

New Perspectives for Learning - Briefing Paper 46

The education of Gypsy children within Europe

Context of the Research

The expansion of the European Union increases the opportunities for people to move freely between Member States, including temporary workers and nomadic communities like Gypsies. However, this raises many issues for static communities with their infrastructures and facilities concerning how best to cope with the needs of such nomadic communities who are often difficult to contact and whose movements may be difficult to predict. One issue concerns the schooling of Gypsy/Roma children.

The goal of the project has been to provide the diverse European management boards with an updated analysis of the situation of the schooling of Gypsy/Roma children. The project has focused on developments in Spain, France and Italy.

Key Conclusions

Generally, it has been observed that education systems studied are not capable of dealing with the schooling of the Gypsy/Roma children in a positive way. Indicators for this include the high percentage of absenteeism and dropping out of students who are also failing to gain school results.

The way Gypsy/Roma children are educated across Europe is dependent upon political, socio-cultural, institutional and ideological factors so the following more specific conclusions have been grouped in this way: -

Political Factors

1. Some policies do not even consider how Gypsy/Roma children are incorporated within the education system and most are not designed to ensure the successful inclusion of Gypsy/Roma children within their education systems due to lack of: -
 - Materials and human resources
 - Coordinated guidelines developed at both regional and local levels for dealing with Gypsy/Roma children

Socio-economic factors

2. The socio-economic situation of Gypsy/Roma groups is characterised as being precarious and economically unstable. This factor creates negative relations between Gypsy/Roma children and the school.

3. The lack of infrastructure, like areas for the parking of caravans, available to the Gypsy/Roma people, with an itinerant way of life, can also contribute to seriously damaging their relations with the school.
4. Although European legislation guarantees the right to movement for all citizens, in fact, these rights are sometimes restricted due to coercive practices and also due to the absence of the required infrastructures that would allow this right.
5. In fact, racism and social exclusion activates informal bureaucratic practices that prevent Gypsy/Roma families from practicing their right to choose, freely, the education centres for their sons and daughters.

Ideological Factors

6. The dynamics of the education systems are based on an ideological model that ensures the perpetuation, reproduction and conservation of the social and cultural systems of the majority and/or most powerful groups.
7. Thus, this negative image of Gypsy/Roma - with a lot of racist prejudices, stereotypes and negative images - tends to continue within schools.
8. The ideology of the school, both in its practices and its discourses, perpetuates myths and beliefs that foster the exclusion and marginalisation of the Gypsy children. The education systems transmit, either in a formal or an informal way, values and worldviews that have a hierarchical cultural orientation that is characteristic of the class structure of the majority society.
9. Gypsy/Roma children suffer processes of segregation in the educative systems, both in the classrooms and in particular school centres. These processes of segregation that are explained by diverse arguments, such as the academic gap and/or the need of socio-educational "adaptation".
10. The ideology about the Gypsy/Roma children is created around the stigma of Gypsy students as "misfit" and "disabled", associated to psychic deficiency, together with the "ethnic determinism" that considers that the failure at school of Gypsy/Roma children is due to their cultural identity.
11. The negative social representations regarding Gypsy/Roma students, the absence of expectations about school success for those students, and the malfunction of the socio-pedagogic dynamics that are established in classrooms, have a very negative influence over the educational interaction of the Gypsy/Roma children in the groups of teachers.

Institutional factors

12. There are gaps in the training of teachers who are involved in teaching Gypsy/Roma children. Bureaucratic and practical factors also limit their ability to provide flexible approaches to learning.

13. Gypsy/Roma students have also been portrayed as being disabled or misfit even amongst teachers who “specialised” in teaching them.
14. There is also a lack of multidisciplinary research in this field at universities.
15. At all socio-economic levels the relations between Gypsy/Roma families and the school are hindered by the negative social representation of their ethnicity. This prejudice often prevents positive bonds between Gypsy/Roma families and teachers that also obstruct communication between them. This lack of communication increases due to the ideological, socio-economic and institutional factors already mentioned.
16. In most of the contexts studied, the channels of communication between the families and the teachers are almost non-existent.

Cultural and symbolic factors

17. Often, the Gypsy culture is associated to exoticism - enhancing some kind of “difference”. This has led to the believe that some sort of specific structures are necessary - with specific classes, specific teachers, specific mediators - all of which are in fact ineffective and unproductive strategies. Thus, ethnicity turns into a sinister wall that separates them from the “normal” and leads to stigmatization.
18. This paradox arrives because Gypsy/Roma culture with its language and literature, history, and all the other positive and enriching references tends to remain invisible.

Key Recommendations

Political and legal

There is a need to: -

1. Guarantee the protection of the fundamental rights of the Gypsy/Roma children in line with legislation in force, especially their right to effective education.
2. Fully develop State and European legislation regarding the educational and cultural aspects of ethnic minorities.
3. Enhance and help the development of a transnational, integrated, flexible and jointly coordinated approach to social and educational policies.
4. Promote educational policies addressing the itinerant groups of the European Union and for creating infrastructures that allow the inclusion of the Gypsy/Roma children within ordinary schools, thus assuring their right to education.

5. Promote educational policies addressing the migrant population coming from Eastern Europe, guaranteeing the socio-educational integration and the fundamental rights of these children especially the disadvantaged.
6. Give priority to the transnational coordination of educational policies so that they could pay especial attention to itinerant Gypsy/Roma groups, agricultural temporary workers and fair-goers.
7. Articulate and implement the coordination between the local, regional and state administration of each country in order to tackle effective socio-educational policies.
8. Design socio-educational and cultural policies in the European Union that are directed to the acknowledgement of the Gypsy/Roma culture in the school.
9. Promote educational policies in the European Union that are directed to the acknowledgement of the Gypsy/Roma language and its inclusion in the teaching programmes at all levels of the education system.
10. Enhance the inclusion of Gypsy/Roma people at all socio-educational levels of management and democratic participation – the State and local administrations, public and private institutions and non-governmental organisations.
11. Implement educational policies that take into account the principle of positive discrimination regarding: assistance and scholarships to study, school resources, and catering services at school and the nursery.

Socio-economic

There is a need to: -

12. Implement coordinated, coherent and effective social politics from local, state and international administrations. The socio-economic inclusion of the Gypsy/Roma groups of children requires coordinated and complementary actions in the diverse spheres being involved.
13. Articulate socio-educational policies that guarantee the most disadvantaged Gypsy/Roma groups of children the access to housing, medical assistance and education.
14. Promote urban and social politics that avoid the processes of urban concentration and segregation, especially regarding the re-housing of social accommodation and the infrastructure of the areas for the parking of caravans.
15. Implement socio-labour policies that foster the labour regularisation of the Gypsy/Roma groups in general and those of migrants in particular, in order to guarantee the schooling of the Gypsy/Roma children of these groups.

Institutional

There is a need to: -

16. Consolidate socio-pedagogical actions aimed at the improvement of inter-ethnic relations in educational contexts, fighting with prejudices, stereotypes and negative social representations of Gypsy/Roma.
17. Guide the training offered to teachers, towards an ideological reformulation of the system itself, from a critical and constructive perspective regarding educational processes.
18. Guarantee the interdisciplinary training of teachers, orientated towards the ideological de-construction in order to activate the renovation and positive transformation of the educational systems.
19. Foster the democracy and the participation in the educative communities, guaranteeing the participation of Gypsy/Roma families.
20. Articulate pedagogic strategies and educational curricula aimed at fighting ethnic prejudice and negative social representations regarding Gypsy/Roma children.
21. Eradicate educational segregation, determined by formal and informal processes, of the Gypsy/Roma students in classrooms and schools, promoting inter-ethnic co-existence.
22. Help the inclusion of Gypsy/Roma students in ordinary centres and classes, thus avoiding exclusion and segregation.
23. Articulate educational policies that foster the decrease in the teacher/student ratios (1/10) with disadvantaged Gypsy/Roma students.
24. Foster models of cooperative education that help the inter-ethnic co-existence and that decrease prejudice and segregation of Gypsy/Roma students.
25. Implement educational policies aimed at the interdisciplinary university training of teachers and the enlargement of the curricula dealing with Gypsy/Roma issues.
26. Foster interdisciplinary and transnational networks that promote the training and dissemination of good teaching practices.
27. Support and encourage teachers, through continuous training, to develop appropriate interdisciplinary learning resources and enable them to develop flexible schedules.

28. Encourage the spread of good practice to all teachers in order to avoid the creation of “specific” groups of teachers for Gypsy/Roma students.
29. Foster flexible democracy in the educational communities in order to promote the participation and leadership of the families of Gypsy/Roma students.
30. Guarantee the right to the free choice of a school centre for all the Gypsy/Roma community and particularly to the most disadvantaged groups in socio-economic terms, in order to avoid concentration or exclusion.
31. Guarantee the inclusion of the Gypsy/Roma culture in the school curricula.
32. Implement the use of new technologies in educational centres with the aim of facilitating the tracking of the itinerant Gypsy/Roma students.
33. Create a transnational institutional portal (ROMA-NET) in order to facilitate the coordination of the educational policies in the countries of the European Union, regarding the education of the Gypsy/Roma children.

Further Information

The full title of the project is: “The Education of the Gypsy Childhood in Europe”. The final report was completed in May 2003.

[Abstract Summary Full Report Partner details](#)

Key Publications

Most of these reports are available from the project website. The Spanish reports are freely available upon request.

Italy

Barontini, Michele. *I roma Xoraxané di Pisa: educazione, musica, contesti*.

Lelli, Silvia. *Pragmatiche in una relazione educativa interculturale. Ricerca micro-etnografica a taglio prevalentemente sociolinguistico in una classe pluriculturale con alunni rom di un plesso scolastico di Firenze*. (2002)

Monasta, Lorenzo. *Mappatura degli insediamenti di cittadini non italiani di etnia Rom sul territorio nazionale*. Università degli Studi di Firenze. (2002)

Pontrandolfo, Stefania. *Io questi cinque anni di scuola lo strascorsi tutti bene e tutti felice. I rom e la scuola di Melfi*. Università degli Studi di Firenze (2002)

Sidoti, Pietra Simona. *Pratiche d'erranza quotidiana in una comunità di Caminanti siciliani* (2003)

Tauber, Elisabeth. *Men Ham Sintì - Men ham ker gage!. About Sintì, Childhood and the others*. (2003)

Trevisan, Paola. *Sintì in Emilia*. (2002)

Sorani, Alessandro Vittorio. *Gli insegnanti degli alunni rom e sintì. Un'analisi quantitativa*. (2002)

France

Faure, Pascale. *Quelques aspects de la question scolaire en milieu gitan.*

Montpellier. (2002)

Bruggeman, D, Repair V. *L'enseignement a distance pour les enfants du voyages.*
(2002)

Centre de Recherches Tsiganes. *La scolarisation des enfants tsiganes. La situation de la France.* (2003)

Kirilova, D., Tare M. *Les roms de la région Parisienne* (2002).

Delphine Bruggeman. *Les Antennes Scolaires Mobiles de Lille.* (2002)

Spain

Sama Acedo, Sara. *Espacios vividos, espacios creados. Los gitanos/roma de Évora*
(2002)

García Pastor, Begoña. *La educación de la infancia gitana/romni en la ciudad de Valencia. Del barrio a la escuela.*(2002)

Marcos, Cristina. *Gitanos en la ciudad de Sevilla* (2002)

Martínez, Mariví, Alfredo Alfageme. *La escolarización de la infancia gitana en cifras*
(2002).

Berta Chulvi, *Comunidades invisibles. Los húngaros en España.* (2002).

EINA Equipo de Investigaciones aplicadas. *Prospección sobre la escolarización de la infancia gitana/romni en 167 poblaciones de Andalucía.*(2003)

Research Institutions

University Jaime I (Spain)

University Rene Descartes (France)

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