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Roma in the Republic of Macedonia: Challenges and Inequalities in Housing, Education and Health

Andrea Spítálszky





Young girl in Roma settlement, Republic of Macedonia.

Andrea Spitalszky, April 2018.

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Roma Democratic Development Association SONCE

The Roma Democratic Development Association SONCE is a non-governmental organization working at the local, national and international levels to promote civil integration, democratic rights and equal opportunities for Roma in the Republic of Macedonia. Founded in 1996 as an informal self-help group for the Roma community in the Municipality of Tetovo and officially registered in 1999 as a non-profit organization, SONCE has implemented more than 50 projects over the past two decades in a range of areas including education, health and social care, employment and democratic participation of Roma.

SONCE collaborates closely with other civil society organizations, public institutions and international groups in order to bring positive change to the Roma community. It is a member of the following national and international networks and bodies: Roma Rights Advocacy Network, National Coordination Body Following the Implementation of the Roma Strategy 2014-2020, Federal Union of the European Nationalities (FUEN) and United Against Racism.

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Roma in the Republic of Macedonia: Challenges and Inequalities in Housing, Education and Health is published by MRG as a contribution to public understanding of the issue which forms its subject. The text and views of the author do not necessarily represent in every detail and all its aspects, the collective view of MRG.

Roma in the Republic of Macedonia: Challenges and Inequalities in Housing, Education and Health

Introduction

The Republic of Macedonia's (referred to as Macedonia for the remainder of the report) Roma population is still the most vulnerable minority in the country, a community that faces both institutional discrimination and social prejudice. This briefing provides crucial insights into the daily lives of Macedonian Roma. It draws on the first-hand accounts gathered by Roma mediators working with their communities, thereby enabling Roma themselves to describe their own direct experiences of the barriers they face.

According to the 2002 census, 53,879 (2.7 per cent) people identified themselves as Roma, although the actual number is likely to be significantly higher: for instance, the Council of Europe has estimated that there are between 134,000 and 260,000 Roma in the country.¹ Despite official recognition - Roma are explicitly mentioned as an ethnic community in the Preamble of the Macedonian Constitution amended by the Ohrid Framework Agreement in 2001² - Roma remain excluded from mainstream society and experience discrimination in almost every aspect of their lives.

This process begins early, with many Roma children segregated in separate classes or even in special schools, where the curriculum is often of a poorer quality and pupils typically achieve lower academic results. For a variety of reasons, the school drop-out rate is higher among Roma compared to the overall population and this, combined with discrimination in the labour market, leaves the majority of Roma unable to obtain formal employment. As a result, many Roma live in substandard living conditions, often struggling with overcrowding and without access to sanitation, safe drinking water, electricity, street lighting or public transport.

During its participation in the Decade for Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015, the government adopted its first Strategy for Roma,³ which aimed to improve the quality of life of the Roma, reduce inequalities, expand service access and promote integration. Ten years later, in accordance with the European Union's (EU) Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and preparation for the upcoming post-Decade period, the Government adopted a new Strategy which focuses on five priority areas: education, health care, employment, housing and culture.⁴ At present, despite some progress in areas such as school enrolment, implementation of the strategy remains poor.⁵

This briefing, drawing on extensive fieldwork and desk research, focuses on three key areas in which Roma continue to experience profound discrimination: education, housing and health. Its aim is to serve as a powerful tool

for advocacy at the local, national and international level, bringing together information gathered by mediators from the field to support civil society organizations (CSO) and human rights activists in their work. It also provides information for national and international decision-makers on the situation of the Roma. Most importantly, it is hoped that this publication will empower the Roma community itself in their fight for social justice and equality.

Methodology

This briefing is a product of collaboration between Minority Rights Group International (MRG) and the Roma Democratic Development Association (RDDA) SONCE as part of a joint three-year project, 'From Action to Equal Rights for Roma' (2017-2020), funded by the EU. The purpose of the project is to combat the discrimination that Roma face in Macedonia through litigation, advocacy and capacity-building. As part of these activities, in May 2017 MRG and RDDA SONCE trained 31 Roma mediators in human and minority rights, discrimination, advocacy and community outreach. Since then, 12 of these Roma mediators have been working regularly on the project, visiting the six target municipalities (Tetovo, Debar, Kicevo, Shtip, Vinica and Berovo) on a weekly basis to meet members of the Roma community, map human rights violations and identify incidents of discrimination for litigation and advocacy. Their findings, based on field trips between June 2017 and January 2018, were used as the basis for this briefing.

In addition to the mediators' reports, MRG and RDDA SONCE carried out desk research on relevant statistical data and national legislation, and also spoke with members of the Roma communities in four target municipalities during a field visit carried out in April 2018. The partners also drew on the Advocacy Action Plan of the Roma Advocacy Network,⁶ which focuses on all three areas covered by this briefing.

Discrimination: the root cause of human rights violations

Discrimination and equality before the law is guaranteed by the Constitution of Macedonia⁷ and it was further reinforced by the Ohrid Framework Agreement adopted in 2001 which guarantees the principle of adequate and equal

representation of communities.⁸ In 2010, the Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination⁹ was adopted, which defines the different types of discrimination and established the Commission for protection against discrimination.¹⁰ The Commission has various competencies in the field of anti-discrimination, acting on complaints and giving opinion and recommendations in cases of discrimination.¹¹ Furthermore, the Public Attorney (Ombudsman) plays an important role in the protection of the principle of non-discrimination.¹² For example, in 2017, out of the 3,223 complainants who turned to the Ombudsman, 1,871 citizens declared their ethnicity, of whom 117 were of Roma origin.¹³ The complaints submitted by the Roma applicants were mainly related to health care, social welfare, finances, consumer rights, judiciary, children's rights and urban development.¹⁴

Despite the legal and institutional protections already in place, discrimination remains an everyday reality for Roma. From a very early age they experience prejudice and rejection from mainstream society. Indeed, many Roma struggle to secure the full enjoyment of their economic and social rights, including the right to education, employment, adequate housing and health. Roma who do not have any personal documentation find themselves on the margins of society, at risk of statelessness, with even more limited access to basic services. Due to incomplete statistical data it is difficult to estimate the number of stateless Roma. According to estimates by the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association, there are 664 persons at risk of statelessness, with around 70 per cent of them being Roma.

Roma returnees are also more vulnerable and they usually face difficulties in their reintegration. After the visa liberalization in 2009, due to their unfavourable economic conditions and social marginalization, thousands of Roma have sought asylum in EU member states. The largest number of people who left Macedonia to live abroad, mostly in Germany, France, Belgium, Netherlands and Sweden, were Roma. However, many of the asylum requests presented by Macedonians, including Roma, have been rejected by EU member states and unsuccessful applicants sent back to Macedonia.

One of the most common cases of discrimination identified by the Roma mediators is access to private services. A number of incidents were documented of Roma being prevented from entering restaurants, coffee shops, bars, discos, swimming pools or hotels on a variety of false pretexts: for example, they are told a private event is taking place or that they need a reservation, even if the place is empty. On other occasions, diners try to sit as far away as possible from them, or they are insulted either by the waiters or by other customers. Waiters often refuse to serve them and even, in the most extreme cases, inform them directly that Roma are not accepted.

For example, mediators in one municipality reported a case of a Roma woman who went to a water park with her children. Having bought tickets, an employee stopped

them at the entrance and checked their backpacks – something none of the other families at the park were obliged to do – before shouting at them to give back the tickets and go away. This incident clearly demonstrates how ethnic profiling and prejudice colours even the most mundane situations for Roma: besides amounting to discrimination, which is prohibited by law, these experiences have a strong negative effect on their self-esteem and their faith in society.

Education

The Constitution of Macedonia¹⁵ and the Law on Primary Education¹⁶ guarantees the right to education under equal conditions. However, in practice, Roma children still suffer from social stigma, discrimination and segregation,¹⁷ and face several barriers in their access to regular and quality education and training.¹⁸ Pre-school enrolment of Roma children is still very low: a survey of selected Roma settlements found that only 14 per cent of Roma children aged 3-6 receives pre-school education, compared to 29 per cent of the non-Roma population living in close vicinity to them.¹⁹ There is also low attendance and high drop-out rates among Roma pupils. There are a number of reasons for this: emigration of Roma families to countries in Western Europe, lack of personal documentation, segregation even at the earliest stages of education and the lack of organized or public transport to the kindergarten from Roma settlements, which are most often far away from educational institutions.²⁰ Of all the ethnic groups in Macedonia, illiteracy levels are highest among Roma: however, there have been some signs of improvement in educational enrolment and completion among Roma students in primary and secondary schools.²¹

According to the mediator reports, on some occasions Roma children had to attend segregated classes, or they are physically separated from their non-Roma peers in the classroom and are obliged to sit in the back row. The proportion of marginalized Roma children who attend segregated school is significant, with 40 per cent of marginalized Roma students aged 7-15 attending segregated schools in 2017. Troublingly, this phenomenon appears to be on the rise: in 2011, the ratio was 25 per cent. The quality of education in these schools is typically poorer, with limited resources and less qualified teaching staff.²² Under the Law on Primary Education, primary schools are obliged to enrol pupils residing in their catchment areas: however, a primary school can enrol students from other districts or municipalities if there are free spaces, which often leads to arbitrariness in practice.²³ One of the main reasons behind school segregation is that parents find ways to circumnavigate the catchment system to secure places in their preferred schools – a situation that contributes to the creation of 'Roma only' elementary

schools. The Ombudsperson has repeatedly highlighted the problem of segregation and the disproportionate representation of Roma children in special schools.²⁴

Poverty is a further barrier to education: many Roma parents do not have enough money to buy clothes, shoes or school material for their children. As some of the poorest Roma households lack access to running water, making hygiene difficult, parents may choose to not send their children to school to protect them from bullying. Many Roma families also leave on seasonal work with their children, who then miss school during that period. In some traditional families, girls are encouraged to stay at home to help around the household and take care of their siblings, rather than go to school.²⁵ Some children also lack the necessary documentation to be able to attend school or to receive the certificate of completion. Roma are sometimes barred from enrolment or not fully aware of the rights guaranteed them by law.

In addition, Roma children and their parents are often subjected to discrimination, bullying, harassment or other forms of ill treatment at school. The Roma mediators have reported several occasions when Roma children suffered prejudice and hostility from their peers and even their teachers, including being insulted or marked down for discriminatory reasons. Roma mediators reported cases of Roma children being forced to sit at the back of the classroom and not receiving the same attention from the teachers as their non-Roma peers. In one school, Roma pupils, unlike their non-Roma peers, are immediately punished in a humiliating way: if they do not behave properly, for example, they have to stand on one leg for an hour.

For those Roma children whose mother tongue is not Macedonian, it is even more difficult to follow classes and integrate at school. Although the Law on Primary Education guarantees that Roma language and culture can be taught as an optional subject, in practice this regulation is widely ignored and often this option is not available for Roma pupils. In addition, there is a lack of qualified Roma teaching staff in primary and secondary schools, while at the same time those Roma teachers who are qualified and have university education cannot find employment at primary and secondary schools. Furthermore, the children of Roma returnees face difficulties in integrating and having their foreign school certificates recognized in Macedonia. In addition, there are financial implications, as in families where there are several children, parents often cannot afford to pay the administration fees.²⁶ Besides language barriers, they lack psychological, emotional and social support to cope with the cultural shock of their return.

Housing

There are various laws in Macedonia which regulate housing and which are especially relevant for Roma, like the Law on Housing and the Law on the Procedure of Illegally Built Objects.²⁸

Roma face some of the worst housing conditions in the country.²⁹ 28 per cent of Roma live in poor neighbourhoods, in badly constructed housing that often lacks formal registration.³⁰ Overcrowding is also widespread: many Roma families live in houses with less than 5 square metres per person.³¹ This situation is made worse by the precariousness of these arrangements, with some 80,000 Roma households lacking long-term housing solutions.³² The frequent absence of adequate drinking water, electricity, heating or sanitation also contributes to widespread ill health.

Local government agencies play an important role as they have the mandate to closely regulate housing. They are also responsible for infrastructure development, urban planning and land registries, but many Roma are not familiar with the complex institutional structures that shape these policies and so are largely dependent on the goodwill of decision makers. While some 2,000 applications to regularize unregistered homes have reportedly been made in the last few years, the outcome of these procedures is largely unknown – though civil society organizations believe the ratio must be relatively low at a national level.³³ In this context it is difficult for citizens, particularly Roma, to get a clear picture of the regulations and how these can be successfully navigated.

CSOs further argue that the national social housing programme fails to reach those areas where the Roma population need these measures most, and that there is not enough social housing to cater for all of those in need. Even in regions where the volume of available social housing is proportionate to the number of Roma, they are often unaware of these options and the procedures involved in applying for them. Nor have all local authorities developed detailed urban plans, further hindering the implementation of social housing programme.³⁴

The impact of poor living conditions on Roma health and education

Some years ago, after a flood in eastern Macedonia destroyed a Roma settlement, residents were relocated to the site of a former hospital. These buildings were in a deplorable state and were not fit for human habitation: lacking even the most basic furniture, such as beds, many Roma were forced to sleep with their children on the floor, covered by blankets. As there are no containers, garbage accumulates in the yard and attracts flies: a number of children have been infected as a result. As most of those living there do not have any income and cannot pay for their electricity, it is often cut. Children are not able to attend school and do not have even adequate clothing or running water to clean themselves. The local authorities have made promises to find a solution, but no steps have been taken so far.

The situation is also concerning in one of the Roma settlements which MRG and RDDA SONCE project staff visited with local Roma mediators in April 2018. Most of the houses lack legal tenure: of the 30 or so families who

initiated the legalization procedure, only five have managed to legalize their homes while others are still waiting for a favourable decision on their case. Other families do not have the financial means to begin the legalization procedure. The majority of houses do not even have sanitation or running water: while local authorities built a cistern around a year ago, often there is no water in it and so residents use an older one that was built around 25 years before. However, the quality of the water is not good and many people claim to have fallen sick from it. When the cistern is dry, those families who can afford it buy bottled water while poorer families must go to the nearest pump, around 200 metres away, to collect water from there. The knock on effects of this limited access – for instance, residents need to wash their clothes by hand and there is no opportunity to take a shower – impacts Roma in other areas of their lives as well. Roma pupils can face discrimination and harassment from teachers due to what may be perceived as poor personal hygiene.

Health

The Macedonian Constitution guarantees the right of all citizens to health care.³⁵ Prohibition of discrimination on any grounds in health care is enshrined by the Law on Health Protection³⁶ and the Law on Protection of Patients' Rights,³⁷ but in practice discrimination against Roma in health care is still widespread and goes largely unreported. The negative experiences many go through when attempting to access health care can discourage them from engaging these services in future.

Under domestic law, all citizens are entitled to health insurance³⁸ and coverage among Roma is the best in the region³⁹ and is close to universal: 94 per cent of marginalized Roma (aged 16+) are covered, compared to 97 per cent of non-Roma population living in close vicinity to them.⁴⁰ The main reason for those who are not covered by the health insurance is lack of personal documentation. Nevertheless, while health care coverage for Roma is comparable to that of non-Roma, the services Roma receive are typically of a lower quality than the services offered for the general population.⁴¹ Furthermore, the Roma have higher morbidity and mortality rates than the general population:⁴² this is reflected in the significantly lower average life expectancy among Roma (68 years) compared to the average of the national population (73.5 years).⁴³

Discrimination by medical personnel against Roma plays a key role in their reluctance to see a doctor. Apart from existing cultural barriers, health workers often behave

in a hostile way with Roma patients or make racist comments about them. This kind of behaviour, based on stigma and prejudice, often dissuades Roma from seeking medical attention – a situation that contributes to their poor health outcomes. One survey, for example, found that almost the same percentage of Roma suffer from chronic non-contagious diseases as non-Roma, but a lower proportion of them received regular therapy and those who did were provided with lower quality health care services.⁴⁴ Similarly, a smaller share of Roma children are vaccinated than children from other ethnic groups.⁴⁵ The solution to this depends in part on better social engagement of Roma communities: in particular, Roma health mediators⁴⁶ play a crucial role in the provision of information for Roma on their health rights, contributing to wider coverage of health insurance and child vaccination.⁴⁷

Roma women are particularly vulnerable as they face both physical and financial barriers in their access to primary gynaecological health care. They often live in remote settlements without any public transport, or the gynaecologist charges them even for services which otherwise would be free. Many Roma women do not receive any type of health education and are therefore not aware of their rights. MRG's mediators have reported on a number of occasions that Roma women had difficulties in arranging an appointment with their registered gynaecologist. When they went to ask for an appointment,

they were told that they could only get one in a couple of weeks, while they witnessed non-Roma women being allocated ones for the following day. These factors all contribute to the reluctance of Roma women to visit their

gynaecologist for preventive check-ups, so putting their health at risk: many do not even visit their registered gynaecologist during pregnancy and in some cases give birth at their home, without any medical assistance whatsoever.⁴⁸

Prejudice and discrimination in medical services – the experiences of Roma in the health system

Mediator reports have documented a range of rights violations experienced by Roma in their efforts to secure health care. Widespread discrimination not only often results in Roma receiving inadequate treatment at the time, but also leaves them less willing to approach services in future, even if their needs are urgent.

In one municipality, after a young Roma girl swallowed a coin, her mother immediately took her to the local doctor, whose initial response was dismissive: children often swallow things, the doctor said, and the coin must be already in the girl's stomach, so she would expel it later. However, the girl appeared to have problems breathing so her mother insisted that an X-ray was taken to see where the coin was. The doctor was reluctant to do so, arguing that the mother was just panicking: in the meantime, she overheard one of the nurses saying, 'This is a typical Gypsy thing - she thinks she is smarter than the doctor.' After a long argument, the girl started vomiting and the mother finally convinced the doctor to make an X-ray. Based on the results, the doctor realized that the coin was in the girl's throat and she was urgently transferred to the main hospital in Skopje, where the coin was finally removed.

In another case, a Roma woman was 4.5 months pregnant when she was told by the gynaecologist during a

check-up that the foetus was dead and had probably died some 6 weeks before. The doctor sent her to one of the hospitals in Skopje. At the hospital she was refused immediate treatment as she could not pay for it: only after receiving a blood test that showed she was in a critical condition did she receive proper care. She subsequently spent seven days recovering in hospital from a blood infection she had received as a result of the miscarriage. All her documents (ID card, health insurance card) were seized by the hospital as she could not pay 110 EUR for her treatment, and she was told that she would not get them back until she paid. The woman wanted to know why the foetus had died, but she was not provided with any information by the hospital staff.

On another occasion, Roma mediators reported a case where a Roma man engaged in seasonal work fell off a tractor and suffered a head injury. After being taken to hospital, one of the doctors started to stitch his head but when his shift ended, he simply left while the patient still had the needle in his head. When the new doctor came, he asked the man to pay for the treatment before he went on stitching his wound: only after the doctor was paid 100 Euros was the stitching completed.

Conclusion

The findings documented by our mediators, supported by published data and reports by a variety of independent organizations, highlight how Roma in Macedonia - despite many legal regulations in place specifically prohibiting discrimination - continue in practice to experience prejudice and stigma from an early age. These issues are frequently interrelated. Segregation at school and poor quality instruction contribute to high drop-out rates; this in turn makes it difficult for young Roma to find a job, creating reliance on social benefits; high unemployment levels and limited resources oblige many to live in substandard housing conditions; and lack of electricity, safe drinking water and sanitation results in ill health which, coupled with the discrimination in access to public services, ultimately leads to a lower life expectancy. At present, then, despite some progress in certain areas, Roma continue to experience a lifetime of discrimination and on average die earlier than their non-Roma peers.

The national government and local authorities should therefore take firm steps to break existing barriers and ensure that the legal provisions on prohibition of discrimination are fully implemented. The Ombudsman, Roma activists and civil society play a crucial role in drawing the attention of authorities to discrepancies between the law and practice. The government must consult with CSOs working with Roma communities, Roma activists and Roma mediators - those most familiar with the difficulties and rights violations that Roma experience – to develop concrete solutions to the issues they face. Beyond consultation, national and local decision-makers should involve Roma representatives in decision-making processes in all areas that affect them. It is of utmost importance that the Roma regain confidence in state institutions so that they can constructively contribute to any policies affecting them: social justice and equality for all can only be achieved by the active participation of Roma in all spheres of public life.

Recommendations

Education

- Develop a state policy to promote pre-school attendance among Roma children and to raise awareness about its importance among their parents.
- Implement a strategy to effectively combat high school drop-out rates, extending beyond punitive measures such as fines for the parents to the active motivation of Roma children to attend school.
- Assess the number of Roma children in the catchment area of each school and ensure their equal allocation with non-Roma children.
- Ensure the full implementation of opportunities for students to study Roma language and culture as an optional subject, in line with the provisions in the Law on Education.
- Amend Article 156 of the Law on Primary Education to simplify the recognition of foreign school certificates obtained by returnee children abroad. In addition, offer fee waivers to those families who could not otherwise afford to pay the administration fees for the recognition of foreign school certificates.
- Introduce a component on non-discrimination and equal treatment in teacher training programmes. Make completion mandatory for successful receipt of a teacher training certificate.
- Review course materials and curricula to ensure that negative stereotypes are not included. If necessary, produce new materials that promote equal treatment of Roma and other minorities.

Housing

- Undertake needs assessments and data collection on the housing situation of the Roma population.
- Accelerate the legalization procedures for illegal buildings occupied by Roma, in line with the Law on the Procedure of Illegally Built Objects.
- Design detailed urban plans and provide funds for the improvement of the utility infrastructure in Roma settlements and municipalities.
- Identify the most vulnerable Roma families and ensure the provision of social housing to them.

Health

- Collect disaggregated health data to identify the main obstacles that Roma face in their access to healthcare to guide policy design.
- Improve awareness about the importance of healthcare and the rights of Roma to public services, through Roma health mediators and other alternative approaches, with particular attention paid to the needs of illiterate Roma.
- Through special measures, ensure that the number of Roma studying to become health care professionals increases to reflect the proportion of Roma to society as a whole.
- Increase the number of health mediators in municipalities where there is a high density of Roma, with more resources to support their work.
- Provide free healthcare services for Roma without personal documentation who otherwise might only have limited access to it.
- Incentivize gynaecologists through grants designed to target their healthcare services in Roma settlements.
- Support sensitisation and awareness-raising among healthcare staff on anti-discrimination, social prejudice and equality.

Notes

- 1 Council of Europe, 'Document prepared by the Support Team of the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues', July 2012.
- 2 Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, adopted by the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia on 17 November 1991 amended by the Ohrid Framework Agreement on 16 November 2001.
- 3 Government of Macedonia, Strategy for Roma in the Republic of Macedonia, December 2004.
- 4 Government of Macedonia, Strategy for Roma in Republic of Macedonia (2014 -2020), June 2014.
- 5 European Commission, *The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: 2018 Report*, Strasbourg, April 2018, p.33.
- 6 In June 2017, MRG and RDDA SONCE established the Roma Advocacy Network with the participation of Roma and non-Roma NGOs, as well as the Ombudsperson's Office and other anti-discrimination experts.
- 7 Article 9, Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia: 'Citizens of the Republic of Macedonia are equal in their freedoms and rights, regardless of sex, race, colour of skin, national and social origin, political and religious beliefs, property and social status. All citizens are equal before the Constitution and law.'
- 8 Article 4.1, Framework Agreement, Concluded at Ohrid, Macedonia signed at Skopje, Macedonia on 13 August 2001: 'The principle of non-discrimination and equal treatment of all under the law will be respected completely.'
- 9 Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination, Official gazette no. 50/10.
- 10 An improved Draft Law on Prevention and Protection Against Discrimination is soon to be adopted which was favourably evaluated by the European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission) in March 2018.
- 11 Article 24.1, Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination.
- 12 Article 2, Decree Proclaiming the Ombudsman Law, No. 07-4502/1, 10 September 2003: 'The Ombudsman shall [...] protect the constitutional and legal rights of citizens and all other persons when these are infringed by acts, actions and omissions by the state administration bodies and by other bodies and organizations that have public authority, and who shall undertake actions and measures for protection of the principle of non-discrimination and adequate and equitable representation of community members in the state administration bodies, the local self-government units and the public institutions and agencies.'
- 13 Applicants are not obliged to reveal their ethnic origin.
- 14 Ombudsman of the Republic of Macedonia, Annual Report, 2017, pp. 152-154.
- 15 Article 44, Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia: 'Everyone has the right to education. Education is accessible to everyone under equal conditions. Primary education is compulsory and free.'
- 16 Law on Primary Education, Official gazette no. 103/08, 2008.
- 17 European Commission, April 2018, p.31.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p.78.
- 19 UNDP and World Bank, *Roma at a Glance – The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, April 2018.
- 20 CEA and Romalitico, *Shadow Report – Implementation of the Roma Strategy in the Republic of Macedonia in the Years 2016 and 2017*, March 2018, p.62.
- 21 UNDP and World Bank, *op. cit.*
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 Article 46, Law on Primary Education, Official gazette nr. 103/08, 2008. See also IHR and ERRC, *Segregation of Roma Children in Elementary Schools in Republic of Macedonia*, October 2016, pp. 8-9.
- 24 See, for example, Ombudsman report, 'Information of the situation for enrolment of Roma in first grade and their representation in classes together with children from other ethnic backgrounds 2014/15', October 2015.
- 25 OSF, REF and UNICEF, *Roma Early Childhood Inclusion*, 2012, p.41.
- 26 CEA and Romalitico, *op. cit.*, p.64. See also IHR and ERRC, 'The issues that Roma students face during their reintegration in the education system after returning from the Western European countries', December 2017.
- 27 Law on Housing No. 99/09, 05.08.2009.
- 28 Law on treatment of illegally constructed buildings No. 23, 24.2.2011.
- 29 Government of Macedonia, *National Strategy on Alleviation of Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Republic of Macedonia 2010-2020*, March 2010, p.66.
- 30 UNICEF, *Inclusion of All Roma in the Health Insurance System*, 2016, p.2.
- 31 Council of Europe, Thematic Report by the Experts of the CAHROM thematic group on Social Housing for Roma, CAHROM (2012)8, Strasbourg, 28 November 2012.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 CEA and Romalitico, *op. cit.*, p.62.
- 34 *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.
- 35 Article 39, Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia: 'Every citizen is guaranteed the right to health care. Citizens have the right and duty to protect and promote their own health and the health of others.'
- 36 Article 9, Law on Health Protection, Official gazette no. 43/2012, 145/2012, 87/2013, 164/2013.
- 37 Law on the Protection of Patients' Rights, Official gazette no. 82/2008, 12/2009 and 53/2011.
- 38 Law on Health Insurance, Official gazette nos.25/2000, 96/2000, 50/2001, 11/2002, 31/2003, 84/2005, 37/2006, 18/2007, 36/2007, 82/2008, 98/2008, 6/2009, 67/2009, 50/2010, 156/2010, 53/2011, 26/2012, 16/2013, 91/2013 and 187/2013).
- 39 European Commission, April 2018, *op. cit.*, p.33.
- 40 UNDP and World Bank, *op. cit.*
- 41 ECE, OSF and FOSM, *We are All Human: Health Care for All People Regardless of Their Ethnicity*, 2014, p.9.
- 42 UNICEF, *Inclusion of All Roma in the Health Insurance System*, 2016, p.2.
- 43 OSF, REF and UNICEF, *op. cit.*, p.24.
- 44 ECE, OSF and FOSM, *op. cit.*, p.37.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p.38.
- 46 The Roma Health Mediators programme has been running in Macedonia since 2011, funded by the Ministry of Health, the Foundation Open Society Macedonia and the Health, Education and Research Association (HERA). In the framework of the project, 16 trained and accredited mediators started to work in eight municipalities where the Roma population density is the highest. See European Social Policy Network, Roma Health Mediators in Macedonia: a successful model under threat?, ESPN Flash Report 37/2017, June 2017,.
- 47 CEA and Romalitico, *op. cit.*, p.64.
- 48 ECE, OSF and FOSM, *op. cit.*, p.10.

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Roma in the Republic of Macedonia: Challenges and Inequalities in Housing, Education and Health Andrea Spítálszky

The Republic of Macedonia's Roma population is still the most vulnerable minority in the country, a community that faces both institutional marginalization and social prejudice. This briefing, drawing on the first-hand accounts gathered by Roma mediators working with their communities, provides crucial insights into their daily lives and the difficulties they continue to face.

Despite official recognition, Roma remain excluded from mainstream society and experience discrimination in almost every aspect of their lives, beginning at school and continuing into adult life, with the majority of Roma unable to obtain formal employment. As a result, many Roma live in substandard living conditions, often struggling with overcrowding and without access to basic services.

Roma in the Republic of Macedonia: Challenges and Inequalities in Housing, Education and Health outlines the range of challenges the country's Roma still face and includes a series of recommendations on how their situation can be improved. These include a more inclusive approach to service provision, greater awareness of the specific barriers experienced by the community and an emphasis on targeted strategies to address these disparities.

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Minority Rights Group International 54 Commercial Street, London E1 6LT, United Kingdom

Tel +44 (0)20 7422 4200 **Fax** +44 (0)20 7422 4201 **Email** minority.rights@mrgmail.org

Website www.minorityrights.org  www.twitter.com/minorityrights  www.facebook.com/minorityrights

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