SCHOOL DROPOUT AMONG ROMA STUDENTS. CAUSES AND METHODS OF PREVENTION

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Abstract: Family involvement in children's education is fundamental for success in education. Given the even more important role of the family and the community in the Roma context, it is essential to identify the consequences of early school leaving on Roma children, in terms of personal development, as well as on their future socio-economic integration. It is extremely important that there is a collaboration of Roma families in terms of staying in the educational system of Roma girls, who are the most affected by the high rates of early school leaving. Therefore, a widespread phenomenon that should be treated with greater attention and that has become a serious problem of Romanian education is school dropout. School dropout is found among all students, but especially among those of Roma ethnicity, students who adapt with difficulty both in society and in the education system, who face the difficult acceptance in communities (more and more parents are reluctant to enroll their children in classes where there are also children of Roma ethnicity). (The Gentle, 2021)Roma cultivate, especially in children, a sense of reality as well as the ability to conceive survival strategies and less concern for school, they, in turn, receive the same education.

Keywords: school dropout, Roma students, prevention, educational system, vulnerable communities

The causes of school dropout among Roma children are multiple and differ from case to case. A first cause is related to the socio-economic condition of the family and presents several aspects. In most cases, school dropout is determined by poverty. Due to the poor financial situation, parents cannot provide their children with the necessary things for school (notebooks, books, backpacks, clothing, food), and they have little chance of getting a complete school education.

In most cases, Roma children who drop out of school come from families where the parents have a very low level of education and do not consider it necessary for their children to finish school or go on to high school or college. Parents are not even interested in what the children learn, if they learn or not, if they integrate into the class group. The family environment has an important role in the child's development. In these families, the atmosphere is characterized by arguments and violence favored by alcohol consumption, which have negative effects on the child's psyche and influence his behavior at school and in society. Parents' indifference regarding children's education and school activity leads to school failure and from here to school dropout is only one step. As a result of the causes related to the socio-economic condition of the family, the causes related to the student contribute to the increase in the number of Roma students who drop out of school. They refer to the student's psychological state. (Petrovan, 2018)

Having a damaged self-image, feelings of inferiority, anxiety, they have different reactions when school failure occurs. Those who do not find in themselves or in the family the necessary resources to face the difficulties will satisfy their need for personal valorization outside of school, by dropping out. Low confidence in school education, disinterest in education or difficulties in acquiring the knowledge that is taught are other important aspects

of the causes of school dropout. However, there are also cases in which the school causes Roma children to choose abandonment in exchange for education: the lack of teaching materials and modern facilities, especially in schools where only Roma children study, the attitude of some teaching staff who react wrongly to Roma students who have poor academic results or who present behavioral disorders, the lack of interest of schools in providing programs for individual integration and curricular adaptation.

Dropping out of school is one of the many forms of school failure. The notion of school failure has different contents from one education system to another, among the most common meanings, such as premature school leaving, including: gap between personal potential and results, leaving school without a qualification, learning difficulties, repetition and illiteracy, the inability to achieve pedagogical goals, failure in final exams.

School dropout also has different meanings and meanings: leaving the education system before completing compulsory education, leaving the system before graduating one of its levels, leaving the system, regardless of level, without obtaining the diploma certifying the completion of the respective level of education education, leaving the education system without acquiring a certificate that offers the possibility of integration into the labor market.

We need to know the causes of school dropout for each individual student and then develop individualized strategies. Successes and rewards, as well as highlighting positive behaviors, strengthen the student's confidence in their own strengths. Thus, the creation of successful situations by highlighting some of their skills (drawing, music, dance) represents an important aspect of the activity of eliminating school dropouts.

Other actions that can have a decisive role in reducing the number of Roma students who drop out of school would be stimulating the interest of Roma adults in increasing the level of schooling by creating education programs for adults - "Second Chance", initiating and developing programs special financial support for families with no income or minimal income, providing a meal and helping with homework through "After school" programs, school partnerships with other schools, kindergartens, the Red Cross, extracurricular activities where Roma children can interact with others children, capitalizing on the examples of success that come from among them, etc. (Petrovan, 2018)

The issue of school failure or success must be approached in the context of equal opportunities for education, a concept on which there are several perspectives. A first perspective concerns equality of access: at the start of schooling, all children must be given equal opportunities, taking into account that they have a different genetic endowment, come from heterogeneous backgrounds and have suffered different influences. A second perspective concerns equality of opportunity: the content of school programs and the pedagogical approach should be non-discriminatory, including that schools should be equal in effectiveness. The perspective on the results of the educational process presupposes the equalization, at least relative, of school performances, at the end of the same levels of schooling.

The problems regarding the Roma community have gained an unprecedented relevance on the political level, both at the national and European level. There is a general consensus regarding the need to establish specific, integrated and effective actions to compensate for the inequalities and structural disadvantages faced by the Roma population in Europe, and beyond. This political commitment is reflected in the National Roma Integration Strategy, constituting extremely valuable frameworks for the promotion of integration and the fight against discrimination. The European Strategy 2020 emphasizes the need to reduce the school dropout rate and increase the level of education of the European population. The European framework highlights the determination to overcome the disadvantages of the existing educational context for the Roma population compared to the rest of the population in the European Union, promoting the success of Roma girls and boys, especially by guaranteeing the financing of at least primary education. These objectives of the European Union were taken into account in

the framework of national educational policies, consequently they were mostly focused on investments in Roma children. (Neacșu, 1998)

The experience of the different actors at the national level contributes to the generation of knowledge regarding specific strategies and interventions that have added value and a real impact on improving the educational level of Roma children. In addition, the Roma community in Europe is characterized by its young people and their low level of qualification. They are, consequently, separated from the current economic life. In the medium and long term, increasing the educational level of Roma children will lead to the promotion of equal opportunities for these children, but also to economic growth.

Among the multiple factors that affect this situation, an important place is occupied by the family, given its importance as one of the primary socialization factors, in the educational processes and in the development of individuals together with other social actors such as peer groups. It is very important to raise awareness among Roma families about the consequences for their children who drop out of school at an early age, both in terms of their personal development and their future economic and social integration. In many Roma families there are no reference models of relatives who have completed primary education, and even less of members who have completed more than compulsory education. This aspect must be taken into account, offering support to families so that more and more students complete their studies and become reference models in their community.

Today's Roma families are not the ones of the past. In many cases, Roma men and women go through a process of change; we see this in young men and women who continue their studies with vocational training or university studies, and then enter the labor market. Strengthening this process of change by involving families in the educational process of their children has become one of the main tools in guaranteeing participation, performance and greater success within the educational system.

In addition to the family, it is necessary to consider other key actors in this process, such as: public administration, NGOs, and, of course, school centers. All of them have different but complementary roles and, together with the family, facilitate the school participation and success of Roma children.

The Roma population in Europe, and in particular, the Roma population in our country, presents a series of problems in accessing, integrating and benefiting from academic success within the educational system. These problems that visibly affect the Roma community result from a lack of training on the part of it and, consequently, its members do not have access to the labor market on equal terms with the majority of the population. This generates further social inequalities, less wealth and an impoverished social perception, as well as a devaluation of the Roma community.

The factors that influence this situation are multiple, long-lasting and respond to a diversity of social, economic and cultural causes, which have determined the development and evolution of the Roma community in the countries where they have a fairly large share.

A first factor is the social, economic and labor market situation. We all know that the Roma population constitutes a large minority in our country, representing the largest ethnic group after the Hungarian minority. According to recent studies, the Roma are more affected by poverty and extreme poverty than the majority of the population. Many Roma live today in colonies, nuclei and ghettos, occupying marginal positions in the economic and productive system.

From the perspective of the economy and employment, the Roma community usually occupies a position of inequality compared to the majority of the population, they have marginal occupations or, in some cases, jobs that are not qualified or secure. In addition, the liberalizations that took place after the fall of the socialist governments, as well as the current

economic crisis marked a significant deterioration in the level of poverty and unemployment of the Roma community.

Among the main reasons affecting this situation of economic and job insecurity for Roma in our Europe are:

• Fall of traditional employment sectors;

• Educational levels below the national average; this aspect significantly limits their opportunities for development and access to the labor market;

• Discrimination on the labor market reduces the possibilities of Roma workers to get a job.

In essence, the Roma population, in adverse economic conditions, has a greater risk of being poor and maintaining a marginal position, with objective difficulties in accessing the labor market. In this context, education has a fundamental role, as it is one of the most important ways to achieve greater development, integration and training for the Roma population and, ultimately, a better quality of life.

Another factor is education: in general terms, the Roma community in our country has a lower level of schooling, a higher level of illiteracy, a higher dropout rate, a lower presence of Roma students in higher education and, generally less academic success.

In the Romanian educational system there are three school cycles: preschool, primary and secondary (secondary education being compulsory until the age of 16, 10th grade), vocational training in various fields and university education. The main educational principles and policies are: the free nature of public education, the accessibility of different levels of education, as well as the equality of citizens in terms of education.

In our country we find a formal attitude that is both positive and inclusive towards ethnic minorities, an attitude that is strongly supported by the European Union, resulting in policies, plans and specific actions of intervention on the Roma population. However, the main educational principles and policies are not always applied equally to all citizens, such as the Roma. It is a real fact that in Europe, as in our country, different types of school segregation still persist, more or less. Some measures have even been created to support the schooling of Roma children.

However, in practice, these measures and policies are not always adequately materialized, there is still a strong segregation, making it difficult for the Roma population to access normal education centers, and their rights not always being guaranteed. The existence of segregation of the ethnic minority, especially of the Roma population, is evident in different ways – from the visible segregation that exists in different educational centers, to a more hidden segregation that manifests itself differently. An example would be: the abuse of educational measures aimed at special situations and cases, or the grouping of Roma students in special classes in schools. (ERRC, 2004)

Among the different forms of segregation, it should be mentioned the existence of special school centers or centers for the population with specific needs (mental disabilities), with very low academic requirements, which obviously offer a lower level of education, many Roma children are sent to these centers . In addition, segregation also occurs in schools where some classes are created only for Roma children.

Similarly, a number of special measures aimed at solving particular situations of students are implemented to a greater extent among Roma students. An edifying example would be: students at home, which in practice means that students do not have to attend classes, but only have to go to school to take their end-of-year exams, or supporting Roma children's access to education programs vocational training (which are very short), providing a low qualification and therefore few alternatives to meet the demands of the labor market.

On certain occasions, these segregation situations are related to housing policies or the distribution of students by centers, by educational levels. Example: many Roma students with

a low level end up in the same class, or if they live in segregated neighborhoods, it is common for schools in the area to be segregated as well. Despite the segregation, although serious, this is not the only problem that influences the educational difficulties of the Roma community. There are other factors that come into play, especially the inclusion of Roma children in the educational system and their school success.(ERRC, 2007))

The most common problems faced by Roma children and their families are grouped into the following categories:

Socio-economic exclusion factors affecting the family:

• Poverty and extreme poverty. Poverty is one of the main obstacles to school inclusion and participation; although it is a complex phenomenon in its economic dimension, it could mean that families cannot access educational centers because they cannot afford the cost of education, such as textbooks, transportation and other needs.

• Unemployment or underemployment. Job insecurity, low pay, discontinuity of work, economic difficulties in financing education needs.

• Internal and external migration. Migrations that occur mainly for economic and work reasons cause a discontinuity in contact between school centers and/or students and their families.

• Lack of necessary documents. Lack of documents and regulations make it difficult to access and register at school.

• Geographical location. Geographical location influences the possibility of accessing school centers, either because they do not exist nearby, or because the accessible ones are segregated or of poor quality. Certain isolated or marginal settlements (ghettos) or even areas of the country have fewer resources and therefore offer fewer opportunities for development through education.

List of attitudes of the Roma community and the education system:

• Prejudice and mutual mistrust between schools and the Roma community;

• Some Roma see school as a foreign territory, which is not familiar to them;

• Many schools have a poor relationship with Roma parents, which has a direct effect on the parent's perception of the school, as well as their lack of knowledge and information about the opportunities and advantages of continuing education for their children: the lack motivation for Roma students; the lack of models within Roma families; the shortcomings of the school system in working with families in situations of poverty or extreme poverty.

The deficiencies of the education system.

• The education system is not adequately prepared to deal with the cultural diversity of students to integrate ethnic minorities. Intercultural education is a way of understanding education. It is an educational focus of an inclusive nature, where diversity is a positive and indispensable ingredient that contributes to quality holistic education and is seen as added value. It is an education to learn and live in society, developing values such as respect and tolerance for others. An intercultural approach is built and developed by supporting and promoting a diverse society where there is room for all, regardless of origin or ethnicity, or any other differences. This society promotes development and opportunities for all groups, membership of a different ethnic group not implying a disadvantage, but rather an added value that enriches society. (Pop, 2020)

• In other words, teachers do not have enough knowledge and experience regarding intercultural education and exploiting the diversity of students within a school. As an institution, schools are primarily designed and focused on a homogeneous student model. Diversity is often seen as an obstacle associated with the need to compensate for difficulties rather than a feature that can bring added value.

• Lack of sufficient resources to develop quality programs and actions to support minorities and specifically the Roma community.

• The broad spectrum of segregation and discrimination against Roma in the education system.

All these factors generate:

- • Extremely limited progress to higher levels of education.
- • Roma girls and boys have difficulties accessing pre-school education, generally completing only the primary cycle.
- • Dropout problems when they reach the secondary cycle and reduced access to university education.
- • High unmotivated absenteeism.
- • High rates of students repeating the school year.
- • Low academic/school performance.
- • Discontinuity in formal education.
- • Low professional qualification, generating difficulties in accessing the labor market and perpetuating situations of poverty and marginalization.
- Given the relevance of these educational, economic, legal, social and cultural factors described above, it is important to take into account several aspects regarding:
- • Approaching and supporting groups of Roma families to favor the inclusion of their children in the school community.

Despite the efforts made in recent years to expand and improve the educational system for Roma children, over 50% of Roma children in Europe do not complete primary education and only a quarter of Roma children complete secondary and high school.

Participation in the educational system drops dramatically after completing compulsory education, where only 15% of young Roma complete high school or vocational education. Illiteracy levels among young Roma continue to remain high for Europe, where almost 50% of Roma are illiterate or can read and write to an average level of proficiency.

By not completing compulsory education, many young Roma do not meet the basic conditions of vocational education programs. These low percentages of participation in education for Roma and nomadic children and youth are very alarming, because educational factors have a direct and acute impact on life chances. (Sechkova, 2008)

Education and vocational training are not yet sufficiently recognized as priorities and solutions that offer possibilities for mobilizing and emancipating young Roma and nomads and ensuring economic self-sufficiency. Vocational education can also be seen as a kind of transmission belt into the labor market for those who have not continued their education and vocational training, which can be considered as a safety net for young Roma and nomads at risk, and at the same time, they should look for means of opening the labor market for the employment of Roma.

But the progress so far has not led to significant, visible changes in the daily life of the majority of Roma. Educational achievements remain much lower among the Roma population compared to the rest of the population. Increasing access to high-quality, non-segregated preschool education can play an important role in overcoming the educational disadvantages faced by Roma children.

Based on the analyzed surveys and the information collected through numerous projects, the experts decided and jointly established six common lines of support for educators of young Roma:

• Involvement and motivation of families;
• Optional programs for schools and kindergartens;
• Creative education for Roma children;

• High level of educational support for Roma children and youth;
• Resuming professional education.

Education is the main area where the situation of the Roma has improved. Successes in the field of education include legislative reform, inclusive structures, increasing the level of Roma participation, improving multicultural skills, supporting Roma students and teachers, and contacting parents.

Among the challenges that still pose problems are the high rates of early school leaving, the difficulty of promoting an effective transition of Roma to secondary, high school and higher education, language deficiencies and discrimination. According to the research carried out, it was concluded that Roma students face language barriers and ethnic intolerance on the part of teachers and colleagues. (Bradea, 2019)

The main reason why Roma children do not achieve better results in the education system remains poverty. The problem of high school dropout rates is largely due to the high level of poverty among Roma families, expensive education, early marriages and the discouraging nature of current programs. Regarding education reform, the state should support Roma parents and children by providing the necessary school equipment, learning support (teachers available after hours, Roma assistants and Roma mediators), free cultural and creative education and scholarships for high schools and universities. But the curriculum available in current schools does not correspond to multicultural diversity and must be adapted through remedial teaching, motivation, specific programs and school support, equal treatment, changing the school program (involvement of cultural mediators and family dialogue and support, involvement of parents), stimulation of talents, skills (mainly artistic ones such as music, dance and crafts) and changing the strategy and proposing an innovative assessment of Roma children's skills and interests, based on solving tasks in games, composing and expressing through music or images. (Shih, 2007)

Language barriers could be overcome with the help of a period before kindergarten and primary school, during which Roma children learn the language and adapt to the new environment. Roma assistants and mediators are a good solution in this regard. Supporting inclusive education is crucial. In this regard, there is support from the European Union, one of the priorities is protecting the education of disadvantaged children and young people, including the Roma, by ensuring an education and training that meets their needs.

On average, the Roma represent a very young population. As a result, it is important to work with this part of the population, which will soon become responsible citizens of the Member States and the EU. Youth is the time in life when most people rebel against the existing situation for reasons that are justified or not. But if they are in a situation where they have nothing to lose because they own nothing, they cannot lose their social status because they are socially excluded, they cannot jeopardize their future because they have no expectations, they have low self-esteem and a labeled identity, they dare to do anything. (Pop, 2019)

Preventing radical behavior among young people starts with inclusion, integration and a dignified standard of living. If we don't want to have no-go areas or nests of criminals among the Roma, we must offer young people opportunities for a better life, creative possibilities for spending free time, fun, sports, etc. Equally important is the prevention of early school leaving, with a second chance at education. With a better level of education and employment opportunities will be better.(Sechkova, 2008)

Roma inclusion in education is essential, ensuring a close link between human rights arguments and economic efficiency. If only the human rights argument is used, this can be harmful, especially if it creates the perception that Roma require special rights or a special interpretation of them, especially given that Roma are often perceived as people who do not accept all the obligations that they have return as citizens. On the other hand, the economic argument alone is not strong enough to fight entrenched discrimination.

Economic reasoning may be most persuasive for technocrats, but more often than not, it is not so persuasive for politicians or the general public. Roma access to basic services is often counterbalanced by the high costs of the consequences of a low standard of living, leading to the systematic exclusion of Roma. The Roma Education Fund draws attention to the importance of good governance in education systems, and good governance requires policies and programs that comply with the country's legislation, which in turn should comply with European standards. One of the problems encountered is that once a country has joined the EU, one of the key incentives for legislators to act on human rights is lost, as the EU has relatively little influence over how member states resolve their minority issues, especially in education, as education remains the responsibility of each individual Member State.

In terms of Roma education, participation is essential for several reasons. One of the reasons is the need for emancipation of the Roma communities. Until recently, it rarely happened that the Roma represented a strong and well-organized political force at the local and national level, which is why, with a few exceptions, their participation in the legislative and elected bodies was very small, as a result, they had a reduced ability to influence specific policies and programs.

If they do not become a force that can influence the democratic game of power, the Roma's success in influencing economic reforms will be limited. It is essential, therefore, that the minority elite be provided with a voice and visibility, as this elite is still small and requires support, and participation can lead to the stimulation of Roma interest in involvement in public life.(ERRC, 2004))

Roma parents tend to be less involved than other parents in school management and interaction with school staff. This is due to several factors, such as the Roma's low level of education, their perception that they will not be listened to, or the fact that the adaptation mechanisms needed to fight poverty do not give them the time and resources to participate effectively.

The experience gained through Roma education projects shows that the low level of parental involvement can change quickly and that this is actually not as big a problem as one might think. If parents are listened to in school and receive the minimum support and necessary explanations, their attitude changes quickly. The programs also show that when parents commit to participating in their children's school life, this has a rapid impact on children's success in schools. (Neacșu, 2000)

Although they did not explicitly address the issue of school participation, the education reform measures in Romania after 1990 promoted a series of changes in the system, with potential impact on the reduction of dropouts and non-schooling, phenomena that gained momentum in the first part of the 90s. The first legislative regulations that had as their main objective the prevention and improvement of these phenomena were adopted in 1998.

Thus, an inventory of educational policy documents developed within the Ministry of Education and Research that highlighted several categories of measures with an impact on improving participation schools: measures and programs for direct intervention on the causes and effects of the phenomenon of school non-participation; regulations regarding the improvement of rural education, with effects on the stimulation of school participation; measures to increase the quality of human resources in the education system in disadvantaged areas; regulations regarding the flexibility of the structure of the school year and alternative forms of organization of the educational process; social protection measures for disadvantaged population categories. (ERRC, 2007)

Among the authorities' recommendations regarding the stimulation of Roma children's participation in education, the most important would be:

• Assuming as a central objective of educational policies, ensuring equal opportunities in education by promoting especially inclusive education. In this process the role of the school

must be defined as the primary entity responsible for meeting the needs of all students and creating the conditions for school performance to depend more on the talent and individual work of the child and less on factors beyond the students' personal control (material situation, ethnicity, parents' level of education, etc.)

• Promotion of integrated service provision programs (approach to educational inclusion both from the perspective of school support for the student but also from the perspective of supporting the economic integration of the family, the child's health, living conditions, in order to effectively and efficiently support children who come from disadvantaged groups. It is necessary in this framework to: periodic assessment by school boards of measures to ensure equal opportunities; providing mentoring activities to students at risk of dropping out and those who perform below average in the classroom; transforming the school's educational culture so that every student feels comfortable at school, valued and appreciated, regardless of ethnicity, parents' social status, etc.; the introduction of mechanisms at the level of each school to effectively combat abusive, discriminatory, racist behaviors, etc.

• Continuation of the program of allocating special high school places to Roma children as a measure to reduce the long-term influence of structural factors on Roma school participation and performance.

• Providing large-scale social grants to children from vulnerable groups to continue their studies after secondary school and realize their rights to education in accordance with national standards.

• Revision of the National Strategy to combat school dropout and increase the school participation rate in accordance with the recommendations made here. This strategy should pay special attention to the situation of children vulnerable to educational exclusion in general and Roma children in particular.

• Promoting a new approach in which the responsibility for the effective realization of the right to education belongs to the school, as a representative of the state. If there are obstacles to the realization of the rights to education, the state (through schools but also other institutions) must take the necessary measures to remove these obstacles. From this perspective, an awareness is needed at the school management level of their own role and responsibility in ensuring the effective realization of the right to education of all children.

Conclusions

Inclusion of Roma in education systems is possible and important progress has been made in recent years. These changes have really begun to be reflected in the few statistics available. A new elite is beginning to form who are committed to working for their communities as facilitators, teachers, school principals or community NGOs.

It is important that educational systems are more open to multicultural approaches, and that people accept that being citizens of the same country does not mean that everyone is exactly the same, has the same cultural references or has the same economic background. It is also important that educators are focused on the individual child and interactions with other students in the classroom, and that school staff interact meaningfully with parents and the community outside the classroom. The main philosophy behind a sustained effort to include Roma in the education system should be that this effort will benefit all children as well as society as a whole. A more child- and community-centred approach is needed, whereby all children, regardless of their differences, can develop as part of a wider community. This can only be achieved if governments work to change their institutions and if the Roma become participants in the system.

Regarding access to education, it is important to inform the population about the importance of education and professional qualification, in order to prevent Roma children from following the family tradition regarding education, where the parents are illiterate or have a low level of education; providing constant support and mediation between family and school;

addressing the vulnerability of Roma women, especially those who have more children, by supporting access to education and care services (kindergarten, after-hours programs); addressing the problem of illiteracy among Roma, by facilitating access to education for Roma, with a view to completing secondary and high school education and continuing implementation. programs to encourage the participation of the Roma population in the educational system (providing incentives for adults who participate in after-hours classes/second chance programs); constant prevention of school dropout among Roma children.

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