

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## External Document

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## **Bosnia and Herzegovina: Roma and the right to education Factsheet**

### **The Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Estimates of the number of Roma living in Bosnia and Herzegovina vary -- the most often quoted figure is of about 60,000 Roma out of population of over four million. Forcible displacement of Roma during the 1992-1995 war reduced the number of Roma in the Republika Srpska (RS), reportedly to fewer than 10,000. In the other entity, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the biggest Romani communities are in the Tuzla, Sarajevo and Zenica-Doboj Cantons.

Romani is used by most Roma, although decreasingly so in younger generations.

Roma have continued to face problems in returning to areas from which they were displaced during the war, including as a result of discrimination.

A significant proportion of Roma live in informal settlements, often built without the necessary permits and have little if any access to essential services.

The poverty rate for Roma is significantly higher than for the rest of the population; 26 per cent of Roma are considered to live below the official poverty line compared to 3 per cent of the rest of the population.

Estimates based on the number of Roma receiving social assistance suggest that approximately 70 per cent of Roma are unemployed.

### **Legal framework and the national action plan on minority education**

The 1995 General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which forms the Constitution of the country contains a provision on non-discrimination on the basis of "sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status".

The right to education is included in the Constitution among the rights that "all persons within the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina" shall enjoy.

The Framework Law on Elementary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina includes the principle of free and compulsory elementary education for all children.

The Law on the Protection of Members of National Minorities provides that members of national minorities can study language, literature, history and culture also in their language.

An Action Plan on the Educational Needs of Roma and Members of Other National Minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina was adopted in 2004. The Action Plan identifies a number of special measures to promote the inclusion of Roma in education.

### **Exclusion from pre-school and primary education**

Few Romani children have access to pre-school education.

Accurate information on attendance rates of Roma in primary schools is not available; it is reported that the vast majority of Romani children do not attend school or attend school intermittently.

High drop-out rates; in the RS, for instance, the number of Romani children who drop out is three times higher than the number of those who complete elementary education.

According to some estimates only 15 per cent of all Romani children complete elementary school.

### **Main barriers in access to education**

Extreme poverty; lack of adequate clothing; difficulties in travelling from distant settlements; hunger; overcrowding in sub-standard settlements.

Failure of the authorities to provide the necessary financial and other means to make available textbooks, meals and transportation services for low-income Romani families.

Failure of the authorities to collect data on Roma included in education and to ensure that Romani children are included in compulsory elementary education.

Romani culture and traditions are not included in a systematic way in school curricula; with rare exceptions, Romani language is not taught or used in schools.

An extremely small number of Roma attend pre-schooling programmes, which are often not available on a free or subsidized basis.

Lack of Romani teachers and mediators.

Lack of training for teachers and Romani assistants.

### **The Tuzla Canton**

In 2005/06, 711 Romani children attended elementary school, an increase from 641 in 2001/02. The authorities say that "only" about 120 Romani children are now completely excluded from education and approximately 80 do not attend school regularly. Such estimates however appear to be rather optimistic, given that in 2002, when 641 Romani children were reported as attending school, it was also estimated that 80 per cent of Romani children were excluded from school.

Tuzla Canton authorities informed Amnesty International that lack of resources was preventing full implementation of the Action Plan on the Educational Needs of Roma and Members of Other National Minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### **Recommendations to the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina include to:**

Ensure that accurate data and statistical information are collected on the Romani population, as well as on its inclusion in education, disaggregated by gender and age.

Take steps to ensure that children from low-income Romani families are provided with assistance in a timely and comprehensive manner, in order to overcome barriers in access to education originating from their poor socio-economic status.

Take steps to ensure that Romani culture, history and traditions are included in school curricula in all areas or schools with a significant Romani population.

Take steps to ensure that Romani children have access to pre-school programmes of a sufficient duration, which should incorporate Romani culture, history, traditions and language, as well as Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language.

Take steps to ensure that Romani assistants and mediators are employed in a systematic and comprehensive way in all schools and pre-schools with a significant Romani population.

Take steps to ensure that teachers and other staff working in schools, especially where they work with significant numbers of Romani pupils, receive training on Romani culture, history, traditions and language, with the involvement and cooperation of Romani organizations.

Provide pedagogical and other relevant training to Romani assistants and mediators, with a view to ensuring their full and meaningful participation in the teaching process.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566  
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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