Reclaiming Adolescence: A Roma Youth Perspective

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In this article, the authors present data gathered in the Reclaiming Adolescence research project, which investigated the educational hardships of Roma youth by comparing their experiences with their non-Roma peers' in Belgrade, Serbia. Serious inequalities in access to secondary and tertiary education affect the life and career opportunities of Romani adolescents in Europe. Yet, despite a plethora of reports and surveys on this topic, the views of young Roma themselves remain undocumented. This article reports on research that addresses this lacuna in terms of both substantive findings and methodological innovation. Using participatory research techniques and focusing on the young people's voices, the authors reveal the direct impact of experiences of discrimination on Romani students' educational and career choices. Youth-based participatory approaches and support for youth leadership emerge as key tools to building robust and sustained adolescent investment in social and political change.

Keywords: participatory research, adolescents, minority groups, youth leaders, Roma, anti-Roma racism

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Jelena,[1] a young Roma, planned to look for a job in a beauty salon once she finished her part-time vocational school. This was a revision of her more ambitious earlier career aspirations, a change of direction caused by her poor school achievement record. Years of exposure to an unwelcoming school and social environment in Belgrade had affected her ability to succeed academically. The daughter of parents engaged in social organizing within their community, Jelena had once hoped to find more stimulating and better paid work and to have a professional career, but her overwhelmingly negative school experience dashed those aspirations.

Jelena recalled being repeatedly discriminated against and ridiculed at school because of her ethnicity. She was constantly bullied by a peer who threw papers at her and made fun of the way she dressed. Though she considered dropping out of school not long after enrolling, she persisted, but the experience of unremitting and unchallenged anti-Roma racism affected her concentration to such an extent that she had to retake the first year of school. Eventually she did drop out.

Jelena recently returned to school and is finishing a part-time vocational course. As a participant in the Reclaiming Adolescence (RA) project, she recalled how "students from the general population discriminate . . . and [the Roma] are forced into dropping out of school. This is what happened to me. I was discriminated against and I dropped out of school because of them." What she describes is not unusual; it is a common occurrence and a significant factor in the continuing extreme educational deprivation of Roma children in Europe. While many Romani children and adolescents do not mention discrimination as a factor that impedes their equal chances in education, Jelena's activist family background and her participation in the RA project helped her develop the awareness and courage needed to talk about the effects of discrimination.

Not many European minority groups have faced continuous discrimination as intensely and widely as Europe's 10–12 million Roma. For centuries, since their migration from northern India during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the disenfranchisement of this ethnic group has gone hand in hand with their representation as inferior, uncivilized, vulnerable Others. The misrepresentation of Roma as lazy, uneducated wanderer "Gypsies" has contributed to the perpetuation of racialized modes of thought (Matache, 2016). Regardless of the prevailing political regime, Europe's Romani communities have experienced violence and racism and have been considered "inferior" and "dark-skinned" Others, even after centuries of residence and citizenship within European countries. Prejudice and anti-Roma racism have militated against mainstream acceptance of the Roma as a legitimate ethnic group long settled in Europe and as citizens entitled to equal rights. Governments have contributed to the problematization of Roma, frequently attributing the educational deficit of Romani children to the community's culture of educational refusal or disinterest (Rozzi, 2017).

The evidentiary picture, however, extracted from population surveys and human rights reports, points to other factors driving school dropout. These factors include educational segregation by school authorities, social stigma, bullying, and racist behavior by peers across educational levels, phenomena that are pervasive throughout Europe (Farkas, 2007). In addition, young Roma students are exposed to the negative impact of low teacher expectations, including reduced homework allocation, placement at the back of the classroom, and lack of support for extracurricular activities (Baucal & Stojanovic, 2007, 2010; Lambrev, 2015). These discriminatory factors drive educational failure, which leads to poor outcomes in a job market where anti-Roma prejudice already unlevels the employment playing field (FRA, 2016). Despite this significant body of evidence, anti-Roma racism has remained largely untouched, with educational institutions still unable to generate structures and educational materials that prevent discrimination of Roma students.

The social and political failure to achieve positive outcomes for educational and career opportunities for Romani students is not only a product of pervasive discriminatory conduct but also a result of a lack of social power and strategic mobilization. Roma communities—including adolescents and their parents—have been denied a voice in reforming their education environment (Clavería & Alonso, 2003) and have been effectively excluded from policy making (OHCHR, 2014). As a result, the perspective strongly voiced by interviewees in the RA study and grounded in ordinary experience that anti-Roma racism—*not* an absence of educational ambition—drives limited Roma career ambition has been disregarded by policy makers.

Instead, the prevailing wisdom has continued to be that incentives to address Roma's inherent low motivation to pursue education are the key to progress in increasing their post-primary school attendance. "Roma youngsters should be strongly encouraged to participate also in secondary and tertiary education," stated the EU Roma Framework (European Commission, 2011). This approach, however, has only delivered modest results, for both secondary and postsecondary, or tertiary, education. The absence of research led by Romani adolescents that examines their views about what they consider the key hardships and effective solutions to improved access to higher education and career opportunities may be a factor in the failure of current programmatic interventions.

In reporting on research that addresses this lacuna, we present in this article the findings of a study using youth participatory action research (YPAR). The RA project focused on the views of Roma adolescents and non-Roma adolescents, those belonging to the dominant majority population in Serbia, as they navigate the complex transitions from childhood to adulthood and from school to work. The YPAR approach challenged the focus of conventional Roma-related research, which tends to view obstacles to educational advancement particularly through the lens of economic deprivation and Roma vulnerability.[2] Instead, this study explores the discrepancies between Roma

adolescents' high expectations for education and low expectations for future desired careers, a disjuncture that results from their pragmatic appraisal of the reality of pervasive anti-Roma racism. It investigates Roma demands and strategies for realizing better access to higher education and career opportunities. RA participant researchers explored strategies adopted by their peers for building independence and implementing aspirations for the future. The study sought to generate more accurate insights into the causes of Roma rejection by the educational system and to encourage researchers and policy makers to design more participatory and ambitious programs and targets for and with Romani youth.

The RA project had three goals. The first was to generate data on educational and career opportunities of Roma and non-Roma youth through a YPAR project that gave ownership of its goals and activities and its research questions, methods, and policy recommendations to the young people themselves. The adolescent researchers collected information on aspirations and expectations in relation to higher education and the school-to-work transition for Roma and non-Roma adolescents. The second goal was to strengthen the capacity of an ethnically mixed group of youth researchers to become leaders and visible voices for their diverse community by helping them develop their research skills and their organizing and advocacy capabilities. Finally, the third goal was to develop intervention strategies that incorporate suggestions and insights generated by the adolescent researchers.

This article provides an overview of the literature on academic approaches and factors impacting the access of Roma adolescents to education in Europe. It presents the RA study's research methods and findings, including reflections by the Romani and non-Romani youth researchers, and details some of the study's limitations and points to the need for other studies with a participatory approach to this topic.

The Current State of Play: Setting the Context for the Reclaiming Adolescence Action Research Project

Children and adolescents constitute nearly half of the 10–12 million Roma living in Europe today (UNICEF, 2016). In some European countries with a large Romani population, up to 90 percent of Romani adolescents are excluded from secondary education and approximately 99 percent from tertiary education (Brüggemann, 2012).

Although the significant disparity between Roma and non-Roma educational access increases with educational level, it is evident across the education spectrum. In Serbia, according to one survey, only 4 percent of Romani children aged three to five took part in organized early childhood education, as opposed to 34 percent of the non-Roma population (Roma Education Fund, 2010). At primary school level, 74 percent of Roma, as compared to 98 percent non-Roma, children were enrolled in school. At the same time, a 2010

study reported an overrepresentation of Romani children in the Serbian special education system, a phenomenon that the report explained by referring to widespread anti-Roma discrimination in the country (Open Society Institute, 2010). An earlier study showed that only 28 percent of Romani, as compared to 98 percent of non-Romani, children remained in school until the eighth grade, and only 10 percent of Romani children were enrolled in secondary education, as compared to a national average of 84 percent (Open Society Institute, 2007). Less than 1 percent of Romani adolescents attended university (Müller, 2011). The existing literature suggests that this massive education and opportunity deprivation is embedded in political, socioeconomic, and historical factors. Several authors, including Hancock (2002) and Achim (2004), have examined historical accounts of exclusion policies targeting the Roma. These include practices of enslavement, genocide, expulsion, forced assimilation, and pogroms. The atrocities peaked during the Holocaust, but long before the twentieth century, Roma communities experienced brutal violence and were stigmatized, despised as dark outsiders even after centuries of living in Europe. In some regions, including Wallachia and Moldova, former provinces of modern Romania, Romani populations were enslaved until the practice finally ended in 1855–1856. During the Middle Ages, Roma were deported from different kingdoms in Europe and, in some cases, executed. In the eighteenth century, they were forcibly assimilated and settled by the Hapsburg Empire (Achim, 2004; Hancock, 2002). And, during the twentieth century, under the Central and Eastern European Communist regimes, the Romani people were not officially recognized as an ethnic group. Some states, including Czechoslovakia, designed forced sterilization policies to reduce the Roma birth rate for eugenic reasons, a persona non grata stigma that continues to impact the Roma people.

The repercussions of this history are apparent today. The long and tumultuous history of state-sponsored injustice coupled with a dramatic absence of reparations and ongoing racial exclusion, both institutional and attitudinal, have led to the significant inadequacies in health and nutrition, education, and employment outcomes evident in Romani children and youth (Matache & Bhabha, 2015, 2016).

Present-day social and economic factors also hinder Roma youth's access to educational and career opportunities. Across Europe, almost 90 percent of Roma are left in poverty, and 40 percent of Romani children struggle with malnutrition and hunger (FRA, 2014). In Serbia, Romani infants and children under five exhibit mortality rates almost three times higher than those of the majority population (Roma Education Fund, 2010).

Current policies, driven by adverse political contexts, have also contributed to Roma educational deprivation. Across Europe, governments have tended to use a top-down approach to develop policies for Romani communities, a factor behind the poor outcomes (OHCHR, 2014). This approach has tended toward paternalism and has not substantively included Roma young people or

communities. In contrast with the plethora of work on Roma access to primary education, governments have invested meager resources and formulated only a few policy measures to ensure the Roma people's access to higher education (Matache, 2017). For example, in 2003 the Serbian government launched an affirmative action program for Romani youth admission to high school and university that reserved seats for Romani students in secondary and/or tertiary institutions (Roma Education Fund, 2007). However, despite these programmatic interventions, the number of graduates did not improve significantly. As the data cited above illustrate, government programming to enhance Roma inclusion has not produced significant change in access to higher education. These interventions have also failed to impinge on the significantly worse outcomes in health, nutrition, and rates of parental employment that set Romani children and youth apart from the majority population (OHCHR, 2014).

Along with social, political, and historical factors that impede Romani youth's participation in higher education, shortcomings in the research *with* Roma communities have also had a negative impact on the development of policy. Little Roma-related research has used a participatory approach. Most studies do not investigate the concerns or priorities of the Romani communities, or the solutions the communities themselves might advance, and instead focus on descriptions of dire poverty and passive vulnerability. As a perceptive scholar notes more broadly about Roma research, "Scientific or expert interests are at the same time epistemic but also mundane and profitable—but not for those categorized" (Surdu, 2014, para. 8). Research can compound already widespread stereotypes and the ever-present Roma experience of scrutiny by casting a contemptuous and condescending majority gaze. The perception of a combination of anti-Roma bias and self-interest among field researchers has generated some suspicion of "outside" researchers trawling Roma communities for publishable data. Even when their own research-generated data do not meet the stereotypic assumptions of investigators, some authors have shown a resistance to changing their ethnic presuppositions. "We can obviously not disregard the possibility that parents conceal their true opinions about their children's education," noted a group of scholars in relation to Roma parents' claims of hopes and aspirations for their children's education (Djuve, Friberg, Tyldum, & Zhang, 2015, p. 126).

Another approach taken in the literature has been to explore the differences in educational and career aspirations between Roma and non-Roma youth, particularly by looking at poverty, hopelessness, poor educational outcomes, and Romani culture as an opponent to education. As Brüggemann (2014) underlines, scholars have pathologized Roma as a people who consider education as well as reading and writing as "alien" processes. The RA study challenges some of these views by directly probing the discrepancies between expectations and achievement of Roma and non-Roma youth. To do this we, the authors, examined not only career paths and related educational and career experiences but also their correlation with reported instances of

discrimination and other obstacles to achievement. We also explored the connections between reported ambitions and choices, on the one hand, and experiences of discrimination, whether direct or indirect, on the other.

Academic literature has also largely neglected to highlight the very issues prioritized by the communities themselves or to give voice to issues Romani and non-Romani adolescents have identified as problematic based on their own experience. Until this study, Romani youth had not been substantively involved as key contributors in research design, data collection, and analysis. To tackle this limitation, RA research relied on participant researchers and on the first-person testimony of young people. The study was not limited by implicit assumptions or explanatory tools of "expert" research interpreters. The research built on the work of Clavería and Alonso (2003), who noted that researchers have contributed to the enduring educational inequality of the Roma by ignoring their views. The RA project's approach endorsed their call for a new approach to Roma education based on "intersubjective dialogue" and an "egalitarian relationship between the researcher and the researched" (pp. 1, 15).

While few previous studies have adopted this research strategy, two have supported some level of Romani people participation in the data collection or in the design of local action plans. Consider, for example, research involving Romani CRISS (2009), a Romanian Roma rights organization that included community members as direct participants in and contributors to its research, successfully persuading their partner research institutes to hire and train Roma interviewers who were drawn from the localities where data on Roma health, education, and experiences of stigma were being collected. Another study supported by the Roma Education Fund (2010) was conducted in the Vojvodina region of Serbia by the Roma Students Union and the Novi Sad Humanitarian Centre. It involved twenty group discussions with representatives of Romani communities, five of which called for the development of local Action Plans for Roma Integration, with a focus on educational measures. Both these projects directly solicited the views of Romani community members in their data collection. Nevertheless, more remains to be done to involve Roma communities substantively in all stages of the design and execution of the research projects.

A key goal of PAR is to ensure that the community plays a central role in all stages of the research project. This strategy is intended to address inevitable power disparities by ensuring that the concerns and needs of the researched community drive the research agenda (Caxaj, 2015). The work of the University of Barcelona Center for Theories and Practices That Overcome Inequalities (CREA) exemplifies this approach. CREA has adopted participatory methods for developing research and social interventions in deprived Romani communities (Martí & Macías, 2017), and its methods have vigorously involved the community in data collection, priority setting, and problem solving. Its work within Romani communities has contributed to dramatic results: an increase

in Roma primary school attendance and a reduction in later school dropout. As CREA notes, "Virtually every student who finishes primary school enrolls in and graduates from secondary school" (Martí & Macías, 2017, p. 195).

RA expanded on the PAR approaches used in Romania, Serbia, and Spain by focusing on the question of young people's access to education, a new topic for this methodology. RA involved Roma and non-Roma youth not only in the design and implementation of research but also in the resulting community actions. The project also introduced an intercultural dimension: Roma and non-Roma researchers worked in pairs to document the similarities and differences in the hardships experienced by Roma and non-Roma adolescents in accessing higher education and career opportunities. These ethnically mixed teams of adolescent researchers then proceeded to jointly develop community interventions based on their findings.

Methodology: Developing Participatory Action Research with Romani and Non-Romani Adolescents

The RA project was implemented by three collaborating institutions—the Harvard University FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, a research center; the Belgrade Center for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP Center), an educational civil society organization; and Save the Children in the North West Balkans, a human rights organization—and was overseen by a local advisory board in Serbia comprising Romani leaders, members of Romani communities, scholars, and representatives of relevant institutions and municipalities. The project was piloted in Serbia, a candidate for European Union membership and therefore a country particularly open to improving its efficacy in matters of social inclusion, a key criterion for a successful membership bid. As a post-war country, Serbia is experiencing political and economic transition. And it also has a fairly high Roma population, estimated at 8.2 percent (Council of Europe, 2012), which allows for robust comparison between majority and minority populations.

RA activities were designed to be incremental, generating participation and tasks gradually and progressively as the youth researchers' knowledge, confidence, and interests developed. The project was implemented over an eighteen-month period between January 2013 and June 2014 in Zvezdara and Palilula, two Belgrade municipalities with large Roma populations. Twenty Roma and non-Roma youth supported by two mentors, two tutors, a research expert, and a project coordinator developed the research questions and collected and analyzed the data.

Recruitment of Adolescent Researchers

The CIP Center recruited the adolescent researchers from the two Belgrade municipalities via door-to-door contact, after members of the community advisory board had spoken about the project within the community. Information

TABLE 1 *Demographics of the Reclaiming Adolescence youth researchers*

Group structure	*Male, under 18*	*Male, 18 and over*	*Female, under 18*	*Female, 18 and over*	*Total*
Roma population	2	4	2	3	11
Non-Roma population	1	2	1	5	9
Total	3	6	3	8	20

about the recruitment process was also disseminated to local schools, nongovernmental organizations, and cultural and youth centers and through various media channels, including social media, websites, e-mail groups, and local and national radio stations.

The selection criteria for the adolescent researchers included boys and girls aged fifteen to twenty-four who were either enrolled or not enrolled in school, of different socioeconomic backgrounds and legal status in Serbia (integrated citizens and internally displaced persons), and from both the Romani and non-Romani populations. Eventually eleven Romani and nine non-Romani adolescents were selected and hired as participant researchers (see table 1).

Among the adolescent researchers selected, three were internally displaced persons from Kosovo living in Belgrade with their families, and one was an internally displaced person living in a residential institution for children and youth without family care. Three youth researchers lived in Romani settlements (isolated communities inhabited predominantly by Roma) in Belgrade, and the rest lived in the city of Belgrade. The youth researchers' educational backgrounds were also diverse: some were college students studying psychology, journalism, medicine, social science, and computer studies; some were vocational school and high school students. The participants' parents' occupations ranged from community organizing to factory work, teaching, and journalism, and some were unemployed.

Development of the Research Instruments

During the early stage of the project, the RA research expert in Serbia trained the youth in how to conduct qualitative and quantitative research, and the RA project team organized several workshops to prepare them for their new research activity. The workshops covered a range of themes, including data entry, SPSS Statistics software, coding responses, development of categories for quantitative analysis, how to conduct interviews, how researchers should introduce themselves to future interviewees, how to motivate the interviewee to participate, how to probe and follow up on vague responses, and ethical aspects of the research. The project team also invited outreach workers from the Center for Youth Integration to share their experiences with the researchers and to prepare them for possible obstacles during their field work. In

addition, the CIP Center organized several training sessions to explain the responsibilities of policy makers and policy implementers and to inform the process of developing specific interview questions.

With guidance from the mentors and the research expert, the adolescent researchers designed semistructured interviews around open-ended questions for three categories of interviewees: peers, parents, and relevant institutional representatives (school representatives, municipal leadership, representatives of state institutions at central and local levels, civil society organizations). The RA study had a clear focus of identifying and differentiating the experiences of Roma and non-Roma youth, their parents, and the institutional leaders working with youth and minorities. The main domains of interest were educational expectation and experience and desired and actual career trajectories. During brainstorming sessions, participant researchers made a list of ten key topics regarding young people's life circumstances and educational trajectories. Among the research domains they identified as relevant were sociodemographic family characteristics, social relationships and independence (friendships, relationships with teachers and parents), experiences of discrimination, experiences with education (significance, satisfaction, utility, hardships faced, equality of opportunity), educational expectations, desired careers, and overall life goals. The researchers also set out eight domains for the interviews with parents, including the parents' own experiences and the parents' expectations regarding their children's education and career opportunities. The domains helped the group organize the RA study and develop questions for peers and parents (see appendix 1). The next step involved the adolescent researchers refining and testing the interview questions for peers and parents over the course of several interactive workshops. They then piloted the interviews with friends and parents and amended the research instruments based on feedback.

During the workshops, the adolescent researchers also developed interview questions for institutional representatives. Drawing on their experiences interviewing peers and parents, they generated questions for the institutional actors focused on several common areas: the problems facing young people, including those from minority and marginalized groups; education challenges, including those specific to Roma children and adolescents; hardships to educational and career advancement for Roma and non-Roma young people; the support, if any, that the institutions were providing young people; and any interinstitutional collaborations.

Data Collection and Analysis

Throughout the data collection and analysis in Serbia, the adolescent researchers worked with specially recruited adult enablers—a mentor and two tutors—who provided regular guidance and feedback as the work progressed.

The RA project used several methods to recruit interviewees. One was the snowball method: adolescent researchers started by interviewing peers and

adults in their social networks—friends, acquaintances, neighbors, colleagues of young researchers—who then recommended other possible interviewees. Researchers also recruited interviewees door to door in the Roma settlements, personally inviting young people to participate in the interview process and to recommend others. Also, the Roma local radio station broadcast information about the project and encouraged interested young people to participate. These recruitment techniques provided the RA study with a diverse and representative sample in terms of demographic variables, socioeconomic and employment status, and education. The non-Roma sample was similarly recruited, with researchers interviewing their own friends, acquaintances, neighbors, and colleagues as well as those of the interviewees.

The CIP Center's research expert developed the data entry methodology in cooperation with the adolescent researchers. Through several workshops, the adolescent researchers had the opportunity to practice taking notes and entering data in a research notebook. Once they mastered these techniques, the adolescent researchers started interviewing the research participants, audio-recording responses, and taking notes on key points. They conducted the interviews in Serbian. The research notebook contained the main domains, the interview questions, and space for the answers. Researchers assigned each interviewee a code to protect their identity. The adolescent researchers interviewed 300 adolescents (176 Roma and 124 non-Roma), 57 parents (44 Roma and 13 non-Roma), and 40 representatives of state institutions and civil society organizations, including policy makers, teachers, social workers, and employers.

After completing the data collection phase, the Serbian team undertook both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Using both the completed notebooks and the interview audio recordings for data entry, the adolescent researchers, the tutors, and the research expert developed a database in SPSS and coded the questions from the interviews, categorizing responses and assigning numerical codes to each category. The notebooks facilitated the transcription process and the coding for quantitative analysis. Two of the adolescent researchers who were psychology students with experience in quantitative research generated descriptive statistics from the interview data. The team then used the descriptive statistical analyses—frequencies, percentages, significant differences between subsamples—to compare Roma and non-Roma sociodemographic family characteristics, social relationships, experience of discrimination, experiences with education, educational and employment aspirations, expectations, and goals. A member of the RA project team translated the findings into English.

At a two-day workshop, the mentors and the CIP Center research expert presented the initial data for analysis. They divided the adolescent researchers into thematic groups according to the key domains set up in the initial phase of the research. The results of the small group discussions served as the basis of the research expert's report. Once the report was completed, the results were presented to the whole team for discussion, interpretation, and joint

drafting of conclusions and policy recommendations. The researchers then presented the results to the communities where the data had been collected, eliciting feedback and incorporating suggestions and additions into the final report, which was distributed to key stakeholders, including local policy makers, media outlets, and civil society organizations.

Secondary Analysis

The initial quantitative analysis did not take into account personal and family characteristics of the study respondents, which could influence their responses to study questions. For example, perceptions of the significance of education or the hardships confronted in education or future life expectations might vary according to parents' education levels and employment status, participant sex or age group, as well as ethnicity. We were also interested in specific attributes, such as experience with discrimination, and how these might be associated with participant responses. In order to both estimate and control for these possible associations, the Harvard FXB team, building on the findings of the Serbian team, conducted secondary analyses of the quantitative data using descriptive statistics and logistic regression. The goal of this analysis was to further describe differences between the participants' personal and family situations and to explore different responses between ethnic groups after controlling for these other characteristics as potential confounders. Finally, by estimating the magnitude and significance of the potential confounders, the Harvard FXB team aimed to gain insights into associations between the study outcomes and personal and family characteristics, but without exploring all the possible confounders with these various covariates.

The FXB team used descriptive statistics (e.g., Chi-square tests) to compare Roma and non-Roma youths' responses to questions about their career aspirations and expectations and their experiences with discrimination. Questions with multiple answer options, such as the significance of education or the expectations of achieving life goals, were recoded so that endorsements of each possible response were counted. For example, in response to the question regarding the significance of education, a respondent could say that education was important (with no explanation), it was important for financial security, it was important for social status, or it was important for personal development. The respondent could endorse one or more of these responses. A dichotomized variable was coded for each possible response according to whether it was or was not endorsed. In some cases, such as for hardships faced during education, one of the possible responses was "none"; in this case, a dichotomous variable representing whether the participant endorsed at least one type of hardship ("any hardship") as opposed to "no hardships" was formed and analyzed. Odds ratios comparing Roma to non-Roma responses to the survey questions were then computed. An odds ratio greater than one indicates that Roma were more likely than non-Roma to endorse a specified survey response; an odds ratio less than one indicates that Roma were less

likely to do so. The 95 percent confidence interval around the odds ratio gives an indicator of variability in the estimate and can be used as a significance test of whether the odds ratio is greater or less than one.

The FXB analysts used logistic regression models to explore group differences in (1) key dichotomous outcomes based on multiple response measures (individual responses to importance of education, future expectations, hardships experienced during education, obstacles to achieving life goals); (2) select other dichotomous responses (equality of opportunities coded as perception of equal chances or not); and (3) ordinal categorical outcomes (usefulness of and satisfaction with education and education required for desired career, with each level assigned a numerical equivalent). The logistic regression models also adjusted for personal and family characteristics to account for possible differences between ethnic groups. The analysts first explored the univariable association between each of the following personal and family characteristics and the endorsement of each multiple response question: ethnicity, sex, age group (< 15–17 vs. 18–24 years); education level of youth (primary school or less, in high school, completed high school, in college); mother's and father's education levels (having no data, high school graduate, not high school graduate); parents' employment status (no data, employed or retired, unemployed); discrimination experience (none, knows exists, witnessed, experienced). Discrimination was included in the multivariable modeling because of its likely impact on youth perceptions and behaviors.

Variables that had univariable significance levels of < 0.20 were included in the multivariable models, with $p < 0.15$ required for retention. All models included ethnicity, sex, and age group, regardless of the significance level. Results are expressed as odds ratios (OR) and adjusted OR (aOR) with 95 percent confidence intervals (95% CI). The Harvard FXB team also explored desired careers, satisfaction, and usefulness of education using proportional odds models, based on similar modeling criteria, after recoding these categorical but ordered values numerically, and systematically tabulated results of the quantitative analysis focusing on the differences between Roma and non-Roma youth but also exploring the associations of the outcomes with age group, sex, discrimination experiences, and other family characteristics. Analysts used two-sided significance levels of 0.05 for final inferences and SAS versions 9.2 and 9.4 for the analysis, after translating the original SPSS data file from Serbian to English and converting it to SAS (see appendix 2).

Key Findings

Below, we synthesize the findings from the multiple qualitative and quantitative analyses described above and organize them according to the project's goals: documenting educational hardships and career opportunities of Romani youth as compared to non-Romani youth, capacity strengthening, and intervention strategies.

We found that Romani and non-Romani youth in the study sample differed on a number of personal and family characteristics. Compared with their non-Romani peers, Romani youth were younger; 47.7 percent of Roma, as compared to 24.2 percent of non-Roma, were under eighteen at the time of the survey. The Romani youth also lived in larger families; 41.8 percent, versus 21.4 percent of non-Roma, were in families with more than two children. Romani adolescents had parents with lower education attainment: 51.1 percent of Romani youth had mothers with only primary school education, compared to only 9.7 percent of non-Roma youth; and 41.5 percent, versus 8.9 percent of non-Roma, had fathers with only primary school education. And more Romani youths' parents were unemployed (23.8 percent) than did non-Romani youth (12.6 percent), an indicator of lower socioeconomic status.

Romani youth interviewed for this study had less education than their non-Roma peers. Although this is partly explained by the difference in ages between the two groups, still, almost 30 percent of Roma youth stopped their education at primary school (vs. about 6 percent for non-Roma), and for over 20 percent the terminal degree was high school (vs. 13 percent). Fewer than 5 percent of Roma youth were in college (vs. almost 40 percent).

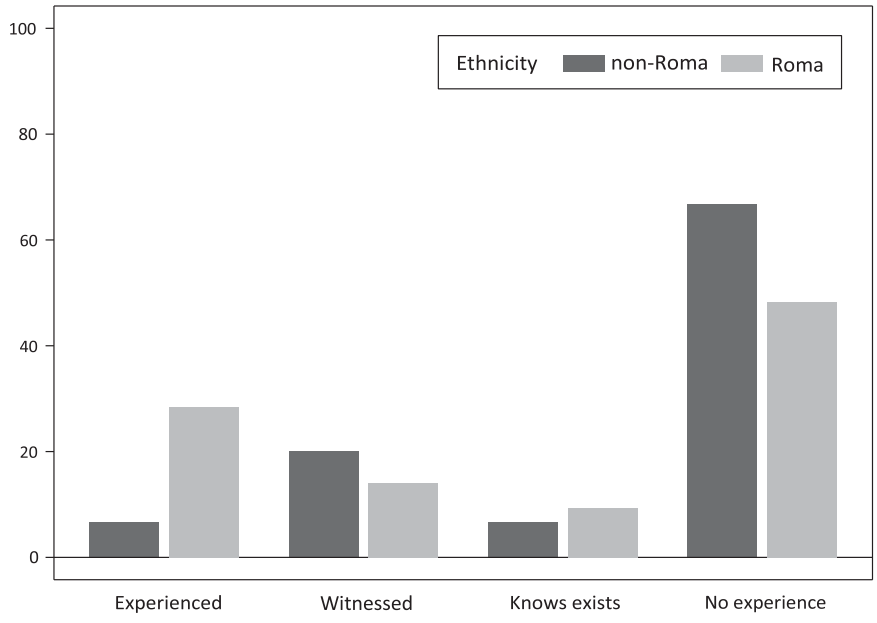
Hardships Faced During Education and Obstacles to Achieving Goals in Life

To understand the hardships Romani youth face during their education, we combined responses relating to discrimination (by peers, teachers, and school workers) and verbal or physical abuse. We also considered administrative hardships to include financial problems and hardships experienced during the process of enrollment in a particular school.

We found that Romani and non-Romani youth perceived similar hardships around financial and education factors. More than half of the Roma (58.7 percent) and nearly two-thirds of non-Roma youth (69.9 percent) stated that they did not experience hardships during education. But both Roma and non-Roma mentioned administrative problems as hardships. Non-Romani respondents (14.4 percent) cited problems with registration (lacking a small number of credits required for entry into a particular school), while fewer young Roma cited that problem (7 percent). Financial difficulties were mentioned by only 1.6 percent of Roma and 0.8 percent of non-Roma respondents. The lack of support from teachers/schools was identified as a hardship by a small percent of Roma (3.3 percent) and non-Roma (0.8 percent) youth; lack of support from parents was cited even less. About 11 percent Roma and non-Roma youth stated they encountered other hardships.

Both Romani and non-Romani students reported discrimination in the school setting (figure 1), though not many perceived it as a hardship that affected them during their education. About 28.5 percent of Roma and 6.7 percent of non-Roma respondents stated that they had had personal experiences of discrimination at school. In addition, 14 percent of Roma and 20 percent of non-Roma adolescents said they had witnessed someone else being

FIGURE 1 *Adolescents' reported experience of discrimination in school, by ethnicity (n = 120 non-Roma and 172 Roma)*



Note: $p < 0.001$, $\chi^2 = 23.7$, df = 3.

discriminated against ($p < 0.001$). Further, when asked if there were differences in the way teachers treated Roma students compared to non-Roma, more than 20 percent of Roma and 7.3 of non-Roma adolescents stated that teachers discriminated against Roma students. Thus, Roma youth were more than seven times as likely as non-Roma youth to experience discrimination (aOR = 7.79, 95% CI [2.26, 26.88]).

Examples of discriminatory experiences Roma adolescents recounted during interviews include the following:

> "If a student lost something then the Roma were immediately blamed; the teacher called me a 'gypsy brat' and tried to hit me."

> "I had difficulty in primary school when they looked at me as subhuman because I'm black . . . In primary school, I was one of the best students—I even participated in the national math competition—but the principal of the school failed to recognize me as the Student of Our Generation [an award] because he said I did not know enough."

> "I did not follow the subject during class, and the teacher told me that, since I am Romani, I will definitely get married, so why waste time at school?"

When asked whether discrimination played a part in the hardships they faced during their education, only 15.3 percent of Roma and 2.4 percent of non-Roma youth responded positively. In other words, although Roma adolescents were almost eight times as likely as their non-Roma peers to report discrimination as a hardship, still only a small minority of Roma youth mentioned it. But those who experienced discrimination were more than five times as likely as those who had not experienced discrimination to report at least one hardship (aOR = 5.45; 95% CI [2.74, 10.85]) and to report an administrative hardship (aOR = 5.53; 95% CI [2.05, 14.92]). Thus, the experience of discrimination was not incidental nor without consequences.

Roma parents spoke of the increase in overall discrimination within the school system after the end of communism, and they considered this one of the biggest hardships facing their children. Biases and discrimination by teachers, parents, and other school students were, they noted, a pervasive worry. They provided dramatic examples of discrimination against their children by teachers and non-Roma students:

> "The teacher rejected [my] daughter; she was a racist."

> "The teacher kissed each child from the general population when they received their report cards at the end of the school year, but just shook hands with the Roma children."

> "One [non-Roma] girl did not want to sit next to my daughter."

Some reported that bullying kept their children in a state of constant fear and stress:

> "Serbian children were beating my child . . . By the time I came they had lit a fire and were going to throw him in it."

> "They [non-Roma students] would hide their pencils and erasers and then claim my child had stolen it and laugh."

> "Two boys who sat behind my daughter in school poked her with the tip of a compass on her back, and because of that she began running away from school."

Several government representatives shared the opinion of the Romani parents that discrimination within the school system was a hardship for Roma children and youth. Some suggested that Romani students faced both explicit and implicit discrimination. Their comments highlight a concerning resignation in the face of endemic and targeted systemic discrimination:

> "Their peers discriminate against them, teachers treat them differently than other students, employers are not willing to employ them." (Teacher)

> "There is a multigenerational legal invisibility of the Roma population that aggravates the problems they experience in accessing educational, health, and social services." (Representative from Open Society Fund Serbia)

> "Teachers have lower expectations of Roma children; they do not expect anything from them. Roma children do not have adequate support during their education. Stimulant/Affirmative measures are lacking." (Representative from Open Society Fund Serbia)

> "Discrimination has become so subtle and implicit that it is difficult to notice." (Government representative)

While Romani parents and institutional representatives cited or were aware of instances of discrimination against Romani children both by other children and by adults, most non-Romani parents were not aware of any concrete examples of discrimination. When asked about hardships Romani children encounter in school, most non-Romani parents stated that they were not aware of instances of discrimination against Romani children but that they assumed the economic disadvantage and the lack of parental support were hardships Romani children face. One non-Roma parent said, "They do not have basic living conditions; they do not have support from their parents. It is certainly easier for people who are wealthy—maybe they all have equal chances, but not everyone has the same amount of money and means to motivate their children."

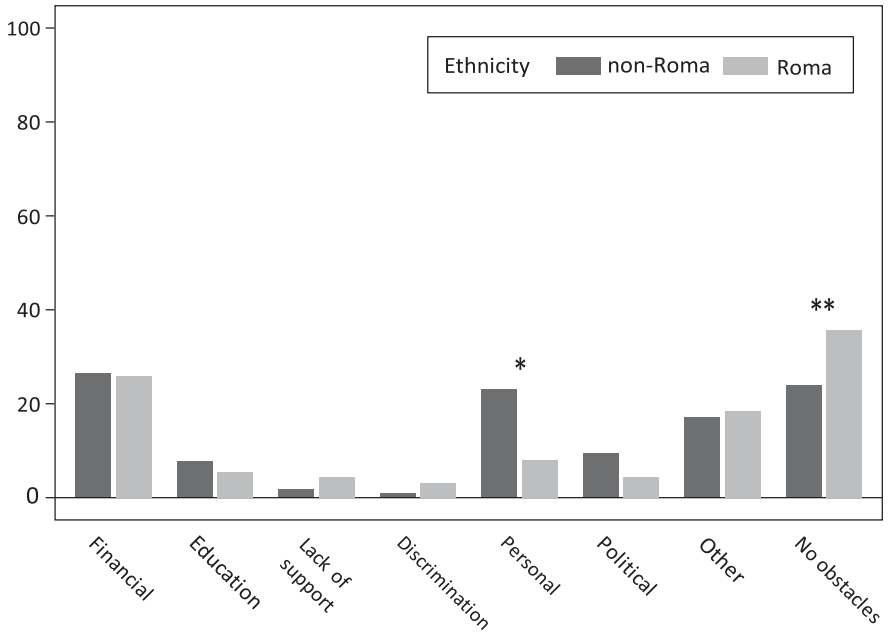
Finally, few adolescents sought help when encountering hardships. Roma and non-Roma youth adopted similar strategies when asking for help in connection with their education. For example, the main response to discrimination for both Roma and non-Roma students was passive withdrawal—not saying anything to the discriminator (46.1 percent of Roma vs. 50 percent of non-Romani youth, a nonsignificant difference). But Roma were almost four times as likely as non-Roma to report their experiences of discrimination to parents, other teachers, school psychologists, or friends (14.6 percent versus 4.3 percent; OR = 3.76; p = 0.07).

Knowing how to seek help, and from whom, when hardships arise is an important tool for realizing success in life. Just over 10 percent of respondents from both groups (11 percent Roma; 13 percent non-Roma) said they would turn to school staff or teachers; 10 percent or fewer from both groups said they would turn to parents. More Roma than non-Roma turned to minority rights groups for help with education, though the proportion was relatively small (6.0 percent vs. 0.9 percent; p = 0.03). Our findings suggest the need for more outreach to youth with problems, whether Roma or non-Roma.

To assess the obstacles that the young people in the study experienced in achieving their life goals, we sorted their responses into the following categories: lack of support, discrimination, personal qualities, and political situations. We compared each of these categories individually as well as the global category "any obstacle."

After adjustment, we found that fewer Roma youth tended to perceive obstacles to achieving their goals, as compared to non-Roma youth (all ORs were less than 1.0), though this difference was only statistically significant on

FIGURE 2 *Adolescents' reported obstacles to achieving goals, by ethnicity, N = 117 non-Roma and 163 Roma*



Note: $*p < 0.001$, $\chi^2 = 12.69$, df = 1; $**p = 0.04$, $\chi^2 = 4.34$, df = 1.

two domains. We found statistical differences both within the pooled domain, including lack of support, personal and political factors, and discrimination (aOR = 0.44; 95% CI [0.23, 0.86]), and also when we looked solely at personal qualities (aOR = 0.26; 95% CI [0.11, 0.58]). In both cases, Roma youth were 80–90 percent less likely than non-Roma youth to perceive these issues as obstacles.

With respect to the impact of financial obstacles on education, younger adolescents (aged seventeen and younger) across both ethnicities were half as likely to perceive any obstacles as those who were older (eighteen and older) (aOR = 0.51; 95% CI [0.30, 0.87]). Younger youth were also 60 percent less likely to perceive financial obstacles (aOR = 0.42; 95% CI [0.21, 0.84]) and 80 percent less likely to perceive educational obstacles (aOR = 0.21; 95% CI [0.05, 0.84]) to achieving their goals. Only 3.1 percent of Roma identified discrimination alone as a factor in preventing realization of life goals, nonstatistically different from the 0.9 percent of non-Roma who gave the same answer. And finally, Roma and non-Roma youth tended to seek out similar sources of support for achieving their life goals, with about two-thirds turning to parents and family.

Equal Chances

Around the issue of opportunity, 73.4 percent of Romani youth, compared to 58.7 of non-Roma youth (aOR = 1.88; 95% CI [1.02, 3.48]), felt that everyone has the same chances in life. Many of the Roma said they were responsible for their own futures and that characteristics such as persistence, perseverance, hard work, and dedication would enable them to achieve their goals. Many Romani adolescents did not relate the reality of their own experience of discrimination to the broader societal chances of equal opportunity—that is, respondents who reported having been discriminated against *also* claimed to have the same future opportunities as others.

Other factors were sometimes associated with these outcomes. Youth whose mothers had only had a high school education were more likely to say they had equal chances, compared to those with mothers who had only attended primary school or less (aOR = 1.84; 95% CI [0.95, 3.54]). But youth with mothers with higher education levels were less likely to say they had equal chances, although this latter trend was more pronounced in the unadjusted analyses.

Unlike the young people, more than half of the Romani parents interviewed believed that their children did not have equal chances. The reasons they gave included financial problems (rarely mentioned by the young people), discrimination/bullying by teachers and peers, unmotivated teachers, lack of legal documents, characteristics of the children and their families, and societal corruption. In spite of high hopes and the investment of considerable effort to promote their children's education and careers, parents perceived discrimination as an overarching problem that reduces their children's opportunities; moreover, their awareness of the persistence of unequal treatment lowered their expectations about their children's likely educational achievements.

Some non-Romani parents, however, argued that everyone has an equal chance if they know how to use it:

> "Everybody that is connected in the system has the same chances, even though the conditions themselves are not all the same for everyone."

> "One of my classmates finished college and now works for city hall, even though she is Roma."

And other non-Romani parents felt that all children have the same opportunities regardless of their ethnic background. One non-Romani parent stated that "teachers treat all students fairly and possibly have an even better attitude toward Roma students." Another referred to "positive discrimination" (affirmative action measures in higher education) toward Romani children as a form of discrimination against non-Romani children.

Despite the parents' perceptions and the actual experience of discrimination during education, Romani youth expressed a striking faith that their chances in education were on par with others'. It seems that these young Roma either saw themselves as agents of their own future, rather than as victims, and

refused to portray and accept themselves as a vulnerable other or have somehow normalized the experience of discrimination, and because of this their views and feelings on sensitive topics could not be captured as a consequence of "the silence produced by subalternization" (Frey & Cross, 2011, p. 2).

Significance of Education, Expectations Regarding Education, and Future Careers

Roma and non-Roma youth were equally likely to expect to complete their education and to attribute significance to education. Ethnicity, age, and sex were not associated with perceived usefulness of education. For example, in the multiple logistic regression modeling, we saw little in the way of sex-related differences in the significance attributed to education, hardships faced, future expectations, or obstacles to achieving goals. Nevertheless, those with higher levels of education were two to three times more likely to perceive it as being useful. In fact, the group with the highest odds of seeing education as useful were those currently in high school (aOR = 3.24; 95% CI [1.62, 6.46]).

Several factors contributed to the different significances given to education by Romani and non-Romani youth. While Romani youth were less likely to attribute personal significance and more likely to attribute financial significance to education in unadjusted analyses, these differences did not persist after adjusting for personal and family characteristics. Attribution of financial significance to education was associated with parental employment status and youth education level. Youths with unemployed parents were more than twice as likely to attribute financial significance to education (aOR = 2.42; 95% CI [1.23, 4.77]). Youths who had completed more education were less likely to attribute financial significance to education (aOR = 0.74; 95% CI [0.55, 0.98]) and more likely to attribute personal significance to it (aOR = 1.84; 95% CI [1.34, 2.53]). Younger youth, across nationalities, were more likely to attribute unspecified significance to education (aOR = 1.78; 95% CI [1.05, 3.03]), while older youth, with more discrimination experience, were less likely to attribute significance to education (aOR = 0.80; 95% CI [0.64, 0.99]).

The study's data suggest that Romani youth are both hopeful dreamers and pragmatic grown-ups. In line with a 2012 UNDP study (Brüggemann, 2012), but in sharp contrast to the prevailing view, the RA research findings challenge the notion that Roma do not aspire to a higher education or a good career. Over 50 percent of Roma youth in this study noted that continuing or completing their education was among their expectations for the future. Roma adolescents were, however, clearly more anxious about their access to tertiary education.

When we compared the desired careers of Roma youth with those of their non-Roma peers, the challenges facing Roma youth emerged. Only 23.2 percent dared to hope for careers requiring college or some other form of higher education, far fewer than the 65.8 percent of non-Roma youth who anticipated a career requiring higher education. Adjusted models confirmed that Roma

youth were less optimistic about their career opportunities; they were over 80 percent less likely than their non-Roma peers to imagine themselves in a career that required higher education (aOR = 0.17; 95% CI [0.10, 0.31]), and this finding is strongly associated with experiencing discrimination. Adolescents who experienced discrimination were over 60 percent less likely to aspire to a career requiring more education, as compared to youth who had not experienced discrimination (aOR = 0.40; 95% CI [0.20, 0.81]). Although more Roma than non-Roma youth had no experience of looking for work (45.3 percent vs. 30.6 percent)—perhaps a consequence of their younger age—among Roma who had looked for work, almost twice as many had already had negative experiences (36.6 percent vs. 20.9 percent).

Roma parents placed strong value and hope in their children's education. One Roma father said that he would be willing "to do everything, to cope with everything, just to be able to provide education for my children." Parents offered a range of reasons for valuing education, including its impact on the prospects of future financial security ("Education provides easier employment . . . I do not want my kids to be like me"), aspirations for personal development ("Education is important for mental development"), and enhanced social reputation ("Education is important to be someone and something in life—otherwise they are a nobody" and "Education gives you status, without education you are nothing/nobody"). One Roma father concluded that education would contribute to broader social change within Roma communities: "Education is important especially for the Roma community, because if we want some improvement in our community, we need to be educated."

Yet, one non-Roma parent felt that Roma parents do not value education, arguing that the limited support they provide their children impedes their education: "It is important that all children have equal rights; Roma children have a lot of benefits, free snacks, books and so on. But this does not have maximum impact because the parents of these students are not interested in the education of their children." Some non-Roma parents also argued that the beliefs and values Roma parents pass on to their children are the leading causes of anti-Roma attitudes, along with poverty and lack of parental and institutional support, saying, "Roma children often lack basic necessities of life" and "They do not have the support they require at home and at school."

Some representatives of government institutions also stated that Roma parents did not value their children's education, one going so far to say that Roma parents "are unmotivated, have no ambition . . . [do] not recognize the importance of education, and [do] not provide sufficient support to their children."

We found that Roma youth were more likely to be satisfied with their education yet also less likely to desire a career with high levels of education. Factors such as experience with discrimination and the nature of their parents' employment, which affected Roma more than non-Roma youth, were also associated with their perceptions of the significance of education, their satis-

faction with it, and its role in career building. Younger youth were more likely to attribute significance to education.

Capacity Strengthening and Grassroots Actions

The RA project activities—training, research experience, and community interventions—were designed to promote a new set of intellectual and interactive skills among the adolescents and to instill in them an interest in continuing evidence-based policy work on social issues facing their community. The project team employed this approach, instead of a formal top-down training, to enhance the adolescents' sense of their own abilities and responsibilities going forward.

Thus, the reflection and self-reflection process was a critical component of the RA project. For that purpose, all the adolescent researchers kept a diary with personal reflections around the following prompts: What did I discover about myself during the research process? What did I learn from the other researchers or from my research partner? Which tasks were well done? What would I do differently? The diaries helped researchers record their observations during the data collection process and keep track of the knowledge and skills they'd gained. Moreover, focus groups and individual interviews conducted after the conclusion of the project also gave the adolescent researchers opportunities to discuss how the research process influenced and changed them. These tools helped the RA project identify the main areas of effective capacity strengthening regarding adolescents' skills, knowledge, understanding, commitment, and motivation.

Strengths Developed

The project staff and the adolescent researchers planned two training sessions. First, adolescent researchers were trained to better understand concepts such as human rights, equal opportunities, ethnic identity, and discrimination to help them explain experiences they encountered in the course of their research and in their own lives as community members. Building a robust understanding of these concepts was an important step in generating leadership potential. Second, under the mentorship of experts, the young researchers were taught specific technical skills relevant to documentation and dissemination of information. These skills included training in the use of different aspects of information technology and exposure to a range of journalistic techniques, including incisive writing, editing, and graphic design.

Armed with these skills, the adolescent researchers decided to document a range of outcomes within their communities, including violations of human rights that they had previously considered "normal" aspects of life. The adolescents decided, in one case and on their own initiative, to lodge a set of anti-discrimination claims. In another situation, a group of adolescents decided to present some of their findings at a high-level public hearing.

The confidence and expertise generated by the research project strengthened the adolescents' communication, civic, and leadership skills. The capacity strengthening was evident in several areas.

— The Harmonization of Different Aspects of Identity, Personal Exploration, and Enhanced Self-Esteem

One of the Romani researchers noted that the project helped her accept aspects of her ethnic identity:

> This project really allowed me to accept myself—I am a Roma woman. I left my hometown as a child and was forced to build my personality in a different region where I didn't have any of my own people. I adapted and I became Roma, Serbian, Muslim, Buddhist, and everything! [laughs] But this helped me come back in contact with my people. This project really helped me become more aware of this part of myself and to help others.

Several others commented on the project's impact on their own self-esteem. For one young man the opportunity to be a leader was important: "This experience helped me develop as a person; the seminars I attended had a significant impact on me . . . This was the first time that I served as a leader for somebody else." For another researcher, the chance to engage with a broad range of people was a new and welcome experience:

> Honestly, before it was difficult for me to talk to people from the general population whom I did not know. Now I have more self-esteem. Through this project I have learned that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and that everyone is different. I learned how to communicate with different people and that means a lot to me. If someone needs my support I can provide it now. Before I did not always have the courage to do that.

One Romani researcher noted the personal importance of the project:

> I have always had trouble with my identity. The project provided me with a starting point for thinking about this. Even when I am with somebody I have known since primary school, I still feel the need to declare my nationality. People tell me that they know, but I still feel the need to say explicitly that I am Roma . . . I have never talked about these insecurities and challenges before, and preparing for the interviews was a good starting point for these kinds of conversations . . . I noticed that others in our group, who are Roma, also have this problem with their identity. I don't think this is easy to overcome.

— Improved Critical Thinking

During the initial training and field work, the young researchers learned to pay attention to context and to the complex and multifaceted nature of information before making a judgment. As one Romani youth said, "I learned not to make a judgment until I know all the facts."

They also noted the mechanism of "blaming the victim" (Ryan, 1976), which serves to preserve existing prejudices and discrimination. One non-Romani researcher offered:

> They say that Roma do not respect education, or that Roma parents do not care about the education of their children, but they neglect the fact that there is discrimination at school, that Roma children are not wanted there, that they have to work in order to feed the family . . . What we are doing is important, but how do you explain the significance of education to somebody that doesn't have any food to eat? For them, education is an abstract concept.

Some young researchers were struck by the impact of pervasive violence, discrimination, or poverty on the motivation to contribute to social change, as a young non-Romani woman said: "They no longer see their problems as problems but as normal parts of their lives. This was shocking for me." They became conscious of their own use of prejudicial language in perpetuating bias: "I also became more aware of the words that I use in communication, especially with the vulnerable groups, because—even if used unintentionally—the way we use the words has an impact on people."

Finally, the research improved the understanding of non-Romani adolescent researchers about the Romani culture that they had disapproved of before:

> I also understand more about them, their culture, and tradition. I understand why they are the way that they are. I have a deeper understanding of what is at play here; I am more willing to talk to others, to not be judgmental; I learned to look at the people around me differently, to respect that everyone has their own opinion, and that not everybody is the same.

— A Strong Commitment to Advocate for Social Justice and Equity

A majority of the Roma and non-Roma adolescent researchers confirmed their readiness to engage in social action and advocacy to work on the problems that emerged in the course of the study. Some noted that in their role as researchers, they had already had a chance to help interviewees with information about schools or job options:

> There was one boy that we interviewed who was thrown out of school twice because he fought. He couldn't enroll in school full-time because of this. I told him about „Branko Pešić" school. He said he would think about it and maybe contact me. I gave him my phone number and went with him to the school and enrolled him in school.

They found the experience stimulating and instructive:

> I expected that I would have an opportunity to learn, that I would improve my knowledge, and this certainly happened. I also expected that we would give people the information they asked for and needed while we were in the field. I expected lots of questions. We were able to do exactly this. . . . I now really want to use my experience to help others."

The young researchers also enjoyed a solidarity with their peers. One young Romani woman remarked how "several times during the interview she told me 'you understand me, you know what I am talking about' when she talked about the discrimination that she faced in school. It mattered to her that I had had the same experiences."

Some of the Romani researchers mentioned their wish to use their own example to influence others, particularly in relation to the importance of education:

> I wanted to see if there were other families, like mine, where children were growing up in an unsupportive environment. I wanted to use my experience to help others. And I wanted to tell every child, even if their parents were there, that they have rights.

And some of the non-Romani researchers hoped that their interviews with institutional representatives would facilitate future contact and even collaboration:

> The most important things I learned came from the conversations that I had with the representatives from the institutions we had interviewed. I was able to meet with people that had responsibility, that are capable of implementing change. Before, I didn't have access to this. I couldn't approach these institutions and ask them for their opinions on these subjects.

Finally, all of the researchers appreciated the value of the data collected as a basis for rights advocacy for groups that are marginalized and discriminated against. This was particularly significant for non-Romani adolescents, who, for the first time, saw themselves as potential change agents: "At first it was to gain work experience, but later I realized that it wasn't about me. I wanted to change something, to help the others."

Taking Action

To address the need for better human rights and antibias education among young people, the adolescent researchers designed small-scale projects to raise awareness in their communities about the discriminatory climate in which young Roma experience access to education and employment. Their intent was to support young people in reflecting on their experiences with discrimination and to create a safe space for them to discuss it. First, the antibias agenda the adolescents wanted to develop made use of experimental performance techniques drawn from the interactive forum theater methodology created by Augusto Boal's (2000) Theatre of the Oppressed.[3] In each performance scene, participants enact one of their own experiences of discrimination, such as bullying in school or discrimination during job interviews. Enacting the experience of discrimination from both the perpetrator and victim perspectives provided the RA youth researchers with an in-depth understanding of the drivers of discriminatory behavior.

Searching for other interesting ways to educate their peers about anti-Roma stereotypes and discrimination and to stress the importance of peer support, the adolescent researchers also came up with a plan to create an online video game based on storylines they designed after examining familiar day-to-day challenges and exclusions facing Romani children and youth. The game featured two main characters, one a Romani student and the other the player, who together developed cases of discrimination and bullying in a range of settings, including at school, in night clubs, on public transport, and in the job market. Each scene in the game illustrated the Romani student involved in a situation inspired by the real-life experiences of the Romani researchers or interviewees, and the player had to make choices about how to respond. Advancement in the game depended on the player's choices, which became the subject of interpretation and discussion as the game proceeded.

Adolescent Researchers' Viewpoints on Their Findings

We found that three out of ten Romani adolescents claimed to have experienced discrimination and that an overwhelming majority of Roma adolescents were optimistic about their access to future opportunities. In reflecting on these findings, the adolescent researchers expressed skepticism about the accuracy of the incidence of discrimination data, which they considered significant underestimates. Some argued that adolescent interviewees might have given inaccurate answers because, as one Romani researcher said, they were "ashamed to tell the truth to their peers who are conducting interviews, especially if the interview is conducted by a non-Roma researcher." A non-Romani researcher suggested that "discrimation has became so normalized that young people do not even recognize it as discrimination but as a way things are and will be." These comments raise important questions about the challenges that arise in giving effective voice to "silent" or "subaltern" groups lacking discursive power (Frey & Cross, 2011).

The adolescent researchers' diaries added texture to the claims made by both Romani and non-Romani adolescents that they experienced some difficulty in confidently and honestly answering questions in multiethnic interviewing contexts. Respondents speculated on the challenges encountered by non-Romani peers attempting to talk honestly to Romani researchers about their attitudes toward the Roma and, conversely, about the difficulty for Romani adolescents in openly discussing personal experiences of discrimination even to Romani researchers. One entry from a Romani researcher's diary notes how, "in research like this, the respondents will not give honest answers . . . because they fear our reactions." A different Romani researcher recorded in her diary that "the peers [non-Roma] feel uncomfortable—i.e., they do not know how to answer questions related to Roma issues; maybe because I was the interviewer."

Discussion

In the RA project, differences in factors such as experience with discrimination and parents' unemployment, which affect Roma more than non-Roma youth, correlated with differing perceptions of the significance of education, satisfaction with education, and education's role in career building. The difference between the value Romani youth place on education and their expectations for continuing their education and their pragmatic expectations for future desired careers correlated with their experiences of hardship, including discrimination.

The RA project showed that Roma experiences of discrimination were not incidental or without effect. Rather, they correlated directly with the Romani adolescents' career choices and paths. Romani youth who experienced discrimination reported reduced levels of educational career aspirations; they also reported other hardships during education and obstacles to achieving goals and successful career development, including hurdles during the enrollment process and financial challenges. Most important, the more direct the Romani adolescents' experience with discrimination, the less likely they were to feel that education was a key part of their future. The correlation between Roma youths' exposure to discrimination and discouragement from the pursuit of careers that require higher education, despite prior aspirations, proved a notable finding. Our data highlight both the impact of discrimination on Roma children's future career choices and the spillover effects on their chances of success despite the persistence of personal ambition.

Yet, even with exposure to discrimination and its enduring effect on individual confidence and educational expectations, the adolescent researchers also found among young Roma widespread optimism about equal opportunities in the society. This is a surprising finding that should be further explored. The divergence between personal experience and general assessment of the social context is an important and neglected finding that warrants further attention. The adolescent researchers addressed it through their own advocacy, role playing, and video game, and they called for future work to document discrimination and to support and build a community of peers for future interventions.

It is instructive to consider Roma youth responses in reference to their incomplete awareness of the scope of discrimination. Teachers' lower expectations of Romani children are often not interpreted as unequal treatment and may even pass unnoticed because they are so endemic. These are expressions of officially institutionalized anti-Roma bias and racism that have long been part of the official educational system in Serbia. It appears that Roma youth frequently internalize the experience of stigma, seeing violence and discrimination as an integral and "normal" part of life.

More research is needed to explore these hypotheses, so that strategies for data collection and social inclusion policies target the appropriate oppressive mechanisms. From a research perspective, it would be helpful to explore a range of alternative participatory strategies—including role playing, intra-

ethnic interviewing, indirect questioning strategies, the arts as a tool to facilitate expressing hidden experiences (Frey & Cross, 2011)—to minimize the impact of embarrassment, shame, or other factors on the participants' answers.

We found that Romani and non-Romani parents had opposite perspectives regarding the value Roma families put on education. Most Romani parents expressed a strong hope that their children would complete their education and find employment that enabled them to be self-reliant. By contrast, the view of most non-Romani parents and some state representatives was that Romani parents did not actually value education and that their attitudes and lack of support were the reason Roma youths dropped out of school. These differences mirror disagreements within the broader society and underscore the persistence of widespread levels of both implicit and explicit bias against Roma.

In PAR, the concepts of empowerment, cooperation, and participation are central—"the best way to move people forward was to engage them in . . . enquiries into their own lives" (Walter, 2009, p. 1). One of the goals of the RA project was to progressively transfer power and trust from experienced researchers to the Romani and non-Romani adolescent researchers. More broadly, the project staff hoped to demonstrate the value of participatory tools for giving voice to the Roma community in Europe. Instead of being *objects* of "expert research" conducted by others, the Roma youth in the study were primary researchers themselves. They were key contributors to the research design, active participants in the data collection and analysis, and interlocutors in the formulation of conclusions.

The project team did encounter some challenges in implementing the participatory methodology. Perhaps the most notable struggle was finding the very significant amount of time needed to support adolescents to generate their own research instruments, but other challenges included a noticeable fall-off in motivation on the part of the adolescent researchers as the project developed; the problem of generating a set of training modules that worked well across a very diverse research group; the reluctance of young people to openly discuss sensitive issues such as discrimination; and the difficulty of coping with the prejudice of interviewees, especially at the institutional level.

Conclusions

In employing youth participatory action research and maintaining a focus on developing civic and leadership skills among a multiethnic team of Romani and non-Romani adolescents, the RA project provided young people and their communities with the space and means to lead research about their own educational and career circumstances and challenges. The project generated novel findings and policy recommendations deeply rooted in the viewpoints of Romani and non-Romani adolescents and their families. Central among these was the pervasive impact of experiences of discrimination on the development of educational expectations and career aspirations.

The research project was important for another set of reasons. Its original methodology, anchored in PAR and deeply invested in the agency and control exercised by the young adolescent researchers drawn from the researched community, generated a rich set of data about the opportunity for capacity strengthening among young participant researchers. The study probed attitudinal changes, life plans, and interpersonal lessons. It generated novel insights into successful strategies for building community leadership and innovation within ethnically mixed adolescent cohorts working in educationally marginalized communities.

The use of an ethnically mixed adolescent research cohort also produced important results. The study found that while substantial proportions of Roma adolescents expected to complete their education and aspired to high levels of education, as did their non-Romani peers, the expectations of these two groups of adolescents diverged with regard to desired careers. Romani adolescents, while generally resilient in the face of endemic discrimination and optimistic about their life chances as a whole, eventually became less confident and more pragmatic as their experiences of discrimination affected the realization of their life goals.

In contrast to the views expressed by these youths' parents and the Roma researchers, two-thirds of the Romani adolescent interviewees did not report experiencing discrimination during their education. Some adult respondents stated that the Roma adolescents interviewed were missing signals of discrimination because they did not adequately grasp the notion of discrimination or properly understand the behavior associated with it. We explain this, however, by referencing the qualitative data that highlight the tendency of Roma youth to normalize and internalize discrimination in their lives as a resilient coping strategy. This suggests that more research taking into consideration Roma adolescents' lack of access to discourses of power is necessary. This type of symbolic power could enable Roma youth who experience racism to feel safe or to talk about it.

The RA study demonstrates how a YPAR approach can generate positive spillovers in terms of skill building, development of personal esteem, and leadership enhancement. Even in seriously marginalized communities such as the Roma in Serbia, the sense of agency and the self-worth that derive from active engagement with social science research yield immediate and valuable dividends. The project also generated considerable interest in identifying safe ways to give voice to the subaltern. We hope future research can build on these findings and questions in the context of larger, comparative projects.

Notes

1. For the purpose of anonymity and confidentiality, we use this name as a pseudonym.
2. See examples of this approach in the UNDP's studies on the Roma at http://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/ourwork/sustainable-development/

development-planning-and-inclusive-sustainable-growth/roma-in-central-and-southeast-europe/roma-data.html.

3. Forum theater is one participative drama technique used very often in psychosocial research in local communities. It is an educational, research, and activist technique, aimed at identifying problems that are relevant for the group involved in the forum. This technique makes the problem visible and supports participants in exploring alternate ways of solving the problem in a safe environment. Forum theater opens the space for dialogue, searches for possible solutions, and empowers the "silent majority" to react (the audience/spectators have chances to intervene and change the course of the play).

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Acknowledgments

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Appendix 1

Sample Interview Questions for Adolescents, Parents, and Institutional Representatives, per Original Research Domains

Adolescents

Sociodemographic family characteristics

- What schools have your parents finished? Are they employed, and where do they work?

Social relationships and independence

- How would you describe your relationship with the professors?
- Do you have Roma/non-Roma friends?
- Have you ever had conflict with Roma pupils/students (if the subject is from general population)/with pupils/students who are not Roma (if the respondent is from the Roma population)? What was the cause of this conflict? How did you react?
- Do your parents support your education? In what ways do they support you?

Experience of discrimination

- Does your class/school/college have Roma pupils/students? (If the interviewee is Roma nationality, ask, "Are there more Roma pupils/students in your class/school/college?")
- Are there differences in the way teachers/professors treat Roma pupils/students as compared to those who are not Roma? What is the difference? Can you give us a specific example?
- What did you do in that situation (discrimination)? Have you spoken to someone for help, and to whom? Was the problem solved and how?

Experiences with education

- Do you think that education is important? Why is that?
- Are you satisfied with the knowledge that you have gained at school?
- How much do you think you'll use it to enroll in high school/college/university/work?
- Did you experience any difficulties during the registration for school or while attending the school? What were the difficulties that you encountered during schooling? (For each of these problems, ask how it affected them.)

Educational expectations

- Do you think you have the same chances in education as others?
- What do you expect from your education in the future?

Desired career

- Have you ever worked? Have you ever tried to get a job? If so, what is your experience, what problems did you encounter? What are the problems, in your opinion, young people face during the job search and employment?

Overall life goals

- What would you like to do you do when you finish school?

- What are your future plans? How do you see yourself in 5 years? What are you planning to do?
- What do you need in order to achieve these plans? What are you doing now to achieve those plans? Do you think there is a possibility that in this country you can realize your plans and potentials? Why? (If they mention leaving the country, ask, "Do you think you would have a better chance if living abroad? Why? Is there anything that will keep in this country?")
- What do you see as an obstacle to the realization of your goals? What worries you the most when it comes to independence and employment? With whom can you talk about that?

Parents

Sociodemographic family characteristics

- How many children do you have? How old are they? Do they go to school, and which school they attend?
- With whom do you live? What school have you completed?

Parent's experiences with the educational system

- Do you think today's school is any different from the school of your time? What is the difference?
- Did you have any difficulties during the registration of your children in school or during the school? Were there difficulties that you encountered during your children's education?
- Did you turn to someone for help in solving these problems, and to whom?
- *Notice:*
  - If parents are Roma nationality, ask if they think these problems are encountered due to their ethnicity.
  - If you talk to parents from general population, ask them to think about the problems faced by Roma parents during the enrollment and education of their children and to say what they see as the biggest problems of the Roma parents.

Interactions with their children

- How much time do you spend with your children?
- Are you familiar with the activities of your child in school and outside of school?
- Does your child talk about some of the problems he has with his peers?

Equal chances and significance of education

- Do you think that all the children have equal opportunities to be educated? (If the answer is NO, ask, "Who, in your opinion, does not have equal opportunities to study, and why?")
- Do you think that teachers behave in the same way to all children in the school? What children are in your opinion the most discriminated against (i.e., don't have same rights and opportunities as other children)?
- How do you support your children during school/education?

Satisfaction with the education of the child

- Are you satisfied with your child's achievement in school?
- What is the attitude of teachers toward your child? What is the attitude of teachers toward you?

- Did your child have any discomfort at school, conflicts with teachers or peers?

Experience of discrimination

- Do you have Roma friends?/Do you have friends who are not Roma?
- How well do you know your children's friends? Does your child spend time with Roma children/children who are not Roma?
- Did you talk to your children about prejudice that exists in relation to the Roma population? Do you know of any specific cases of discrimination against Roma children?

Parent's expectations regarding their child's education and career opportunities

- How do you see the future of your child? What would you like your child to do when he/she finishes school?
- In what way do you help him/her realize his/her desires and plans?
- What worries you about the future of your child? What do you see as an obstacle to the realization of his/her goals?

Seeking help

- Did you ever ask for help/support from an institution?
- From whom do you expect help and support?

Institutional Representatives

Problems facing young people

- What are, in your opinion, the biggest problems that young people face today?
- Are there groups of young people who are more vulnerable than others, and what are these groups? What makes these groups more vulnerable/sensitive?

Education challenges

- Are students (Roma) accepted at school? In your opinion, what is the relationship among peers in school? What are, in your opinion, the main reasons for a difference in relationships?
- What are the most common reasons for dropping out of school? Do the reasons for dropping out differ with respect to Roma boys and girls?

Hardships in educational and career advancement for young people

- What are, in your opinion, the most common problems faced by young people today when it comes to finding independence and employment? Are there any additional problems faced by young Roma?

Supports provided to young people

- How does the office provide support to young people from the Roma population on the road to independence and employment?
- What do you believe your role is in helping youth gain independence and find employment?

Interinstitutional collaboration

- Do you work with other institutions (government, nongovernment, etc.), and which ones? To what extent are you satisfied with these relationships? Did you organize some joint efforts? If so, what kind?

Appendix 2

Adjusted and Unadjusted Odds Ratios (OR) of Adolescents' Interview Responses on the Significance of Education, Expectations and Perspectives on Equality of Opportunity, Hardships Faced During Education, and Obstacles to Achieving Life Goals

			Unadjusted results			*Adjusted results (N = 299)*	
Model	*Variable*		*N*	*OR [95% CI]*	*p*	*aOR [95% CI]*	*p*
Domain 1: Significance of education							
Financial	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	299	1.87 [1.17, 2.99]	.01 *	1.50 [0.89, 2.54]	.13
	Education level	Each additional level	299	0.73 [0.57, 0.92]	.01 *	0.74 [0.55, 0.98]	.04 *
	Parents' employment	No data vs. employed/retired	299	1.10 [0.56, 2.15]	.02 *	0.91 [0.45, 1.83]	.03 *
		Unemployed vs. employed/ retired		2.62 [1.36, 5.06]		2.42 [1.23, 4.77]	
Personal	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	299	0.43 [0.26, 0.70]	<.001 *	0.71 [0.40, 1.25]	.23
	Education level	Each additional level	299	2.02 [1.55, 2.63]	<.001 *	1.84 [1.34, 2.53]	<.001 *
Unspecified	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	299	1.02 [0.62, 1.67]	.95	1.05 [0.61, 1.82]	.87
	Age group	<18 vs. 18–24	299	1.64 [0.99, 2.69]	.05	1.78 [1.05, 3.03]	.03 *
	Discrimination experience (ordinal)	Each additional level	291	0.81 [0.65, 1.00]	.05	0.80 [0.64, 0.99]	.04 *
Satisfaction	Ethnicity	Roma vs non-Roma	293	2.33 [1.42, 3.82]	<.001 *	2.28 [1.26, 4.11]	.01 *
	Father is high school graduate	No data vs. no	293	1.94 [0.89, 4.23]	.11	5.79 [2.00, 16.74]	.01 *
		Yes vs. no		0.91 [0.52, 1.60]		2.37 [1.07, 5.24]	
Usefulness	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	282	1.07 [0.67, 1.73]	.77	1.11 [0.62, 1.98]	.73

			Unadjusted results			Adjusted results (N = 299)	
Model	*Variable*		*N*	*OR [95% CI]*	*p*	*aOR [95% CI]*	*p*
	Education level	In high school vs. primary school or less	282	3.26 [1.70, 6.27]	.004 *	3.24 [1.62, 6.46]	.01 *
		Completed high school vs. primary school or less		1.93 [0.90, 4.13]		2.13 [0.96, 4.73]	
		In college vs. primary school or less		1.69 [0.80, 3.57]		1.83 [0.75, 4.44]	
Desired career	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	252	0.15 [0.08, 0.25]	<.001 *	0.17 [0.10, 0.31]	<.001 *
	Parents' employment	No data vs. employed/retired	252	0.35 [0.17, 0.73]	.003 *	0.40 [0.19, 0.85]	.04 *
		Unemployed vs. employed/ retired		0.45 [0.23, 0.87]		0.61 [0.30, 1.24]	
	Discrimination experience (categorical)	Knows exists vs. none	245	1.18 [0.50, 2.80]	.002 *	1.40 [0.54, 3.62]	.05 *
		Witnessed vs. none		1.23 [0.63, 2.41]		0.90 [0.43, 1.86]	
		Experienced vs. none		0.30 [0.15, 0.58]		0.40 [0.20, 0.81]	
Domain 2: Expectations and perspective on equality of opportunity							
Equal chances	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	294	1.94 [1.19, 3.19]	.01 *	1.88 [1.02, 3.48]	.04 *
	Mother's education	No data vs. primary school or less	294	1.21 [0.52, 2.82]	.02 *	1.45 [0.61, 3.45]	.03 *
		College vs. primary school or less		0.35 [0.15, 0.80]		0.61 [0.23, 1.58]	
		High school/vocational vs. primary school or less		1.28 [0.72, 2.25]		1.84 [0.95, 3.54]	

Education	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	295	0.52 [0.32, 0.85]	.01 *	0.72 [0.39, 1.32]	.29
	Age group	<18 vs. 18–24	295	1.91 [1.16, 3.13]	.01 *	2.04 [1.09, 3.82]	.03 *
	Education level (categorical)	In high school vs. primary school or less	295	2.83 [1.48, 5.40]	<.001 *	2.23 [1.09, 4.56]	.004 *
		Completed high school vs. primary school or less		0.72 [0.33, 1.57]		0.89 [0.38, 2.09]	
		In college vs. primary school or less		3.97 [1.75, 9.04]		3.94 [1.47, 10.58]	
Work	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	295	1.03 [0.65, 1.64]	.90	0.88 [0.50, 1.54]	.65
	Father is high school graduate	No data vs. no	295	0.54 [0.28, 1.06]	.19	0.39 [0.19, 0.84]	.04 *
		Yes vs. no		0.84 [0.49, 1.44]		0.81 [0.43, 1.52]	
	Parents' employment	No data vs. employed/retired	295	2.38 [1.16, 4.91]	.06	3.41 [1.53, 7.59]	.01 *
		Unemployed vs. employed/ retired		1.22 [0.65, 2.31]		1.36 [0.69, 2.72]	
	Discrimination experience (categorical)	Knows exists vs. none	287	0.48 [0.20, 1.16]	.05 *	0.46 [0.18, 1.16]	.04 *
		Witnessed vs. none		1.94 [0.97, 3.88]		2.02 [0.98, 4.14]	
		Experienced vs. none		0.83 [0.45, 1.53]		0.87 [0.45, 1.68]	
Other	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	295	1.83 [0.99, 3.36]	.05	2.35 [1.25, 4.45]	.01 *
	Age group	<18 vs. 18–24	295	0.39 [0.20, 0.76]	.01 *	0.32 [0.16, 0.63]	.001 *
Family	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	295	2.22 [0.96, 5.14]	.06	2.04 [0.78, 5.37]	.15
	Currently in school	No vs. yes	295	3.33 [1.55, 7.18]	.002 *	2.65 [1.08, 6.49]	.03 *
Independence	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	295	0.70 [0.26, 1.92]	.49	0.62 [0.19, 1.96]	.41
Domain 3: Hardships faced during education							
Any	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	299	1.57 [0.96, 2.56]	.07	1.03 [0.59, 1.80]	.91
	Discrimination experience (categorical)	Knows exists vs. none	291	0.67 [0.24, 1.90]	<.001 *	0.66 [0.23, 1.89]	<.001 *
		Witnessed vs. none		1.27 [0.64, 2.54]		1.27 [0.63, 2.56]	
		Experienced vs. none		5.37 [2.79, 10.35]		5.45 [2.74, 10.85]	

			Unadjusted results			Adjusted results (N = 299)	
Model	*Variable*		*N*	*OR [95% CI]*	*p*	*aOR [95% CI]*	*p*
Administrative	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	225	0.73 [0.35, 1.51]	.39	0.63 [0.28, 1.42]	.26
	Discrimination experience (categorical)	Witnessed vs. knows exists/ none	220	1.42 [0.52, 3.85]	.01 *	1.36 [0.49, 3.79]	.003 *
		Experienced vs. knows exists/ none		4.20 [1.68, 10.49]		5.53 [2.05, 14.92]	
Lack support	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	238	1.45 [0.75, 2.80]	.27	1.07 [0.52, 2.20]	.85
Discrimination	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	221	7.37 [2.16, 25.13]	.001 *	7.79 [2.26, 26.88]	.001 *
Domain 4: Obstacles to achieving life goals							
Any	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	280	0.57 [0.33, 0.97]	.04 *	0.65 [0.38, 1.13]	.13
	Age group	<18 vs. 18–24	280	0.47 [0.28, 0.79]	.004 *	0.51 [0.30, 0.87]	.01 *
Personal plus**	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	155	0.39 [0.20, 0.76]	.01 *	0.44 [0.23, 0.86]	.02 *
Financial	Ethnicity	Roma vs non-Roma	159	0.65 [0.34, 1.25]	.20	0.76 [0.39, 1.49]	.42
	Age group	<18 vs. 18–24	159	0.41 [0.21, 0.81]	.01 *	0.42 [0.21, 0.84]	.01 *
Education	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	104	0.48 [0.17, 1.35]	.17	0.72 [0.24, 2.17]	.56
	Age group	<18 vs. 18–24	104	0.22 [0.06, 0.81]	.02 *	0.21 [0.05, 0.84]	.03 *
Other	Ethnicity	Roma vs. non-Roma	136	0.72 [0.35, 1.49]	.38	0.88 [0.41, 1.90]	.75
Personal only	Ethnicity	Roma vs non-Roma	126	0.23 [0.10, 0.52]	<.001 *	0.26 [0.11, 0.58]	.001 *

Notes: Multivariate models adjust for effects with univariable $p < .20$, retained if $p < .15$. Age group, sex, and ethnicity always included. *$p < .05$; this table only includes ethnicity plus other model effects with adjusted overall $p < .05$. ** Personal plus is endorsed if any of the following obstacles were endorsed: personal, lack of support, discrimination, or political.