schools with employers would boost motivation by equipping young people with valuable skills and work experience.

According to interviewees and survey participants, parents, schools and teachers, social workers and local institutions such as employment services and social work centres play a key role in promoting education. They should support children and provide them with information and incentives to continue their education.

When asked what would motivate young Roma to continue their education at secondary school level, an organisation from south-eastern Slovenia said:

"An awareness that education matters and that they will receive help and support in secondary school, too. Support with transport is also crucial, as many parents do not have a driving licence or a car, and public transport is difficult to access."

Regarding motivation for successfully completing secondary education:

"In our experience, particularly important are support (learning and personal mentors), job opportunities (for example, if a Roma woman trains as a beautician, knowing she'll be able to find a job) and role models (as many people as possible from the settlements whom they know and can look up to)."

Advocate's research based on semi-structured interviews

The Advocate's research showed that Roma students are less likely to complete secondary education than children from the majority population. Secondary education is often out of reach for them, meaning they either do not enrol at all or drop out early. There are several related reasons for this:

- Financial barriers: many Roma families cannot afford school-related costs such as transport, nutrition and learning materials.
- Lack of motivation: often linked to the feeling that education does not lead to better employment or life opportunities.
- Absence of community role models: most older members of the community do not have secondary education, which affects young people's expectations.
- Distrust of educational institutions: developed by many parents and children due to past negative experiences, unequal treatment or a sense of exclusion.
- Sometimes low expectations from school staff: can affect pupils' self-confidence and undermine their belief in their own abilities.

Those who continue their education often choose shorter vocational programmes instead of *gimnazija* general upper secondary schools or technical schools. Financial difficulties often prevent them from attending extracurricular and outdoor activities. Sometimes, Roma students experience unfair and discriminatory treatment, which reduces their motivation to continue their studies even further.

Interviewees stated that Roma pupils are less likely to complete secondary education mainly because of the following:

- Financial difficulties,
- Lack of motivation, and
- Lack of role models.

The following recommendations were made:

- Introduction of financial incentives, such as scholarships and textbook subsidies;
- Development of mentoring and tutoring programmes;
- Extension of the Roma assistants' scheme to secondary schools.

One interviewee who works with Roma children and parents said the following about the support needed for them:

"/.../ for example, we have suggested to our municipality that, since the funds are available, a public call for proposals could be launched. To set certain conditions, in whatever form, a scholarship, for instance, seems like a good option. After all, we all tend to function in a way where financial support provides some motivation /.../. So financial support would be key, above all. Then, there is the role of the school counselling service, for example, when a Roma child enters a school, cooperation could be strengthened through more conversations /.../. If they have concerns, fears, challenges, then additional support is needed. Perhaps career guidance, something like that.

.../ there are still things that would need to be done, even though secondary school programmes are formally accessible. /.../ However, I try to put myself in others' shoes or draw from what I see, hear, experience in my work with them /.../ but the key issue remains financial support. In many cases, parents cannot manage, whether due to financial illiteracy or because their focus lies elsewhere; and the children suffer the consequences. It would be a major step forward if such a scholarship could be introduced in secondary schools. What I notice is that they simply don't know what options are available, /.../ or what more could be done to make this information accessible to children and parents. Information about what exists, about secondary school programmes, about studying in general and what tertiary education actually is. /.../ Perhaps these two areas, yes, financial support and access to information. More would probably need to be done in these areas before we can truly say that education is accessible."

One interviewee emphasised the importance of supporting professionals in educational institutions who work with Roma children and young people:

"The first support or assistance should be provided to professionals. All those who come into contact with the Roma community in the course of the education process – from the person who opens the door in a primary school, to the person who answers the telephone, to the person who sends invitations to families, to the person who receives children and parents in the office – should receive training and additional support, so that they are not left to rely solely on their own knowledge and resourcefulness. So that, within the education system, they receive sufficient support to feel empowered and able to deal with different tasks and, for example, with different types of families. /.../ What matters is that, when conflicts arise – in interests, beliefs, values, understanding, access to information, and so on – there is a mechanism within the system that supports the professional concerned /.../. Otherwise, the teacher is left entirely on their own, without the knowledge, the additional skills or the mechanisms they need, and, in the end, they lose hope. It is better if the child stays at home; the class will be easier to manage, won't it. /.../ It is only when we have trained staff and when we establish support mechanisms that sustain the workforce in the education sector that we will truly be able to speak of meeting the standards of high-quality education programmes in Slovenia."

Summary of the results of the online survey and interviews

| Issues relating to secondary, vocational and technical education | Recommendation |
|---|--|
| Not continuing schooling due to poor learning outcomes. | Increase professional support for Roma students and teacher training. |
| Not continuing schooling due to lack of financial resources. | Provide subsidies for textbooks and scholarships. |
| Lack of motivation and role models. | Introduce mentoring and tutoring programmes, and extend the measure of Roma assistants to secondary schools. |
| A lack of sufficiently developed support networks to which individuals can turn for emotional, informational or practical assistance. | Set up a network of mentors, tutors and counselling services, with a particular focus on Roma students. |

1.4 Higher education

"Education has always meant a lot to me. During my studies, I realised that it is something I need, not for my profession, but as proof of my intellect and ability."⁴⁷

1.4.1 Description of the situation

Data from the 2020 Institute for Ethnic Studies study on Roma inclusion in secondary, higher and adult education show that the inclusion of Roma in higher education is low.⁴⁸ The number of Roma enrolled decreases as students progress through successive school years.

Statistics for the 2017/18 school year show that 13 Roma students were enrolled in higher education, compared to 14 in 2018/19 (nine of whom were women, accounting for just over three quarters). The majority of these students were from the Pomurska region, consistent with the fact that almost half of all Roma secondary school students in Slovenia also came from this region.⁴⁹

The study shows that increased employment opportunities in Austria have led to higher interest in continuing education in north-eastern Slovenia than in other parts of the country. Most of these Roma students came from families where the parents had positive educational experiences and were in better socio-economic circumstances. This has had a positive impact on their choice of higher education.⁵⁰

In south-eastern Slovenia, however, employment opportunities for Roma are limited, resulting in lower motivation to continue with education. Prejudice among employers also hindered the employment prospects of the Roma surveyed. This reduces the perceived value of education. Traditions such as early marriage and parents' fears about their children leaving home to study have also been important constraints on Roma inclusion in higher education.⁵¹

There are no other data or studies on Roma enrolled in higher education.

⁴⁷ From the Advocate's interview with a female member of the Roma community.

⁴⁸ Pirc, J., Bešter, R. (2020). Final Report within the project entitled *Roma integration in the secondary and tertiary education levels and adult education: drivers and barriers that Roma community members face in the education system in Slovenia after completing their primary school*. Institute for Ethnic Studies. The study examined drivers and barriers that Roma community members face in the education system in Slovenia after completing their primary school.

Available at: <https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MIZS/SRI/Romi/projekt-1703-CRP-Zakljucno-porocilo.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

1.4.2 Findings of the Advocate's research

Advocate's online survey

Representatives of various NGOs and public educational institutions working with Roma children in their local communities said that very few young Roma continue their education at a higher level, mostly due to financial and social reasons.

The problems they mentioned include:

- Financial and social barriers;
- The lack of support and role models.

The lack of role models and support in the school environment reduces the chances of achieving success at a higher level. Many Roma students also struggle to find affordable housing and transport. Respondents estimated that insufficient cooperation exists between the state and municipalities at a local level to ensure continuous support for further education.

Based on their experience, there are too few targeted initiatives to help Roma students overcome the specific difficulties of higher education. Therefore, they recommended:

- Extension of financial and housing support for students, especially for part-time study;
- Greater involvement of Roma organisations in providing educational support;
- Introduction of mentoring programmes to assist students in transitioning to higher education.

The Strategy for Roma Education in the Republic of Slovenia 2021–2030 states that a high level of engagement is expected from educated Roma, including students and Roma assistants who can provide learning support. While this is welcome, it is unacceptable from the perspective of shifting responsibility away from educational institutions and onto the Roma. This was also highlighted by the Roma participants in the survey. They emphasised that the education system should provide better support for the individual needs of pupils and students, particularly those from vulnerable groups, such as the Roma.

Greater emphasis should be placed on involving Roma parents in the educational process to help them understand the importance of education for their children. Programmes supporting social inclusion and intercultural dialogue should be more prevalent and accessible at all levels of education. Students from vulnerable groups also require additional financial and moral support.

The Strategy for Roma Education in the Republic of Slovenia 2021–2030 recommended reaching an inter-ministerial agreement on developing a scholarship policy for Roma pupils and students, as well as developing flexible secondary and higher education programmes to improve labour market opportunities. However, there has been no progress in this regard so far.

Advocate's research based on semi-structured interviews

The key success factors identified by all respondents were financial support, motivation and counselling. They considered that more financial support was needed, in the form of scholarships and assistance with accommodation, as well as improved mentoring programmes. Support with social inclusion and access to information on study opportunities were also considered important.

The interviewees believed that Roma youth rarely opt for tertiary education due to a lack of financial support, motivation and role models.

One interviewee summarised the support that Roma children and young people need in terms of accessing the education system:

"First of all, accessibility. We always say that education is accessible to everyone, but this is true only on paper. /.../ We should bear in mind that most Roma settlements are isolated and segregated from urban areas, with no direct links to educational institutions. /.../"

"Second of all, /.../ trust in the education system must somehow be built within the Roma community. A certain proportion of Roma then stall at a particular point, often at the transition from the lower to the upper grades, /.../ and likewise in the final two or three years before completing primary school. At that stage, dropout rates among Roma children are high. Those who do manage to complete primary school often lack the encouragement or options to continue their education, and this is where the story slowly comes to an end. Only a small handful of Roma remain in vocational education, although some do complete it."

"The vast majority do not obtain appropriate employment, and therefore studying or pursuing education at undergraduate or postgraduate level is not something Roma dream about, which is entirely understandable. /.../ Education is not the same as knowledge. /.../ Education, schooling should prepare you for life; not only for a profession. /.../ Education should provide you with mechanisms, knowledge, information, abilities and competences that make it easier to navigate life. /.../ More investment is needed in programmes and mechanisms – not projects, but programmes. Something long-term. /.../ Programmes that focus on developing the community as such, because the community itself must realise what its potential is."

The following measures were recommended by interviewees to support young Roma in higher education:

- Access to scholarships and financial assistance, as these are crucial but not sufficient to cover all costs (e.g. housing and studies). There should be increased financial support to cover living and study costs.
- Psychosocial and mentoring support for Roma students, as a lack of support reduces motivation.
- Programmes to improve social skills to facilitate the transition to faculty, improve academic success and increase social inclusion of Roma students.
- Career guidance to facilitate successful studies and completion by focusing on career opportunities and post-study guidance to help students transition to working life.
- Systematic support for Roma students in teaching professions by providing dedicated scholarships and comprehensive mentoring.

All interviewees agreed that Roma students needed a more comprehensive support system, including additional scholarships, mentoring, social and career guidance, and programmes to improve social inclusion.

Summary of the results of the online survey and interviews

| Issues relating to higher education | Recommendation |
|---|--|
| Not continuing with higher-level schooling. | Improve information on further education opportunities and introduce support programmes for Roma students. |
| Financial barriers and lack of financial support. | Introduce scholarships for Roma students and increase housing support. |
| A lack of sufficiently developed support networks to which individuals can turn for emotional, informational or practical assistance. | Provide mentoring and other support programmes for Roma students. |
| Lack of motivation and role models. | Provide mentoring programmes and promote success stories of Roma students. |

1.5 Adult education and lifelong learning

*"I will continue to learn for as long as I can. I continue to educate myself and encourage as many women as possible to do the same. Even now that I am retired, I still attend lectures, and I would like to learn Italian. It's important to stay active even after retirement."*⁵²

1.5.1 Description of the situation

There are no data on how many Roma complete primary school through adult education programmes.

In many Roma settlements, the infrastructure required to support adult learning is insufficient. For example, access to learning spaces and materials is limited, reducing the chances of successful learning.

Traditional values and language barriers further hinder the inclusion of Roma in educational programmes. In many cases, adult Roma do not speak the language of the majority population, which makes it difficult for them to participate in formal education programmes and social life, and to support their children in their education.

Traditional family roles, particularly those of women, are slowly changing in Roma communities, creating new challenges and necessitating the adaptation of educational programmes to better meet the needs of Roma families.

For her PhD thesis, Dr Rahela Hojnik Kelenc studied the impact of basic literacy and social skills on the life outcomes of Roma adults.⁵³ The study was carried out in three Roma settlements – two in Slovenia (Dolga vas and Pušča) and one in Croatia (Orehovica, Međimurje County) – using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

The need for more accessible and high-quality education for Roma was identified, as this is essential for strengthening their literacy and social skills. Education programmes should be tailored to the specific needs of the Roma community and include adult learning. It would also be necessary to strengthen the social skills of adult Roma through workshops, training sessions and other forms of non-formal education that would help them communicate more effectively and integrate into wider society. Promoting Roma employment through various projects offering work experience, on-the-job training and job search support could contribute significantly to their economic independence. At the same time, it is essential to improve living conditions, particularly in informal settlements. Taking an interdisciplinary approach to tackling the problems facing the Roma community is vital in this respect, as it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the issues and enables the development of more effective solutions.⁵⁴

⁵² From the Advocate's interview with a female member of the Roma community.

⁵³ Hojnik Kelenc, R. (2023). *Vpliv temeljne pismenosti in socialnih spretnosti na pojmovanje življenske uspešnosti odraslih Romov.*

Available at: <https://revis.openscience.si/Dokument.php?id=11306&lang=slv>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

1.5.2 Findings of the Advocate's research

Advocate's online survey

Participants in the online survey identified the following issues:

- Many adult Roma do not recognise education as a way to improve their situation.
- There is a lack of programmes to promote adult participation in education.

Among the effective measures, the workshop activities for adults that promote functional literacy, especially reading, writing, numeracy and computer use, were assessed as particularly positive. Work-based training involving outdoor activities at multipurpose Roma centres was also deemed effective in encouraging adult participation in education. Various social and leisure activities were also well received, helping adults acquire new skills while facilitating social inclusion and strengthening ties within the community. Such activities can encourage parents to become more involved in their children's education. However, the lack of a long-term strategy for including Roma adults in lifelong learning was also mentioned. Many activities are limited to individual projects, meaning that the benefits are short-term. Limited cooperation between municipalities and the Roma community, particularly in relation to counselling and involving adults in education programmes, was also mentioned as a weakness.

The following additional measures were proposed:

- The introduction of effective, adapted programmes, such as national vocational qualifications, based on individual preferences and needs and providing partial or full financial support according to labour-market needs (e.g. company scholarships);
- Greater involvement of NGOs and local advisory centres to provide continuous support to adults, even after completing certain adult education programmes;
- Increased opportunities and improved awareness of adult learning, particularly in marginalised communities, which would help reduce educational gaps;
- Greater accessibility of lifelong learning programmes promoting intercultural dialogue and understanding between the majority population and the Roma community.

One of the organisations in south-eastern Slovenia that works with the Roma community emphasised the importance of taking an integrated approach to providing support to families:

"Most of the support is currently directed towards the morning hours, when children attend school, kindergarten and other public institutions. It is essential that programmes also extend into the afternoon and leisure time – in other words, the remaining 16 hours when children and young people are not involved in public programmes. Social assistance programmes, as well as non-formal education and lifelong-learning programmes, should be strengthened during children's leisure time to support the acquisition of knowledge and skills for easier integration. This also includes activities taking place outside settlements, with transport provided. In this respect, efforts should focus on strengthening links between different organisations and stakeholders in order to build a strong support network for families, so that when difficulties arise, they do not become discouraged or overwhelmed, but know whom they can turn to. Trust and a well-established relationship are key, as they can form a bridge that helps children – from early childhood education onwards – feel safe, accepted and confident."

Advocate's research based on semi-structured interviews

The Advocate's qualitative study involving Roma who had successfully completed their education showed that they recognise the importance of lifelong learning.

Some interviewees spoke about their own aspirations and ambitions for further education, despite already having obtained a university degree:

One interviewee said: *"The focus is clear. I am currently working in adult education as a pedagogue. At university, the focus was mostly on primary and secondary education. I somehow found myself working in adult education, and I feel that the faculty did not give me sufficient knowledge or professional preparation for this field, so this is now my clear focus. Whenever training opportunities arise, I always apply. I still need to build a stronger foundation in this area. Of course, I still have further goals, perhaps a PhD or something similar. So, we'll see."*

One interviewee said: *"No, I am not pursuing a doctorate yet – I will, certainly, but not at this stage. I want, in a way, to crown or complete my career and professional maturity with a doctorate. When that will be, I don't know; life will show me the way – whether next year, the year after, or in 20 or 10 years, who knows. It is definitely on my list. Otherwise, yes, I am continually developing professionally in various fields related to the delivery of high-quality education programmes, and so on. One area I am very proud of, and into which I am now engaging more deeply – professionally, and to an even greater extent personally – is education in the field of the African philosophy of ubuntu. This philosophy inspires me greatly. It was used by Nelson Mandela during the reconciliation of two worlds after apartheid, and it offers a very simple method – a set of principles for living – that strongly resonates with the way I live. It reflects my way of life and thinking, how I see the world. When I first encountered this philosophy, it was like love at first sight – a real "wow" moment. It reflects how I think; how I interpret the world around me, and how I believe we, as a society, should function. So, over the past six months, I have been engaging with it more intensively and investing more energy in further educating myself."*

According to the interviewees, adults rarely choose to pursue education because they lack access to information and programmes. They also believe that further education will not significantly improve their employability.

Adults rarely opt for further education as they do not see it as a means of improving their situation. Limited access to adapted programmes and financial support, combined with low expectations regarding employment opportunities after completing education, means that they rarely choose to continue their studies and often remain isolated within their communities. Greater emphasis should be placed on adapted programmes, as well as improving their accessibility and flexibility.

The key factors for success in education include:

- Personal motivation,
- Professional training, and
- Support systems, including mentoring and flexible learning opportunities.

The following was considered necessary:

- Promote and fund adult education programmes, particularly those focused on acquiring practical skills and vocational competencies;
- Develop local programmes to encourage adult Roma to participate in lifelong learning and vocational training;
- Increase the accessibility of adult education programmes, including by offering flexible schedules and free courses aimed at developing practical skills.

The importance of lifelong learning, as well as the provision of practical courses in areas such as financial and digital literacy, business skills and craft skills, should be systematically promoted among the Roma.

Summary of the results of the online survey and interviews

| Issues relating to adult and lifelong learning | Recommendation |
|---|--|
| Adults often fail to recognise the importance of education. | Expand lifelong learning programmes and increase support from NGOs and advisory centres. |
| Lack of information on education programmes. | Increase support for information and guidance from local advisory centres for adults. |
| Lack of incentives for adults to participate in education. | Provide more financial incentives and free courses to acquire practical skills. |

2 ADVOCATE'S KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Key findings

Language, pre-school education and early support

1. A lack of command of the Slovenian language is a significant barrier to the effective inclusion of some Roma children in school, which is why additional language-learning measures are needed already in the pre-school period.
2. Positive attitudes towards education and early participation in pre-school education programmes help Roma children learn the language, socialise and improve their chances of succeeding at school.
3. Although Roma mothers are more involved than fathers in supporting their children's education, they often fail to recognise the long-term benefits of education due to illiteracy and negative past experiences with society in general.

Support at school – teachers, educators and Roma assistants

4. Not all teachers and educators have sufficient competences to work with Roma children, which reduces the effectiveness of their work.
5. Some teachers have lower expectations of Roma children than of their non-Roma peers, which may result in their unjustified placement in adapted programmes and limit their opportunities for further education.
6. Effective work with Roma pupils depends on respecting their cultural background and ensuring a safe environment that is free from assimilation pressures.
7. The educational success of Roma children often depends on the support of individual teachers who recognise their talent and encourage their learning.
8. Roma assistants and multifunctional centres are important support mechanisms, but their potential has not yet been fully developed.

Motivation, self-image and family support

9. Many parents and children do not recognise the link between education and improving living conditions. Insufficient support from family members and close social networks can hinder children's progress at school.
10. Raising Roma parents' awareness of the importance of education and providing clearer information about the schooling process and the value of cooperating with schools are essential.

11. Roma children need role models from within their own community to motivate and support them throughout their educational journey.
12. The psychological and social consequences of marginalisation, including low self-esteem and social isolation, adversely affect the education of Roma children and lifelong learning among Roma adults.

Financial barriers and living conditions

13. The difficult financial and social circumstances of many Roma families are key reasons for the lower educational performance of their children. These circumstances include unemployment, low levels of parental education and living in segregated settlements lacking basic infrastructure. As a result, the health status of the Roma community is poor. Where living conditions improve, children's participation in education and their school performance also improve.
14. In some local contexts, the poverty and inadequate housing conditions experienced by the Roma community, and the related poor health outcomes, are still widely misunderstood and regarded as normal or typical of Roma culture. Such perceptions create ethnic boundaries and reinforce the spatial and social segregation of the Roma community. This means that the situation is not recognised as the outcome of structural inequalities, but rather as something inherent. Consequently, the development and implementation of appropriate plans and measures to improve conditions are hindered.
15. Insufficient financial resources for education and school-related activities constitute a significant barrier for Roma families, limiting children's opportunities to succeed at school.

Societal pressures, stereotypes and mistrust

16. Stereotypes and prejudices about the Roma community, such as perceptions that Roma families have "too many" children, engage in delinquent behaviour or abuse social transfers, create negative social pressures that Roma children and their parents face within the education system.
17. Poorer and unequal treatment by peers and teachers in the school environment adversely affects the self-confidence of Roma children and, consequently, their educational performance.
18. Parents of Roma children often distrust educational institutions due to past negative experiences or prejudice. This contributes to resistance and fear of discrimination, classroom segregation and inappropriate treatment of their children. Such mistrust is passed on to children and is perpetuated across generations.
19. Society frequently holds expectations of Roma behaviour that are based on stereotypes and prejudice. When these expectations persist in the long run, individuals from the Roma community may begin to perceive them as reality and internalise them. This reduces self-confidence and motivation, and negatively affects their prospects in education, access to employment and broader social participation. As a consequence, the cycle of marginalisation is perpetuated, requiring targeted measures to break it.

Lack of data and a systemic approach

20. There is insufficient understanding of classroom dynamics, including how Roma children feel at school and how they are treated by teachers, peers and the parents of other children. This lack of insight prevents a clear understanding of the reasons behind low educational attainment and social exclusion.
21. The absence of data on the situation of Roma children in the education system hinders the development of effective measures. Collecting data that enable an assessment of the extent, causes and effects of inequality, unequal treatment and unequal opportunities based on personal circumstances is essential for monitoring the effectiveness of measures and ensuring protection against discrimination.
22. Many programmes designed to support Roma pupils are project-based and time-limited, which reduces their long-term impact. A comprehensive, systemic approach and long-term, permanent measures are required.

2.2 Recommendations

The Advocate recommends the following to [the Slovenian Government and the Government Office for National Minorities](#):

1. Update the National Programme of Measures of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Roma for 2021–2030 (NPUR 2021–2030) based on data on Roma in education, on relevant research and evaluations, and on the past recommendations of the Advocate and international organisations. Particular attention should be given to strengthening the education component. This should include measurable targets and performance indicators to enable monitoring of progress and the identification of shortcomings. Other parts of the programme concerning the protection of the fundamental rights of Roma should likewise include measurable objectives, as progress in these areas can have a positive impact on education.
2. Ensure systematic and independent monitoring of the effectiveness of the measures set out in the NPUR 2021–2030 through evaluations. This would make it possible to identify shortcomings, detect potential discriminatory practices, and determine where policies and measures need to be adapted.

The Advocate recommends the following to [the Ministry of Education](#):

3. In cooperation with municipalities and educational institutions, systematically collect and analyse anonymised data on Roma children and youth in education, in comparison with the total population. Such data are essential for the timely and targeted design and adoption of measures, including the provision of additional support for children, scholarships, training for educators and teachers, and the prevention of discrimination and segregation, as well as for evaluating the effects of these measures over time. Data should include the number of Roma children in each local community and the number enrolled in kindergartens, together with information on the age of entry, duration and timing of attendance, and reasons for absence. For primary education, data should be collected on school attendance, deferment of the start of schooling, progression, transitions and grade repetition, as well as on the number of Roma youth enrolled in secondary education programmes, the types of programmes attended, completion rates and any early school leaving. In addition, information should be gathered on the number of schools attended by Roma children, the proportion of Roma pupils in these schools and in individual classes, and the geographical location of these institutions. Pupils' perceptions of education and their relationships at school should also be surveyed.
4. Provide all Roma children who require it with the opportunity to learn Slovenian free of charge before entering primary school, including those already attending kindergartens. Strengthening language skills improves learning outcomes and prevents the stigmatisation of children.
5. Ensure free kindergarten attendance for Roma children from disadvantaged families and organise free transport to and from kindergartens from Roma settlements. Low participation in pre-school education is often linked to financial and logistical barriers. Early integration into the education system enhances children's linguistic, social and learning competencies and reduces the likelihood of early school leaving.

6. Enable socially disadvantaged children, including Roma children, to participate free of charge in the extracurricular activities of their choice, and provide free transport to and from these activities. Such activities support talent development, social skills, and a sense of value and inclusion, all of which are important for children and youth in achieving educational success.
7. Ensure the employment of Roma assistants in all kindergartens and schools attended by Roma children, with priority given to the south-eastern part of Slovenia. The staffing norms should be adjusted and these posts properly classified, so that assistants can devote as much time as possible to supporting children and youth. The presence of Roma assistants facilitates communication, reduces cultural barriers, and strengthens cooperation between schools and families.
8. Enable the existing optional subject entitled *Roma culture* to be offered in all primary schools in areas where Roma communities live. A training plan should be established for teachers to teach the Roma language and culture, and this subject should be integrated into the primary school curriculum. This would contribute to the development of the Roma language, help eliminate stereotypes, and promote better coexistence between the Roma community and the majority population.
9. Based on the Educational Research Institute's guidelines on the inclusion of Roma children in education⁵⁵, develop further guidance to promote the attendance of Roma children in kindergarten and at school. Such guidelines should also strengthen cooperation with parents, enhance their understanding of the importance of education, and build trust in institutions.
10. Prepare the content in cooperation with the Roma community and ensure the training of educational staff to work with children and youth from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds. This would reduce the risk of biased or inadequate educational approaches.
11. Provide mentoring or tutoring tailored to the needs of Roma pupils. This support should be offered in the final years of primary and secondary education and involve highly educated Roma individuals who can serve as positive role models. This would encourage continued education, reduce early school leaving and improve learning outcomes.
12. Regularly inform Roma community organisations, as well as national and local public institutions and organisations, about measures to improve the educational attainment of the Roma population.
13. Seek, in particular together with the Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development, to make use of EU funds for these and other initiatives. EU recommendations and the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation to 2030 clearly underline that these funds are essential for achieving progress. The current situation stems from a combination of factors and requires cross-ministerial, long-term and coordinated action.

⁵⁵ *Smernice na področju vključevanja romskih otrok in njihovih staršev v predšolske programe* (2017). Educational Research Institute.

Available at:

https://korakzakorakom.si/storage/app/files/Smernice_elektronska_verzija.pdf#:~:text=Smernice%20na%20podro%C4%8Dju%20vklju%C4%8DDevanja%20romskih%20otrok%20in%20njihovih,do%20vklju%C4%8DDenosti%20romskih%20otrok%20v%20kakovostne%20pred%C5%A1olske%20programe.

The Advocate recommends the following to [the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities](#):

14. In accordance with Articles 3 and 4 of the Roma Community Act, Slovenia should introduce dedicated scholarships for Roma pupils and students. Many Roma pupils and students face financial and social barriers that hinder their education and limit their future employment prospects. Dedicated scholarships would promote the inclusion of Roma young people in the education system and help prevent early school leaving.
15. Develop vocational guidance and support programmes for young Roma during secondary education to enable them to acquire work skills and integrate into the labour market.

The Advocate recommends the following to [the self-governing local communities](#) where Roma live and which have not yet implemented such measures:

16. Provide adequate living conditions in Roma settlements to ensure the right to suitable accommodation. In doing so, municipalities should also utilise the funds available under Article 20a of the Financing of Municipalities Act. Poor living conditions experienced by some Roma children hinder the realisation of their right to education.
17. Allocate part of the funding received under Article 20a of the Financing of Municipalities Act to scholarships for Roma pupils and students. These scholarships would facilitate access to secondary and higher education and improve their prospects for successful social inclusion.
18. Ensure that Roma parents, children and young people are regularly informed about the importance of education and about employment opportunities. Improving access to information would reduce prejudice stemming from a lack of knowledge and strengthen motivation to participate. This information should be tailored as closely as possible to the target group.

The Advocate recommends the following to [the Roma Community Council of the Republic of Slovenia](#):

19. Carry out awareness-raising activities for Roma children, young people and their parents on the importance of education and educational inclusion, in cooperation with professionals and researchers. These activities should be incorporated into the Council's programme and financial plan, for which it receives funding from the state budget. The Council should also support such awareness-raising activities through public calls for proposals aimed at Roma community organisations.

Challenges in the Education of Roma Children and Youth – Special Report – Selected Chapters

Issued by

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