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**NEEDS ASSESSMENTS
FOR EDUCATION
PROFESSIONALS
TO ENSURE
NON-DISCRIMINATORY
EDUCATION FOR
ROMA CHILDREN
IN FRANCE**

REPORT

**within the project
MISTO AVILEAN**

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October 2019





**NATIONAL LEVEL NEEDS ASSESSMENTS TO STRENGTHEN
THE CAPACITY OF EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS TO
ENSURE NON-DISCRIMINATORY EDUCATION FOR
« ROMA CHILDREN »**

Elaborated within the project

MISTO AVILEAN!

AFEJI

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INTRODUCTION

Officially adopted by the European Union and the Council of Europe, the term "Roma" refers to people living in many different social and cultural realities. The populations gathered under this term come from various histories, religions and geographical backgrounds. However, they have one thing in common: they have been historically encompassed and considered as "Gypsies" by the majority groups in their countries of residence and/or origin. "Roma", "Gypsies", "Kale", "Yenish", "Sintés", "Manouches"... These populations of various backgrounds don't recognise themselves under a common identity and they designate themselves in different ways.

Gradually, another expression has become common in the field of NOGs, academics and/or institutions in France and Europe: "Roma migrants", which refers to immigrant populations from Central and Eastern European countries who recognise themselves or are considered as Roma by others. In this study, we use this terminology for convenience despite its potential simplification and stigmatization. Indeed, the use of this expression may assign under a rigid and predetermined "Roma" identity people with many different trajectories. In addition, the term "migrant" can be confusing by referring to wandering or nomadism. This is a misrepresentation because the populations involved are sedentary.

The "Roma migrants" referred to in this study are people who have moved to France because of multiple factors : economic, social, family, health and other... Mostly coming from Bulgaria, Romania and the countries of the former Yugoslavia, many "Roma migrants" came to France with their families seeking better living conditions. In France, many of them suffer discrimination and obstacles to access to work, housing and basic rights. Many families live in conditions of extreme precariousness and even survival. Some are housed in emergency shelters, but thousands more are forced to live in unworthy housing conditions, in squats or slums, in unstable and unsanitary places regularly threatened with eviction. According to the DIHAL, 17,619 people currently live in slums and squats in France. 12,000 of these people are estimated to be European nationals, mostly Romanian and Bulgarian, often designated or recognising themselves as Roma¹.

Education: a universal right from which many "Roma migrant" children and young people are excluded

According to the DIHAL, between 6,000 and 6,500 children are currently living in squats or

1 These data are those of the Interministerial Delegation for Housing and Access to Housing (DIHAL), *Résorption des bidonvilles. Point d'étape sur la nouvelle impulsion donnée en 2018. Présentation de l'acte II*, https://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/contenu/piece-jointe/2019/09/bilan_campements_2018_vecran.pdf (consulted on October, 10, 2019)

slums. It is estimated that 70% are out-of-school children, which means they are not enrolled in school. And according to the CNDH Romeurope, there are in France "5000 to 7000 Roma children (...) who have reached or will reach the age of 16 without ever or almost having been to school"².

Education is a universal right guaranteed by the French Constitution. In France, the Education Code stipulates that "the education is compulsory for every child from the age of three to sixteen". In addition, as a country party to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, France has an obligation to ensure the right of children to education. However, the fact that thousands of children and young people are excluded from school in France demonstrates that these rights are not respected. This is the case of many "Roma migrant" children who do not benefit from their education and training rights. Some of them have never been to school. Others are in a situation of "school drop-out" while others have discontinuous school paths.

Objectives and methodology of the study

This study aims to identify the obstacles to access to compulsory education for "Roma migrant" children. It also intends to provide a set of recommendations to improve transnational cooperation within the framework of the European MISTO project carried out by partner NGOs in France, Spain and Romania.

Methodology of the study:

This report is based on a rich bibliography (studies and reports from NGOs, institutions and international organizations, field studies and scientific publications). It is also based on a field investigation carried out between May and October 2019 using a qualitative approach. Except for a few interviews in Paris, the investigations were conducted almost entirely in northern France, in cities belonging to the Lille metropolitan area (Lille, Hellemes, Lezennes, Tourcoing, Villeneuve d'Ascq).

The methodology of the study consisted in the organisation of two Focus Groups, each with ten participants: a first focus group brought together "education professionals" from the AFEJI and Sauvegarde du Nord associations, while the second group brought together "Roma migrant" families, most of them receiving social support from the AFEJI. Semi-directive interviews were also conducted with fifteen people: a researcher; specialized teachers for allophone students; a

² Collectif national des droits de l'homme Romeurope, *La non-scolarisation en France des enfants roms migrants*, 2010, p. 7

teacher of a "school truck" program; staff of the CASNAV and the RESEAU CANOPE in Lille; an "education and child rights " advisor from the DIHAL; staff from the NGO La Sauvegarde du Nord involved with people living in squats and slums; NGOs involved at national level in supporting people from Eastern Europe who live in squats and slums. Finally, some more informal discussions with families occurred while visiting their living places in slums.

Limits and bias of the study:

The investigations took place in a limited geographical area, in a short period interrupted by a summer holiday. Because of these factors, it was not possible to reach all the desired stakeholders. In addition, significant biases need to be reported, especially regarding the *focus group* with families: most of them benefit of social support provided by AFEJI teams in the "Villages of insertion". The "Villages" are accommodation places, mainly in mobile homes, on sites provided by municipalities in the metropolitan area of Lille. Families living in the "Villages" are supported by AFEJI social workers in their actions regarding employment, health, schooling, access to independent housing. As a result, the families who attended the *focus group* had been pre-selected to join a "Village de l'insertion". It is very likely that their discourse was influenced by this situation because children's schooling is a condition to access accommodation in a "Village of insertion". This underlines the importance of engaging more informal discussions with families in slums in order to limit bias. More broadly, it seemed essential to compare the views, the interviews and the bibliographic sources.

I. Registration and school assignment needs

The registration procedures initiated by families are sometimes hampered by abusive obstructions from some municipalities as well as by long delays in school assignments.

Improvements are needed to ensure that children can be registered and effectively access school:

1. The type of mandatory documents required when registering children must be clarified so that the mayors can no longer obstruct school enrolment. The children's place of residence must be proven by all means, including certificates on honour and certificates from NGOs.
2. Mayors must apply their obligation to census school-age children residing in their municipality (Article L. 131-6 of the Education Code), including those living in slums and squats. The list must be sent to the Academic Director of National Education (DASEN) so that the presence of children excluded from compulsory education can be known to the National Education. The compliance with this obligation requires the physical movement of municipal officials to families living in slums and squats in order to inform them of school registration procedures and bring them closer to the common law.
3. The academic services in charge of assigning secondary school students (middle and high school) must reduce to a maximum the time for the school assignment of allophone students who have recently arrived in the French school system. To ensure that all children effectively benefit from their right to education, it is necessary to reduce the time taken to carry out assessment tests before Allophone pupils are assigned to a school. It is also necessary to reduce the latency time between the test and the actual assignment of students to a class.
4. The UPE2A³ and UPE2A-NSA⁴ programs for allophone students must be created in sufficient number and equitably distributed throughout the country so that all students can be quickly directed towards a class that meets their needs. The improved deployment of the UPE2A should also help to reduce the distances between the schools of assignment and the students' place of residence.

3 Unité pédagogique pour élèves allophones arrivants

4 Unité pédagogique pour élèves allophones arrivants non scolarisés antérieurement

5. The follow-up of the previous pathways of newly arrived students, especially "Roma migrant" children and young people, needs to be improved. Indeed, the lack of knowledge of these students' previous school experiences can affect the continuity of their school pathway. For example, some of them are exposed to repeated assessments while others are assigned to discordant class levels as a result of evictions and school changes. To ensure the continuity of students' schooling, it is necessary to improve communication between CASNAVs and also between schools in the host country and those in the country of origin. A better knowledge of children's past experiences is necessary so that they can benefit, like any other student, from individualized follow-up in accordance with their needs.

II. Shortening the distance between families and schools: the welcoming of parents and the crucial role of school mediation

For many "Roma migrant" parents, the access to their role as parents of students is made more difficult by various factors. Socio-spatial relegation and unworthy living conditions, linguistic obstacles, lack of knowledge of the school system, there are many factors that increase the distance between parents and the school. A set of specific needs can be identified in order to bring families closer to the school:

6. Schools must have sufficient means to open up to families and to ensure that parents of allophone students have relevant discussion and information times so that they have a concrete idea of the school their child is attending. At a minimum, each parent must be given a visit to the school and an opportunity to receive information, if necessary with the presence of an interpreter, explaining the rules of school life, how a typical day works, etc. In addition, the operation "Opening school to parents for children's success" must be offered to allophone parents in a systematic way.

The operation "Opening school to parents for children's success" (OEPRE)

Carried out in partnership between the Ministries of the Interior and National Education, the OEPRE programme is intended for parents of non-French-speaking students from non-European Union countries who have been residing in France on a regular basis for less than five years.

This training is provided through free weekly workshops, which take place in a school.

The objective is to provide voluntary parents with an opportunity to learn about the French education system. They receive French-language teaching so that they have the necessary elements of understanding to support their children's schooling (report cards, correspondence notebooks, school schedules, attendance at parent-teacher meetings, etc.). Teaching is also devoted to the "values of the Republic".

7. School mediation must be institutionalized and taken in charge by the State. Indeed, school mediation often appears to be a decisive step towards the school success of "Roma migrants" students. Explanation of the school system, raising awareness about the issues surrounding education, support for administrative procedures for the registration of students, development of links between parents and schools... In most cases, the school support is provided by NGOs that substitute for the shortcomings of institutions. However, due to lack of means, NGO mediation alone cannot ensure equal access to school for all children who are excluded from it. Since equal access to education is a duty of the State, it seems necessary for it to assume responsibility for such missions. The access to education must be ensured by the National Education itself through the creation of mediator positions.

Two examples of mediation actions carried out by the National Education Ministry:

- In Lille, the "Passerelles" action is carried out by the Ministry of National Education and supported by the European Social Fund (ESF). Initially initiated by CASNAV, this action aims to support the "Inclusion path to secondary school for allophone pupils with very little schooling in their country of origin, in particular young migrant Roma". Implemented in four junior high schools ("collèges"), the action is based on the recruitment of mediators (one per school). These professionals, some of whom speak romanian, provide support to UPE2A teachers. Their task is to involve families around their status as parents of students while facilitating contact with the teaching teams through specific welcoming times. Mediators also support families in their administrative procedures (registration forms, transport, scholarships, guidance, proof of absences, etc.) Finally, they support each student's individualized project.

- In Montpellier, school mediation work is carried out by the CASNAV, thanks to the implementation of the "Connexion" project. Initially supported by the ESF, this project led to the institutionalization of the mediation function through the creation of a school mediator position funded by the National Education Ministry. As a Romanian and Romani speaker, the school mediator involves parents around the school by integrating parenting into the schooling of students living in slums. He also organizes sociolinguistic workshops and works to strengthen partnerships between institutions, local authorities and NGOs involved in the field. In addition, the mediator initiates school visits for parents and visits to family living areas for directors and teachers. In Montpellier, the school mediator has become the main referent for families and educational stakeholders concerned with the schooling of students living in slums.

III. Needs related to teacher training and the welcoming and teaching conditions for "Roma migrant" children

Our field investigations and readings⁵ lead us to formulate various types of needs concerning the training of educational teams as well as the conditions for the school welcome and teaching for "Roma migrant " children:

8. Since they are the ones who provide training for educational teams on the issue of teaching allophone students, CASNAV⁶ trainers should generally receive interdisciplinary training that is not limited to didactic expertise. The contribution of other disciplines (geography, sociology, law, political science, etc.) would help to enrich the trainers' knowledge about the migratory trajectories of allophone families. Training about the regulatory frameworks on discrimination should also be systematised.

⁵ We refer here to the recommendations contained in the study on the schooling of allophone students by M. Armagnague-Roucher, I. Rigoni *et al.* *Rapport de recherche EVASCOL. Etude sur la scolarisation des élèves allophones nouvellement arrivés (EANA) et des enfants issus de familles itinérantes et de voyageurs (EFIV)*, Défenseur des droits ; INSHEA ; 2018

⁶ CASNAV : Academic centre for the education of newly arrived allophone students and children from itinerant families and travellers.

9. The issue of welcoming allophone students should be fully integrated into the initial training of all future teachers. Indeed, it seems necessary to prepare all teachers to welcome allophone students and/or those living in slums into their classrooms so that they do not find themselves overwhelmed if such cases arise. Initial training should provide all teachers with an opportunity to become familiar with allophone students and the educational and pedagogical methods that can be applied to them. Training on stereotypes and discrimination should also be systematized.
10. Continuous training should be developed and promoted for all educational teams working with allophone audiences: teachers in UPE2A programs but also teachers who receive them in regular classes. This continuous training should be carried out in an interdisciplinary perspective: didactics of school disciplines, history, geography, sociology, law, political science, psychology, etc.
11. It would be useful to develop training courses bringing together the different stakeholders involved in the school inclusion of "Roma migrant" students in order to cross paths while promoting coordination and collaboration: teachers, school directors, main education advisors, NGOs...
12. Good practices in schools should be identified and disseminated during training.
13. More generally, it is necessary to develop training to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices about people living in slums. From this perspective, it seems imperative to avoid any "Roma" categorization that perpetuates the false idea that educational difficulties may emanate from cultural specificities. The training courses must seek to break out the confinement of these categories in order to provide an understanding of migration phenomena and contexts. This includes clarifying the effects on schooling of discrimination and precarious living conditions common to young "migrants" living in slums, squats or hostels, while providing educational tools to welcome them effectively.
14. Regarding the welcoming and teaching conditions for "Roma migrant" children, it seems necessary to "adapt the pace of teaching to the pace of learning"⁷ while maintaining the requirement and taking into account the length of time required to acquire the French

7 M. Armagnague-Roucher, I. Rigoni *et al.*, p. 365

language. However, M. Armagnague-Roucher, I. Rigoni et al. recommend that enrolment of students in UPE2A should not be extended in order to avoid their isolation but to continue to organise language support during school time⁸.

15. Finally, it is necessary to fight against the isolation of children and teachers in UPE2A programs by multiplying interactions between UPE2A students and students in regular classes (joint projects, school outings, school events).

IV. Material imperative needs to promote the continuity of schooling for "Roma migrant" children

16. Children's schooling is obviously hindered when they have no access to water or electricity, and when garbage is not collected. Local authorities must respect their obligation to provide families living in slums with access to water, electricity and garbage collection.
17. Children's access to school is regularly hampered by the geographical isolation of slums and the lack of school transport services. Regions and municipalities must ensure that school transport is supported or free of charge for students living in slums so that they can actually reach their schools. Municipalities, Departments and Regions must also guarantee equal access to school restaurants for all students.
18. The evictions of squats and slums obviously have immediate consequences on children's schooling. It seems essential to stop evictions without stable alternative housing solutions. When evictions take place, they must be anticipated in order to prevent any disruption in the schooling of the children concerned.

8 *Ibid.*

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- Data Collection Methodology, three Country Reports for Romania, Spain, France and Recommendations at EU level regarding school integration of Roma children on the move
- Need assessment of educational professionals in Romania, Spain and France
- Manual for Transnational cooperation mechanism
- Package of information for government bodies, local authorities, NGOs and schools
- Project opening brochure, Success stories brochure, Guidelines for the provision of nondisruptive and non-discriminatory education of Roma children on the move



PUBLIC EVENTS TO FOLLOW

- Launching event in Romania, Transnational event in Spain, Final event in France
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scan for access to project manuals, reports, campaigns, webinars, forums related to educational and social integration of Roma children on the move