

TË KUPTOJMË NDIKIMIN E FAKTORËVE SOCIAL-EKONOMIKË DHE KULTURORË TE STUDENTËT E KOMUNITETIT ROM DHE EGJIPTIAN NË ARSIMIN E DETYRUAR: NJË STUDIM RASTI I RAJONIT TË KORÇËS

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Abstrakt

Ky punim ka për qëllim të identifikojë situatën aktuale të nivelit të arsimit të nxënësve që i përkasin komunitetit rom dhe atij egjiptian në rajonin e Korçës. Gjithashtu, synon të shqyrtojë dhe analizojë faktorët socialë dhe ekonomikë që ndikojnë në nivelin e ulët arsimor të këtyre nxënësve. Çështje të tilla si: braktisja e shkollës, analfabetizmi funksional, fillimi dhe përfundimi i arsimit të detyrueshëm në moshë të vonë, etj., vijnë të jenë shqetësime serioze për këto komunitete dhe paraqesin sfida të shumta për integrimin e tyre të plotë në shoqëri. Ashtu si në rajonet e tjera të vendit, edhe në rajonin e Korçës, një nga problemet më të mprehta mbetet frekuentimi jo i rregullt i arsimit të detyrueshëm.

Në këtë kontekst, identifikimi i situatës aktuale dhe analizimi i faktorëve ndikues do të ndihmojë në mbledhjen e të dhënave, interpretimin e tyre, si dhe në formulimin e përfundimeve dhe rekomandimeve konkrete për përmirësimin e politikave arsimore parauniversitare në vend. Gjetjet e këtij studimi mund të shërbejnë si pikënisje për hulumtime të tjera më gjithëpërfshirëse në nivel kombëtar dhe më gjerë.

Fjalë kyçe: Komuniteti rom dhe egjiptian, arsim i detyrueshëm, gjithëpërfshirje, braktisje e shkollës.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL FACTORS ON ROMA AND EGYPTIAN COMMUNITY STUDENTS IN COMPULSORY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE KORÇE REGION

Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the current educational attainment of Roma and Egyptian students in the Korçë region of Albania, with a focus on the social and economic factors contributing to their low levels of education. Challenges such as school dropout, functional illiteracy, delayed enrollment, and incomplete compulsory education remain significant concerns within these communities, posing substantial challenges to their full integration into society. As in other regions of the country, irregular attendance in compulsory education continues to be a critical issue in the Korçë region. In this context, identifying the existing educational landscape and analyzing the influencing factors are essential for collecting and interpreting relevant data, as well as for developing concrete conclusions and recommendations to improve pre-university education policies in Albania. The findings of this study may also serve as a foundation for more comprehensive research at the national level and beyond.

Keywords: Roma and Egyptian communities, compulsory education, inclusion, school dropout.

I. INTRODUCTION

Conducting research in the field of education holds significant importance for any society globally. However, studies focusing on the education of minority communities, such as the Roma and Egyptian populations, are particularly crucial. The manner in which marginalized groups are integrated into a country's social, economic, and cultural life serves as a vital indicator of its social and cultural development.

In Albania, Roma and Egyptian communities face substantial challenges in accessing education, including poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion, (European Commission, (IPA II- 2014-2020). These barriers not only hinder individual advancement but also reflect broader societal inequalities. Addressing these issues through targeted educational research and policy interventions is essential for promoting inclusivity and social cohesion.

By examining the educational experiences of these communities, researchers can identify systemic obstacles and inform policies that aim to enhance educational access and quality. Such efforts contribute to the overall development of a more equitable and inclusive society.

The Roma and Egyptian communities represent two significant demographic groups in the Korce district. According to the Local Plan of the Municipality of Korça, it is estimated that approximately 24,000 residents belong to these communities (Municipality of Korça & European Union, 2022). However, this figure remains approximate and may not be entirely accurate due to the lack of formal registration and the socio-economic difficulties faced by these populations, which affect the reliability of the data.

Members of these communities are dispersed across the entire territory of the Municipality of Korça, but the largest concentrations are found in specific areas and neighborhoods of the city, such as the Pazari area, “Radaneci” neighborhood, and “Kulla e Hirit” neighborhood. This geographic distribution directly influences their participation in compulsory education across various schools, resulting in certain educational institutions having a significantly higher number of students from these communities compared to others.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to provide a comprehensive analysis of the educational situation of Roma and Egyptian communities in the Korce region.

II. 1. Qualitative Methods

The qualitative component involves an extensive review of scholarly literature in both Albanian and foreign languages. This literature review focuses on issues related to the education of Roma and Egyptian minorities in Albania, with particular emphasis on the Korce region. By examining existing studies and reports, the research aims to contextualize the educational challenges faced by these communities and to identify patterns and factors influencing their educational outcomes. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural and institutional dynamics

affecting minority education, both within Albania and in broader international contexts.

II. 2. Quantitative Methods

The quantitative aspect of the study involves the collection and analysis of statistical data pertaining to school attendance, dropout rates, literacy levels, and other relevant indicators among Roma and Egyptian students in the Korce region. Data sources include official records from educational institutions, governmental reports, and previous research findings. Statistical analysis is conducted to identify trends, correlations, and disparities in educational attainment between minority communities and the general population. To gather quantitative data, a structured questionnaire comprising 10 items was developed for parents, utilizing a Likert scale with 2 to 3 descending options.

The questionnaire was distributed through purposive sampling, targeting schools in Korce with higher concentrations of Roma and Egyptian students. Specifically, the study focused on two nine-year schools: “Pandeli Cale” and “Asdreni.” The sample included 186 students 49 from “Pandeli Cale” (44 Egyptian and 5 Roma) and 137 from “Asdreni” (134 Egyptian and 3 Roma)¹. Data collection occurred between October 2024 and February 2025. To enrich the quantitative findings, qualitative data were collected from 96 parents of the participating students. These parents were selected purposively, as their children attended one of the two schools involved in the study. Data collection methods included focus group discussions conducted during parent-teacher meetings and semi-structured interviews. These approaches provided deeper insights into the parents' experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to their children's education. Such qualitative methods are consistent with practices in similar studies, where focus groups and interviews have been effectively used to explore the educational experiences of Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania.

II. 3. Integration of Methods

¹This is the total number of students enrolled in the two schools under study for the 2024–2025 academic year. These data were obtained from the administrations of the 9-year schools 'Pandeli Cale' and 'Asdreni' in Korce.

By combining qualitative insights with quantitative data, the study seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the educational challenges faced by Roma and Egyptian communities. This integrated approach allows for the triangulation of findings, enhancing the validity and reliability of the research conclusions. The methodology aligns with established practices in social science research, emphasizing the importance of methodological pluralism in addressing complex social issues. This methodological framework is informed by established principles of scientific research methodology, as outlined in academic literature on research methods. Such an approach ensures a rigorous and comprehensive analysis, contributing valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders involved in minority education.

II.4. Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to ethical standards for scientific studies. Participants' anonymity was ensured, and school administrators and psychologists were informed in advance. Parents were made aware that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point, especially if they felt their rights were being compromised.

II.5. Study Objectives

This study aims to analyze and assess the educational situation of Roma and Egyptian children in the city of Korce, focusing on the factors influencing their inclusion and progress within the educational system. The specific objectives are:

1. To evaluate the current educational status of Roma and Egyptian children in Korce.
2. To identify the primary factors contributing to the educational challenges faced by these communities.

II. 6. Research Hypotheses

In alignment with the study's objectives, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **Hypothesis 1:** The economic status of Roma and Egyptian families is a determining factor in the educational attainment of students from these communities.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Certain cultural elements within the Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania, such as early marriages, negatively impact the attendance and continuity of compulsory education among students.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The issues related to the low educational attainment of Roma and Egyptian minorities are not unique to Albanian society but are common across many countries in the region, especially in the Western Balkans. Students belonging to the Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania, as well as those living in other Western Balkan countries, continue to face significant challenges in the field of education (Meçe, 2015). This situation is closely linked to the pronounced poverty experienced by these families, which hinders the full integration of Roma and Egyptian children into society and limits their opportunities to participate in decision-making processes (M.R-Abril & Millán, 2019).

Although efforts to promote the inclusion of these communities exist, achieving full integration remains a significant and ongoing challenge (Rutigliano, 2020). To gain a clearer understanding of the situation regarding the inclusion of Roma and Egyptian students in compulsory education, it is necessary to analyze the development and progress of this inclusion from the early 1990s to the present day. Albania has demonstrated a clear commitment at the international level to the protection of minority rights by ratifying the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms on October 2, 1996², a fundamental document drafted by the Council of Europe (European Convention on Human Rights, 2010). Consequently, the Albanian state is obligated and committed to ensuring and guaranteeing the respect of every individual's rights without discrimination based on

² LIGJ Nr.8137, datë 31.7.1996 PËR RATIFIKIMIN E KONVENTËS EVROPIANE PËR MBROJTJEN E TË DREJTAVE TË NJERIUT DHE LIRIVE THEMELORE \Law No. 8137, dated July 31, 1996, On the Ratification of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

gender, race, color, language, religion, political beliefs, or other social status, including membership in a national minority. Following the ratification of this Convention, significant improvements were observed in the education sector for Roma and Egyptian children, with an increased number attending compulsory nine-year education. Similarly, the right to education is a constitutional right guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, which stipulates that “...every Albanian citizen has the right to education.” However, statistics and reports published by INSTAT, along with studies conducted over the past three decades, have demonstrated that students from Roma and Egyptian communities face numerous challenges in the field of education (United Nations, 2012). These challenges include school dropout during compulsory education as well as low levels of academic achievement among those students who continue their compulsory education (Simon, Galanxhi, & Dhono, 2015).

In response to these challenges, the Albanian state has undertaken a series of legislative initiatives and developed targeted programs to support the Roma and Egyptian communities, thereby facilitating their inclusion in the educational system (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 2021). One of the most significant measures in this regard has been the provision of free textbooks for children from these communities attending compulsory nine-year education, a policy implemented since 2009³. These supportive programs have been developed in accordance with the principles of respecting the rights of the Roma and Egyptian communities, as well as Albania’s commitment to promoting their full integration into society (Meçe, 2023).

Furthermore, all measures undertaken are fully aligned with the European Union’s New Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation 2020–2030 (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 2021). Considering that Albania, like several other Balkan countries, has already entered the EU accession process, it has

³ VKM nr.107, datë 10.02.2010 “Për publikimin, botimin, shpërndarjen dhe shitjen e teksteve shkollore për sistemin arsimor parauniversitar”\ Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 107, dated February 10, 2010, “On the Publication, Printing, Distribution, and Sale of School Textbooks for the Pre-University Education System”.

committed to a range of concrete projects aimed at improving the integration and quality of life of the Roma and Egyptian communities, with particular attention to policies that promote their active inclusion in society and education.

In this context, several important strategic documents have been developed and implemented, including the Roma Inclusion Action Plans (2010–2015), the National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians (2016–2020), the National Action Plan for Children (2012–2015), and the Pre-University Education Strategy (2014–2020). These instruments have aimed not only to improve access to education but also to empower these communities socially and economically, in accordance with European standards on human rights and social inclusion.

The most notable improvements have been observed in raising awareness about the importance of early education for students from Roma and Egyptian communities. However, the most tangible progress has occurred in the legal domain, through enhancements in legislation aimed at facilitating and improving the educational situation of these communities. One of the key initiatives in this regard is the adoption of Law No. 69/2012 "On the Pre-University Education System in the Republic of Albania," subsequently amended by Law No. 48/2018, as well as the issuance of the Joint Instruction No. 292, dated 28.05.2019, by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, titled "On the Identification and Enrollment in School of All Children of Compulsory School Age." This legal framework has introduced several facilitations in the registration procedures for Roma and Egyptian students in the nine-year compulsory education system, thereby enabling broader and easier access to education for these groups.

Despite these legislative improvements, significant challenges remain in practical implementation. The ongoing inclusion of Roma and Egyptian minorities in compulsory education continues to be at low levels. Although the 2018–2019 academic year recorded an increase in the enrollment of Roma and Egyptian children in compulsory education, the dropout rate remains high. According to 2012 data, 40.3% of the Roma population and 12.7% of the Egyptian population over the age of eight were illiterate. Additionally, 61% of Roma

families and 57% of Egyptian families reported significant difficulties in their children's education (Study on the Needs Assessment of the Roma and Egyptian Communities in Albania, 2012).

Furthermore, school dropout rates present a particular concern, with notable gender disparities: the number of girls leaving compulsory education is higher compared to boys (Korce Municipality & European Union, 2022).

In an effort to improve the quality of education and services for Roma and Egyptian communities, Council of Ministers Decision No. 682, dated 29 July 2015, "On the Use of Public Funds for the Transportation of Educational Staff and Students Studying Outside Their Place of Residence," was adopted. This decision provides financial support for teachers working in pre-university education schools, aiming to enhance educational conditions for children from Roma and Egyptian communities.

However, despite the adoption of this initiative, participation of Roma and Egyptian students in compulsory education remained very low, concentrated primarily in the first and second grades of primary education. To address this issue, Instruction No. 17, dated 9 May 2018, was introduced to guide and simplify the legal procedures for enrolling children who had not regularly attended the first two years of primary education.⁴

Despite all these efforts and legislative initiatives, the state of education and lifelong learning for the Roma and Egyptian communities remains concerning (Óhidy, 2023). Various reports from international organizations monitoring minority rights consistently highlight the existing challenges. For instance, the 2013 Progress Report on Albania points out that a particularly alarming issue for children from Roma and Egyptian communities is the high number of children primarily Roma, who work or beg on the streets.

⁴Udhëzim Nr.17 datë 09.05.2018, "Për procedurat e ndjekjes së arsimit të detyruar nga nxënësit që nuk kanë ndjekur të paktën dy klasa të arsimit bazë dhe për arsimin në kohë të pjesshme në arsimin bazë" Instruction No. 17, dated May 9, 2018, "On the Procedures for Pursuing Compulsory Education by Students Who Have Not Attended at Least Two Grades of Basic Education and on Part-Time Education in Basic Education".

Furthermore, it has been documented that these children, especially those from the Roma community, are subjected to the worst forms of exploitation and extreme marginalization (European Commission, 2013).

Additionally, Simon, Galanxhi & Dhono (2015), in a study based on 2011 Census data, demonstrate low educational attainment levels among students from Roma and Egyptian communities nationwide. Approximately 55% of Roma and Egyptian children aged 6–9 were not enrolled in compulsory education, while among the 10–16 age group, 30% of boys and 44.6% of girls had dropped out of school. Key issues identified in this study include systemic barriers within the education system, early dropout from compulsory education, low academic achievement, and failure to register children in compulsory education, among others etc.

Subsequent reports have also identified serious challenges faced by children from the Roma and Egyptian communities that adversely affect their continued attendance in compulsory education. For instance, the 2020 Council of Europe Report highlights that “...roma and egyptian communities continue to face very difficult living conditions and persistent discrimination, particularly regarding access to education, social protection, healthcare, employment, and housing.” Furthermore, the report notes that some members of these communities disagree with political approaches toward the formulation of public policies addressing both groups, and they continue to experience significant barriers primarily in the fields of education and employment (Council of Europe, 2020).

The situation remains concerning at the local level, as evidenced by a study conducted by the Municipality of Korce within the framework of the Local Development Plan for the Roma and Egyptian Communities, 2014–2020. The study reveals that only 51% of Roma and Egyptian children attend compulsory education, while 45% are not engaged in any educational process.

Moreover, a significant issue highlighted is the differing perceptions regarding the value of education for girls and boys. Nearly all respondents indicated that girls’ educational experiences are treated differently from those of boys. Based on the community’s social and cultural norms, boys are generally given the opportunity to complete compulsory education up to the ninth grade, whereas girls often

discontinue schooling between the ages of 13 and 15 due to early marriages. This practice contradicts the provisions of the Family Code (Law No. 9062, dated 8.5.2003, Article 7), which stipulates that marriage is only permitted after the age of 18. Consequently, early marriages pose a direct barrier to Roma and Egyptian girls' access to education (Robayo -Abril & Millán, 2019).

Another factor contributing to low educational participation is the lack of information on family planning, which reinforces the tendency toward larger family sizes. Currently, surveyed parents report an average of 4.5 children per family. The involvement of older children in caring for younger siblings is also a common phenomenon: one in two surveyed parents stated that older children are obliged to take care of the younger ones, thereby hindering their regular school attendance (Robayo-Abril & Millán, 2019).

Meanwhile, although a lack of trust in educational system services exists within the community, it does not appear to be the primary factor behind school dropout rates. Surveyed parents acknowledged experiencing feelings of discrimination and prejudice but emphasized that such discrimination has not been directly manifested within educational settings such as schools or other educational institutions.

Another significant factor contributing to the low participation of Roma children in compulsory education is the lack of parental support. This is influenced by the low level of human capital among parents, which often results in a lack of skills and knowledge necessary to assist children in the learning process. Additionally, the low educational aspirations of Roma children, which are frequently more limited compared to their non-Roma peers, constitute another barrier to their educational progress. This dynamic, related to both parental influence and children's perceptions of education, profoundly impacts their level of engagement and their ability to take full advantage of available educational opportunities (Robayo-Abril & Millán, 2019).

The lack of information on family planning and the prevalence of extended families constitute another observed phenomenon affecting the low participation of Roma and Egyptian students in compulsory education. Currently, surveyed parents report an average of 4.5 children per family. Another notable pattern is the involvement of older children in caring for younger family members (Robayo-Abril & Millán, 2019). Specifically, one in two surveyed parents indicated

that they regularly rely on older children to care for the younger siblings, which, according to them, limits the older children's ability to attend school regularly.

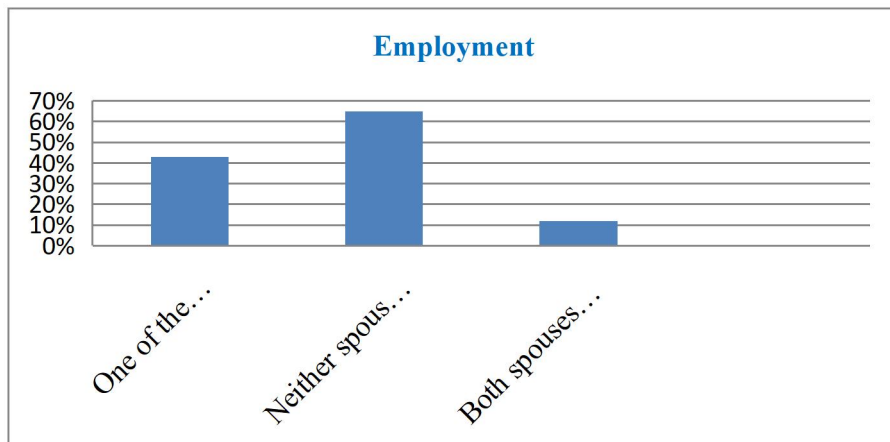
Meanwhile, the lack of trust exhibited by parents towards the educational system's services ranked low among the factors mentioned by the respondents themselves, despite their feelings of discrimination and prejudice. However, perceived discrimination was not reported to manifest directly within educational settings such as schools or other educational institutions.

IV. STUDY FINDINGS

The high dropout rate among Roma and Egyptian students in compulsory education in Albania is attributed to a range of factors sharing common denominators, notably the low economic status and the distinct social and cultural characteristics of these communities. Similar conditions are observed within Roma and Egyptian families in the Korce region.

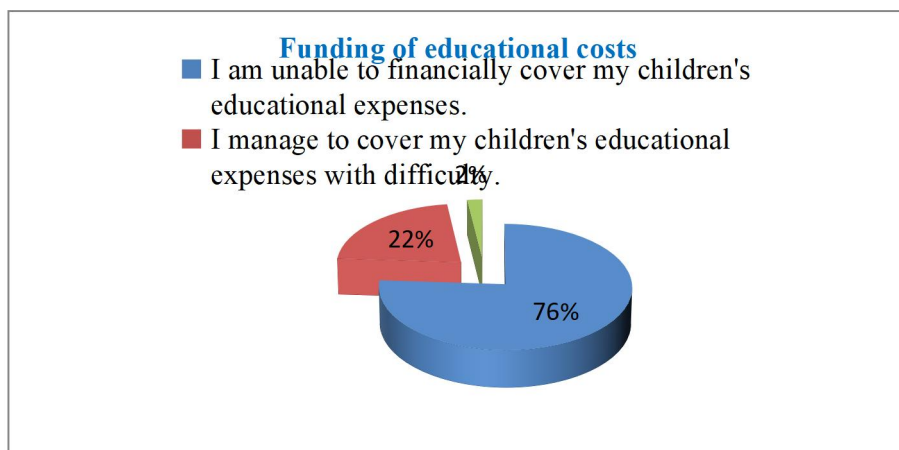
The study reveals a strong and positive correlation between the family's economic background and the attendance rates of Roma and Egyptian children in the nine-year compulsory education system. Among the primary reasons cited for these economic difficulties are irregular employment, discrimination and stigmatization by the non-Roma population, and the lack of concrete initiatives providing financial support. The table below presents detailed responses from parents participating in the study regarding their employment status.

Figure nr. 1



Furthermore, due to limited family income, approximately 76% of surveyed parents acknowledge that they are unable to cover the expenses associated with their children's nine-year compulsory education. This financial constraint often results in parents not permitting their children to attend school regularly.

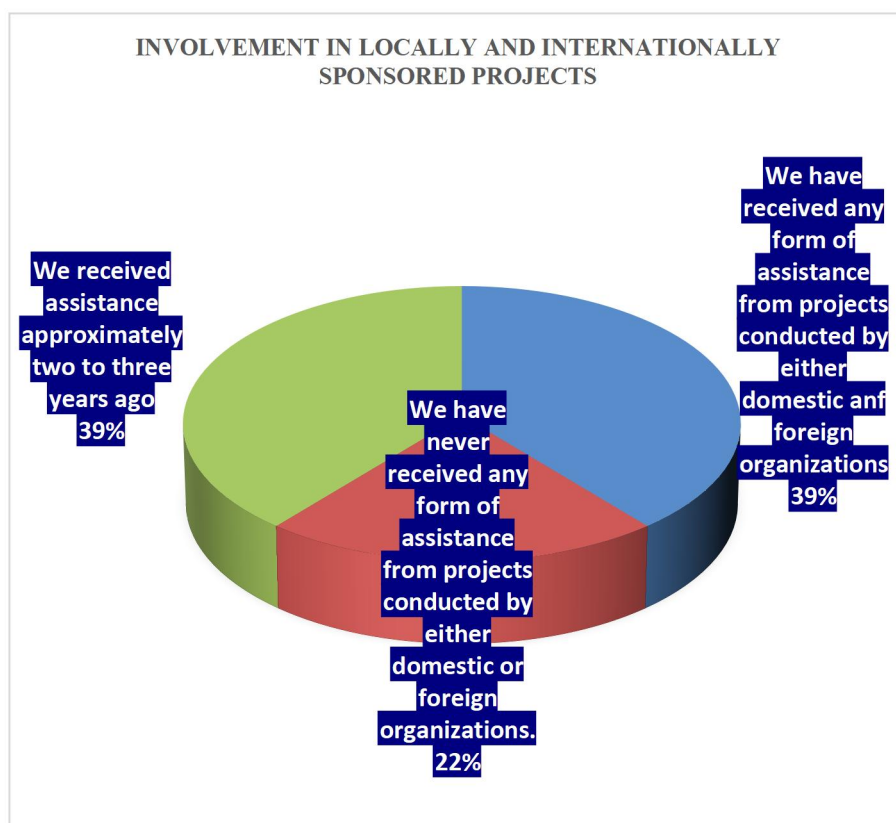
Figure nr. 2



Another focus of the study is the identification of assistance received by families from the Roma and Egyptian communities through

projects implemented by local authorities or international organizations. As illustrated in Figure 3, the parents' responses are indicative, showing that a considerable portion of community members primarily those with children enrolled in compulsory education have received targeted support related to school supplies, backpacks, clothing, and similar items.

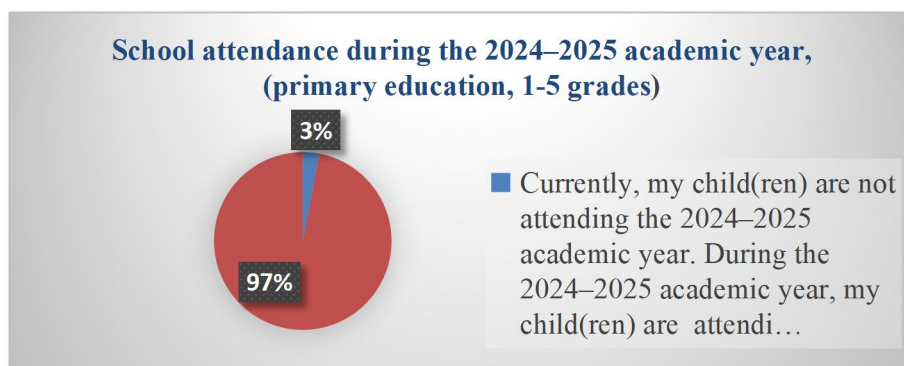
Figure nr. 3



Approximately 39% of parents reported receiving financial assistance and participating in projects implemented by local government bodies as well as primarily foreign organizations. Some parents indicated that they continue to receive financial support during specific months, particularly prior to the start of the academic year and during official national holidays.

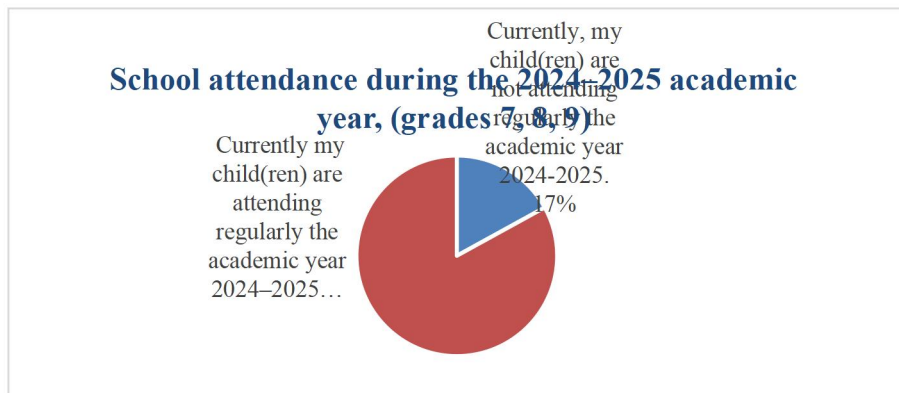
Parents with children in primary education were also surveyed regarding their children's current school attendance for the 2024–2025 academic year. Their responses, presented in Figure 4, show that only about 3% of children do not attend school regularly, while the vast majority maintain consistent attendance.

Figure nr. 4



The situation appears more problematic regarding the school attendance of students in grades 6, 7, 8, and 9 of the compulsory nine-year education. As illustrated in Figure 5, the number of students in upper primary education who do not attend school regularly is notably higher. Approximately 14% of these students demonstrate irregular attendance, while around 3% have dropped out multiple times and only returned to school following teacher intervention. Out of 95 parents surveyed, representing a total of 186 students, 17% of the students exhibit issues with consistent school attendance or have experienced school dropout, particularly in grades 7, 8, and 9. As a result, many of them are unable to participate in final exams required for completing compulsory education.

Figure nr. 5



Findings from the focus groups conducted with the parents involved in the study reveal that parental influence significantly affects students' regular school attendance, with a stronger impact observed among girls than boys. Approximately 16% of parents reported that their daughters no longer attend compulsory education due to early marriage. Furthermore, they stated that this decision was made willingly by the girls themselves. Two parents disclosed that their daughters were married at the ages of 15 and 16 respectively, so after their finished the compulsory education. Through informal conversasion, the parents reported that one of their daughters, who had just completed lower secondary education, were already engaged and soon will be married.

When asked whether they were informed about family planning and the provisions of the Family Code, all respondents (100%) confirmed awareness. However, they emphasized that early marriages do not conflict with their cultural norms and that both boys and girls make such decisions of their own volition.

Academic achievement among Roma and Egyptian students in compulsory education emerged as another area of concern in the study. Survey data indicate that the majority of students (approximately 87%) achieved below-average academic results, while 7% achieved satisfactory outcomes and only about 5% demonstrated excellent academic performance. Focus group discussions revealed that students with satisfactory or excellent academic results were primarily those attending lower primary education (grades 1–5), whereas students in upper primary grades (6–9) were more likely to exhibit weak or below-average academic achievement.

V. CONCLUSIONS

- The study demonstrated a significant correlation between the economic status of Roma and Egyptian families and the educational attainment of their children.
- Unemployment among Roma and Egyptian families represents a serious issue that directly affects students' participation in compulsory education.
- Economic hardship is reflected in pronounced shortages of school supplies, clothing, and other educational necessities. Only a small proportion of parents reported that both spouses are employed, while the majority indicated that only one or neither adult in the household has formal employment.
- Parents reported having benefited from various programs implemented by local authorities and/or national and international organizations; however, they emphasized that such assistance is insufficient to improve their current economic situation.
- Financial support through these programs and projects has been particularly evident over the past ten years.
- Low academic achievement is prevalent among Roma and Egyptian students, with a considerable percentage performing below average.
- A positive correlation was found between the cultural characteristics of the Roma and Egyptian communities and school dropout rates, with early school leaving more pronounced among girls than boys by approximately 3%. School dropout continues to be a concerning issue for Roma and Egyptian students in the 2024–2025 academic year, with a significant number of parents reporting that their children are not currently attending compulsory education.
- This trend is particularly evident among girls, largely due to early marriage. According to surveyed parents, early marriage does not conflict with the cultural values of the Roma and Egyptian communities.
- While the majority of parents reported being aware of family planning and the Family Code, legal sanctions against early marriage are not perceived as a concern within these communities.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Further strengthening of the capacities of local government institutions with the aim of increasing awareness about the importance of education for the Roma and Egyptian communities
- Provide support to the families of students from Roma and Egyptian communities through professional training programs aimed at equipping them with skills for specific trades or occupations.
- Offer concrete support in the form of school supplies to students from grades 1 to 9, distributed according to a defined annual calendar.
- Organize regular meetings between parents, teachers, and school psychosocial service staff to raise awareness about the importance of regular school attendance, particularly in compulsory education.
- Ensure continuous collaboration between psychosocial service professionals, parents, and teachers to provide emotional support and motivation to students with satisfactory academic performance.
- Increase awareness campaigns on family planning and the legal sanctions provided by national legislation concerning early marriage.
- Encourage students with good and/or excellent academic results by involving them in school and extracurricular activities (e.g., academic Olympiads, literary competitions) to reinforce their commitment to regular school attendance.

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