(UN)FRIENDLY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS? BULLYING AND MICROAGGRESSIONS AS A CAUSE FOR ROMA CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT

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When it comes to education policy-making for Roma children, both research and policy-making focus mostly on issues related to segregation, access to education, poverty, and social exclusion. One item that has so far been mostly absent is a focus on the school and classroom environment, namely the prejudiced, hostile, and discriminatory attitudes and actions either of teachers or of classmates towards Roma pupils. In response to this gap, this Working Paper will focus on bullying and microaggressions against Roma pupils in schools, acknowledging it as a significant factor shaping these children's experience at school. After reviewing the relevant academic debates on bullying and microaggressions, the Working Paper will attempt to summarise the existing evidence of bullying of Roma children in schools across Europe. Finally, following an overview of the existing recommendations by European organisations, as well as of national level policy responses to this issue, the Working Paper will conclude that there is a pressing need for comprehensive data collection, academic research, and policy-making concerning bullying and microaggressions against Roma pupils in schools.

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Introduction

The gap in education between Roma and non-Roma pupils has long been acknowledged as one of the most serious obstacles to the integration of the Roma communities. A survey carried out by the Fundamental Rights Agency (2016) across eleven EU states demonstrated both the extent of Roma exclusion from education, as starting already in preschool and continuing on throughout compulsory education, as well as its implications, with Roma pupils' educational outcomes, literacy rates, and completed secondary education rates being considerably lower than in the case of their non-Roma counterparts. In this context, identifying the reasons for the overall educational

underachievement of Roma pupils becomes very important, as once these reasons are identified, policy measures can be adopted to correct the situation. In this respect, the causes for Roma children underachieving in schools have been generally identified as residing in the lack of quality early childhood education services, poor infrastructure, the lack of adequate documentation, poverty and social exclusion, segregation, the school and classroom environment, inadequate financing of the education sector, or an inadequate level of government action (UNICEF, 2011).

Both research and policy-making have so far mostly focused on issues related to segregation, access to education of Roma children generally, as well as poverty and social exclusion of Roma children. However, one item that has so far been mostly absent from both research agendas and policy-making is a focus on the school and classroom environment, namely the prejudiced, hostile, and discriminatory attitudes and actions either of teachers or of classmates towards Roma pupils. This is quite a lack, given the fact that various policy and research reports mention the existence of an unfriendly school environment towards Roma children, resulting in lower attendance rates and ultimately lower academic performance. As an example, a UNICEF position paper focusing on the situation of the Roma in education across Central and Eastern Europe identifies school environment as being often negative towards children of Roma origin, and directly links it to "lower self-esteem, academic performance, enrolment and retention rates,

and a poorer ability to transition between levels of education" for these children (UNICEF, 2011, p.21). A research study focusing on the causes and consequences of early school leaving in Romania found that the most important determinant of school drop-out and educational performance was students' perception of school as a friendly environment, the correlation being closer than that with ethnic background or poverty (Roma Education Fund Romania, 2013, p.11).

This working paper will focus on bullying and microaggressions against Roma pupils in schools, as a significant factor shaping their experience at school. Given the absence of comprehensive research on the topic, this paper will attempt to review existing research on bullying and microaggressions and their effects on victims, summarise existing evidence of bullying and microaggressions against Roma pupils across Europe, and assess existing policies to combat violence in schools. Ultimately, the purpose of this working paper is to highlight the need for both academic research and adequate policy responses to a problem which, as will be shown, is significant and impacts the academic outcomes of many Roma children.

Starting from the research into school bullying initiated by Dan Olweus in the 1970s, this paper will briefly outline the academic debates on ethnic and racial bullying and microaggression in schools, as developed in the last decades particularly in the United States. While this research was developed in a highly specific context, its findings on the risk factors for bullying, the types of bullying taking place in school, and

its effects on victims are arguably very relevant for the case of the Roma in Europe. The second section of the working paper will attempt to summarise the (so far) disparate evidence of bullying of Roma children in schools, by gathering evidence both from existing reports and from various published interviews with Roma children, Roma families, and teachers working in schools where significant numbers of Roma children learn. The third section of the working paper will look at existing recommendations by European organisations, as well as at national level policy responses to this issue. The conclusion will attempt to identify some of the causes for the shortage of research and policy action on the topic, and will highlight the necessity of comprehensive data collection, academic research, and policy-making on the subject of bullying and microaggressions against Roma pupils in schools.

1. Bullying and microagressions

While bullying in schools has been known to happen for a long time, it was only in the 1970s that research on the topic started to become the subject of systematic research, with the research initiated by Dan Olweus on school violence in Swedish and Norwegian schools. The original term used was "mobbing", a word coming from ethology which described a group of birds attacking an individual one. With the realisation that bullying carried out by an individual against another individual was actually much more widespread than bullying by a group against an individual, a change in terminology followed, with "bullying" replacing the older term, particularly in English language publications (in German legislation, for instance, the term "mobbing" is still in use).

It should be said here that bullying does not occur exclusively in schools; indeed, a recent book (Monks & Coyne, 2011) analysed bullying as potentially occurring throughout an individual's life, starting from childhood, and continuing on in adolescence and adulthood; correspondingly, bullying was analysed as occurring in preschools, schools, residential care, families, dating relationships, prisons, the workplace, among older people, as well as in cyberspace.

Research specifically on bullying in schools has touched on a variety of subtopics, such as the epidemiology of bullying - including definitions, issues of measurement, prevalence and frequency of bullying and victimization; risk factors for becoming a bully or a victim, including psychological characteristics, environmental influences, and the consequences of bullying and victimization; intragenerational continuity and intergenerational transmission of bullying and victimization; and prevention methods focusing on bullies, victims, and the environment (Farrington, 1993).

Recent research has built on the existing body of knowledge by developing a better understanding of ethnic and racial bullying and microaggressions. Most of the research carried out in this field refers to schools in the United States, with comparatively less research on schools in Europe. This new strand of research includes, among others, definitions and categorizations of bullying acts (e.g. research on schools in the United

States identifies a specific type of ethnic or racial bullying under the name of "microaggressions", as discussed below), effects on victims, policy responses, school interventions, and their effectiveness.

Definitions of school bullying

A first distinction that needs to be made is that between "violence" and "bullying". Some scholars include under the generic label of "bullying" any kind of oppressive behaviours, including physical violence, mental cruelty, intimidation, extortion, stealing valued possessions, wilful destruction of property, rubbishing other children's work, menacing stares etc (Farrington, 1993, p.385). Other studies however conceive of school violence and school bullying as two separate categories; where this is the case, school violence is understood to encompass physical, psychological, and sexual violence, whereas school bullying is described as unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived imbalance of power (UNESCO, 2017, p.8). It should be mentioned here that oftentimes, wherever available, national policy guidelines refer to school violence as an all-encompassing concept, covering all types of physical or verbal violence and microaggressions.

Definitional variations notwithstanding, school bullying is usually defined by a number of key elements: a physical, verbal, or psychological attack or intimidation intended to cause fear, distress, or harm to the victim; an imbalance of power (whether psychological or physical); and the repeated nature of these types of incidents between the same children over a prolonged period; school bullying does not occur exclusively on school premises, but also on the way to or from school (Farrington, 1993, p.282). Along these lines, it is usually Olweus' concise definition that over time has gained most traction and is used in most research on bullying: "One is talking about bullying when a student is abused and becomes victimized, exposed repeatedly in the course of time to the offensive actions implemented by one or more companions" (Olweus 1993).

Types of bullying behavior

As with general definitions of bullying, the classification of the various types of bullying behaviour is a matter of debate; most studies agree on the types outlined below, but it should be noted that this typology is neither definitive nor without fault, with occasional overlaps and disagreements as to which elements belong to which type.

Verbal bullying entails actions such as teasing, insulting and threatening and can be of a very personal nature and can be directed at the child's family, culture, race, or religion (O'Moore, M., McGuire, n.d., p.2); under this category, some studies distinguish relational bullying, referring to the spreading of rumours, exclusion from a group, and social isolation (UNESCO, 2017, p.15).

Physical bullying includes hitting, pushing, shoving, kicking, poking, tripping up, punching or striking someone with weapons or objects. Such behaviours may be defended as "just a game" when challenged. (O'Moore, M., McGuire, n.d., p.3)

Social and relational bullying includes behaviours that attempt to damage the

victim's relationship with their peers (Monks & Coyne, 2011, p.4); this category overlaps to an extent with verbal bullying.

Direct bullying refers to direct social exclusion, where an individual is explicitly told they cannot join in an activity (Monks & Coyne, 2011, p.4). Obviously, this category partially or entirely overlaps with verbal bullying, cyberbullying, and potentially physical bullying.

Indirect bullying refers to bullying that occurs behind the victim's back and includes behaviours such as rumour spreading (Monks & Coyne, 2011, p.4). Again, this category partially overlaps with verbal bullying and cyberbullying and can also correspond to the social and relational bullying described above.

Cyberbullying involves posting or sending online messages, with the purpose of harassing, threatening or targeting another person; spreading rumours, posting false information, hurtful messages, embarrassing comments or photos, or excluding someone from online networks or other communications are all included under this category (UNESCO, 2017, p.15). Cyberbullying can include social and relational aspects and can be either a direct or indirect form of bullying.

Microaggressions have been analysed in a range of academic studies, particularly focusing on racial relations in the United States. While arguably the types of actions included under this label are already covered by the more generic term of "bullying", their specificity makes their inclusion in a separate category meaningful. As such, racial microaggressions can be verbal, non-verbal, or visual acts communicating a dismissive attitude towards people of colour; they are often automatic or unconscious (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). In an educational context, pupils may describe racial microaggressions as a "pattern of being overlooked, under-respected and devalued because of their race" (Sue & Constantine, 2007, p.137). Scholars writing on this topic have distinguished among three types of microaggressions:

Microassaults include name-calling, avoidant behaviour or purposeful discriminatory actions, such as calling someone a "nigger" or "Jap," proclaiming the inferiority of other races, or refusing to collaborate with students of other racial background (Sue & Constantine, 2009, p.137)

Microinsults convey a hidden insulting message to the recipients of colour; examples include teachers failing to acknowledge the presence of students of colour in the classroom, avoiding eye contact or turning away from students of colour while consistently engaging in exchanges with white students. The prevailing message to people of other racial backgrounds would be that their ideas and contributions are not important (Sue & Constantine, 2009, p.138).

Microinvalidations "exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of people of colour", such as white students and teachers complaining that students of other races "bringing race into everything", such as "'Why does everything have to be about race?" (Sue & Constantine, 2009, p.138).

Racial and ethnic school bullying

Studies focusing on bullying that is carried out on ethnic or racial grounds agree that, while it has certain specific characteristics, the types of behaviours it includes are those that are in any case encountered in the classical form of bullying: physical, verbal and non-verbal actions, directly or indirectly perpetrated, in a repeated manner, against a person due to his/her ethnic origin.

Esoh Elamé (2013, p.34), writing about bullying on ethnic grounds (which he calls "ethnobullying"), describes it as occurring in a social dynamic that reproduces prejudices and stereotypes, through social constructions and finds it can be structured along three categories:

a. Interethnic bullying, which tends to take place between immigrants of different countries (e.g. between Moldavians and Moroccans), and respectively between immigrants and natives (e.g. in Italy between Moldovans and Italians);
b. Intraethnic bullying, which occurs between immigrants originating from the same country (e.g. between immigrants from Cameroon, of Mossi and Douala backgrounds), and respectively between natives of the same country (e.g. between Italians from the north and the south of Italy);
c. Transethnic bullying, by which Elamé means a form of bullying which is initially intraethnic and then becomes also interethnic (e.g. a native Italian from the south being discriminated by an Italian from the north, and the by a French child who

picks up on the initial bullying and perpetuates it).

A research project carried out in a range of European countries (Elame, 2013) has shown that racist bullying is indeed widespread; as for its characteristics, the project found that it is mostly a form of verbal aggression meant to ridicule and/or offend the victim for being different by using swearwords, insults, and bad words.

Indeed, this is where the distinction between general bullying and microaggressions becomes particularly relevant: if indeed racist and ethnic bullying tends to embrace more subtle forms (name calling, bad words etc), it may as well be that it has low priority or even goes undetected by school masters and policy makers, who would be looking to prevent more "serious" forms of bullying (i.e. physical), and thus dismissing microaggressions as being minor issues. Such an exclusive focus on overt, physical forms of bullying means the psychological effects of microaggressions on victims are overlooked, and the consequences of microaggressions on the victims' academic performance are not taken seriously.

Risk factors and effects of bullying on victims

Studies attempting to identify the categories of pupils most at risk to be victims of bullying agree that there are several important drivers of school violence, among which ethnic, linguistic, or cultural differences and poverty or social status figure prominently, together with disability, gender, sexual orientation, physical appearance etc.

Broadly speaking, the effects of bullying on victims are related to their health, social adjustment and academic performance, with students who are bullied tending to have mental health problems such as anxiety and depression at the time and also later in life (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009, p.281).

Studies have found that pupils who had been victimised through bullying display low levels of *psychological wellbeing*, including general unhappiness, low self-esteem, and feelings of anger and sadness. In some cases, the effects of bullying have been correlated with psychological distress, which includes high levels of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thinking; in addition, physical effects have been noted, including psychosomatic symptoms. *Poor social adjustment* has been demonstrated as a further effect of bullying; empirical studies have found that victims of bullying often have feelings of aversion toward their social environment (such as school or the workplace), and manifest loneliness, isolation, and absenteeism (Rigby, 2003, p.584).

Relevant to this working paper are studies which analysed the link between having been subjected to bullying and *academic performance*; for instance, Glew et al (2005) found both victims of bullying and bullies were less likely to be high achievers in school than students who were bystanders. Other studies found a link between victimisation and *school avoidance* (Sharp, 1995; Swearer et al, 2010); in addition, a correlation was found between the duration of children's victimization experiences and *the gravity of their school adjustment problems* (Kochendorfer & Ladd, 1996).

2. School bullying and microaggressions against Roma pupils

Current state of research. Academic research concerning the extent to which Roma children are bullied in schools and the effects of bullying on their academic performance is extremely scarce. There are studies that acknowledge it as a factor in the academic underperformance of Roma children, but with few exceptions, to the knowledge of the author of this Working Paper, no specific, comprehensive study has been carried out on this topic. One of the exceptions is to be found in Esoh Elamé's book, "Discriminatory Bullying. A New Intercultural Challenge", which draws on a large-scale study concerning the existence and frequency of interethnic bullying in schools. The study was carried out across ten European countries and allowed the author to tease out data on bullying against Roma students. Unfortunately, the study – and the subsequent analysis in the book – clumps together data on Roma children and immigrant children, so that the results are only partially relevant. In any case, the study confirmed the existence of interethnic bullying in schools, as directed against Roma and immigrant children, and accounted for several determining factors; among them the level of integration of the Roma/ migrant children (e.g. whether they speak the host country language at home), the size of the classes, as well as the fundamental role of the teacher.

In a recent study, Kisfalusi (2018) examined the associations between peer-reported bullying, victimisation, and pupils' ethnicity

and academic performance among sixth-grade Hungarian pupils. Her research found that poverty and ethnicity were important determinants in students' victimisation: among students with higher socio-economic status, Roma ethnicity was more strongly associated with cyberbullying, verbal forms of bullying such as mockery and gossip (corresponding to the microaggressions identified in the US literature), while physical victimisation and cyberbullying were more frequent among low socio-economic status students. Unfortunately, the research did not focus on the intra- and interethnic nature of bullying.

Research into the links between Roma children's perceptions of a positive school environment and their academic performance confirms the correlation between them; in a research project carried out by Roma Education Fund (2013) in Romania, schools perceived as unattractive by children had a drop-out rate of 64.1%, while schools perceived as attractive by pupils had a much lower 12% drop-out rate. Among the many reasons for the perceived negative school environment, a UNICEF report (2011) identified the often negative assumptions about the intellectual inferiority of Roma children; the fact that teachers systematically ignored Roma children in the educational process; and the verbal and physical bullying of Roma pupils by majority pupils. The negative environment thus created for Roma pupils engenders a certain reluctance on the part of their parents to send their children to school, perceiving it as a hostile place that offers little of value for them.

Finally, a study looking specifically at interethnic violence in several European countries (Medarić & Sedmak, 2012) found that in Slovakia pupils belonging to the Roma ethnic group were exposed to stereotyping and violence because of their ethnic backgrounds, more so than pupils belonging to other ethnicities.

Available evidence of school bullying and microaggressions against Roma pupils.

In the absence of systematic research on the subject, the extent to which Roma children are exposed to bullying and the full effects of such bullying on their wellbeing and overall academic performance are unknown. This is however not to say that the problem presented by bullying against Roma children has not been acknowledged across a range of studies, mostly carried out or financed by European and international organisations.

For instance, a World Bank report (2014) describes schools in Romania with over 90% Roma students as "an overall unfriendly environment", in which teachers "tend to neglect children, spending less than the stipulated time in class, not providing or verifying homework and conducting lessons rather formally, without concern whether children understand and assimilate teachings"; the same report highlights the verbal abuse against Roma pupils. A journalistic investigation into the experiences of young migrants in the UK (Herald Scotland, 2018) found that Roma children often hide their ethnic origin, especially in public spaces, for instance by avoiding to use their mother tongue in schools or on public transport, for fear of attack. Reports looking at the status of Roma children in education in

other European countries do not paint a much happier picture (see for instance Ringold, Orenstein, & Wilkens, 2005; or Tanaka, 2001) .

Anecdotal evidence of bullying can also be gleaned from the various studies focusing on the education of Roma children that used structured or semi-structured interviews as part of their methodology. Although the evidence provided through these interviews cannot constitute the grounds for a study on the topic of bullying, they do point towards several specific aspects meriting in-depth future research. These examples originate from all over Europe and involve both microaggressions and bullying carried out by Roma pupils' peers as well as by their teachers. As will become evident in the following, interviews carried out in different countries, in different contexts, at different points in time, for different purposes and by different researchers, tend to point to common issues related to the bullying of Roma children. Each of these points of commonality suggests paths for further investigation.

Bullying and microaggressions carried out by peers on ethnic grounds and / or on grounds of their social origin

Evidence of bullying of Roma children by their peers is commonly mentioned across studies focusing on education. The following excerpts show examples of name calling, patterns of social exclusion, even physical abuse, carried out against Roma children on grounds of their ethnicity and / or their poverty:

Evidence of name calling / microassaults:

Funny thing is, what I had to live through in school, that's what my child has to go through today. She's dark skinned, she's the only pupil that has declared herself to be Roma. I'm not just saying this because she is my child, but she really is a smart kid. At the beginning of the year all children called her a "crow" [derogatory term used to designate people of Roma origin] and a gypsy, and at some point, she came home and told me "I'm not going to school again. Why are they calling me that?". And when I bathed her, she had this sponge, and she told me "Rub me harder, so that I won't be so dark anymore". [author's translation] (Surdu, 2011, p.54)

"Please, I insist you send your kid [to school] in whatever clothes he has", says the teacher. But don't you see, madam, they are all torn, when they get there, their classmates will make fun of them, he is discriminated against. The child comes home, and he's crying "I'm not going back there, they laughed at me, they said I was dirty, that my shoes are wet", and so on. And then [I said to the headteacher] , now you see, madam headteacher, I sent them to school dressed with what they have, but why are they humiliating my child? Because his parents can't afford things, I can't afford things… She says my child should ignore [the mockery]. But how can he ignore them, he's a child, he feels all these

things… [author's translation] (Surdu, 2011, p.42)

Even when Roma schoolchildren make it into mainstream mixed Czech schools, they often face horrendous racial bullying from their classmates. One boy, Karel, told us of the severe daily bullying his sister Jana experienced at one of the "elite" primary schools: "They called her black-mouth, that she didn't know anything, that she looked disgusting." (Shetty, 2015)

Social exclusion and physical abuse:

I just wanted to share how it feels to be a Traveller who goes to school and how difficult that it is for me. Maybe it is different in some schools but, for me, this is how it is. I don't have many friends in school because they don't want one of their friends to be a Traveller so, when I am in school, I feel isolated from my class and I can always hear them talking about me behind my back and calling me a pikey. (…) At other times, when there are parties or when some of the girls in my class are going to the pictures, I don't get invited because I am a Traveller. At break and at lunchtime, I am always looking over my shoulder because I am scared in case anyone comes up and hits me or shouts abuse at me. (Friends Families and Travellers Website, 2018)

Bullying and microaggressions carried out by teachers against Roma pupils on ethnic or social grounds

Some of the least acknowledged – or, for that matter, researched – types of bullying and microaggressions are those carried out by teachers against Roma children. The instances described across studies usually refer to microaggressions and verbal bullying, while also mentioning subtler forms of microaggressions, such as assigning seats in the back of the room, expressing opinions disparaging Roma culture or language, or neglecting Roma children during class.

Examples of verbal bullying / microassaults:

The teacher told him "Please wash, you stink and you are dirty, we're choking here in the classroom, we can't breathe because of so much gypsy filth". The next day he didn't go to school anymore. [author's translation] (Surdu, 2011, p.54)

Why would I go, if madam [the teacher] screamed at me and asked why I came dressed like this? They should let them come dressed as they can, what is important is for them to come to school. Otherwise you make them abandon school and they won't show up anymore. [author's translation] (Surdu, 2011, p.54)

While Damyan was discussing the issue, his nine-year-old daughter who was around added, "I am not allowed to speak Gypsy language at school … My teacher says: 'Speak Bulgarian,

not in Gypsy. You live in Bulgaria'."
(Lambrev, 2015, p.211)

Examples of microinvalidations:

My daughter experienced discrimination… When she was nearing her 8th grade exams – she is a smart child – she came to me and said "Mom, my maths teacher, my chemistry teacher, my history teacher, they all regret that I study so much. They all say, 'How can this be, that a gipsy girl learns better and thinks faster than the Romanian children?'". The problem is that in school they also keep saying that they [the Roma children] are not washed, not dressed as well as other children… . [author's translation] (Surdu, 2011, p.53)

Examples of microinsults:

They differentiate between the Roma child and the Romanian child. Even at the school festivities, I just noticed now, for the Christmas festivities, those who were Roma were placed at the back, and only Romanians stood at the front [on the stage]. Only the Romanians recited poems. They keep saying, the Gypsy doesn't know, he doesn't have a good memory, they say we're less capable. (…) They even discriminated among them with the textbooks. Roma children received the old textbooks, and richer children received the new ones… And children wonder when they look around desks… Why is yours new? Mine is older (…) it's full of

markings. Some get them torn, others don't.' (…) They don't take care of the Roma child, they just sit them there, at the desk, at the back of the room. They don't take care of him, they don't talk to him, he just sits there in the classroom, that's discrimination, we can for sure say this. [author's translation] (Surdu, 2011, p.53)

Petr, a Romani boy in 5th grade in a mixed mainstream school in Dìèín told Amnesty International that he often faces bullying: "They call me names because I'm Roma. The teacher doesn't deal with it and when I tell her, she accuses me of starting it. She treats us differently." (Amnesty International, 2015)

Romanian children come to the school festivities, but to those who don't have the [financial] means for it, they [school authorities] tell them "You stay home." Some Roma children, they weren't taken to the theater play, because they were "filthy". Weren't those children under her [the teacher's] responsibility? Why weren't they allowed to go? And they were crying, these kids, they were saying … "we weren't invited." [author's translation] (Surdu, 2011, p.54)

Most of my teachers won't have time for me. They think I am just wasting their time because all the other Travellers that have been to my school have never stuck it out as it is so lonesome. I don't think they know

how hard it is when you are being called names every day and getting abused. So, the next time you might wonder why Travellers never stay in school or come to school, that's why! (Friends Families and Travellers Website, 2018)

All evidence therefore points towards a phenomenon that occurs in countries across Europe, creating an unfriendly – and occasionally one could argue even hostile – environment in schools for Roma children. At this stage, in the absence of comprehensive empirical research, it is impossible to estimate the proportion of Roma children affected or the most prevalent types of bullying; there is almost no available data concerning the bullying of Roma children segregated by gender, age, type of school, or by socio-economic status. There is also no study of the bullies' motivations or backgrounds and therefore only a limited understanding of this process; more importantly, to the knowledge of the author of this working paper, there is no study looking at teachers' attitudes and behaviours towards Roma children, despite extensive evidence that oftentimes teachers discriminate in class, and sometimes bully children of Roma origin.

Understanding why schools can become unfriendly environments for children–and subsequently instituting adequate policies— is arguably fundamental in reducing the levels of school dropouts and improving academic performance. There is evidence pointing towards a certain reluctance on the part of Roma parents to send their children to

school for fear they will be mistreated. Ringold et al (2005) found that many Roma from Timisoara, Romania, resisted sending children to school due to fears of discrimination and maltreatment; they also found evidence of similar fears in the case of Roma parents in Bulgaria: "[other kids] bully my kids and [teachers] are not nice to them, they are not allowed to speak Romani and they learn nothing about our ways, this is not the way I want to raise my children" (p.105). As Rostas and Kostka (2014) point out, it is only by acknowledging these points of view can experts understand the reluctance and scepticism of some Romani parents to motivate their children to attend school.

In this context, the lack of specific research and policy action dealing with the bullying of Roma children in schools is a serious deficit. Understanding the extent of the problem, the types of bullying Roma children are most exposed to, the risk factors for victimisation, the teachers' attitudes towards Roma children and their management of bullying by peers, the link between bullying and underperformance in school and respectively between bullying and school abandonment are essential factors for improving Roma pupils' academic performance and attendance rates.

3. Policy responses in Europe

Research has shown that school-level programmes to combat bullying levels have a positive effect on academic achievement. For instance, a US study comparing the academic performance of students who attended schools where bullying and violence

prevention programmes had been in place and respectively of students attending schools without such programmes, found that students in the first group had higher academic achievements; moreover, academic performance decreased in the case of those students moving from a school with violence-prevention programmes in place to schools without such programmes (Swearer, 2010, p. 39). A conclusion one can easily infer would then be that the task of policy-makers and schools is to create a safe environment for all students, free of the threat of bullying and violence, so that their academic performance can flourish.

Given the evidence outlined above–sparse and uneven as it is—the questions that arise are what policies are in place to combat school bullying of Roma children, at what level they are instituted, and how they can be improved.

Bullying in schools is the subject of several Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Although not specifically dealing with bullying of Roma children, these Recommendations provide a general framework for combatting bullying (including on ethnic or social origin grounds): for instance, Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education invites member states to "promote educational approaches and teaching methods which aim at learning to live together in a democratic and multicultural society (…) as well as to combat all forms of discrimination and violence, especially bullying and harassment." This

Recommendation however does not specifically address the issue of bullying and microaggressions against Roma children; a more targeted recommendation is CM Rec(2009)4 on the education of Roma and Travellers in Europe, which mentions the issue of microaggressions against Roma in schools:

> Teachers working directly with Roma and Traveller children (…) should be made aware that they need to engage Roma and Traveller children more in all educational activities and not de-motivate them by placing lower demands upon them and encourage them to develop their full potential. (Council of Europe CM Rec(2009)4)

Also relevant to the topic of this working paper, in 2006 the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) issued its General Policy Recommendation No. 10 on combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education. The recommendation outlines a set of measures to combat racism and racial discrimination in schools, including instituting a permanent policy to fight such phenomena, whether they emanate from pupils or educational staff; adopting educational measures such as, for example, non-formal education activities in organisations dealing with victims of racism and racial discrimination; or treating incitement to racial hatred in schools and any other serious racist act, including the use of violence, threats or damage to property, as acts punishable by suspension or expulsion or any other appropriate measure (ECRI, 2006).

Also, ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 13 (2011) on combating anti-Gypsyism and discrimination against Roma also touches on the topic of school bullying, and recommends that governments "combat, through sanctions, the harassment inflicted on Roma pupils at school". In more concrete terms, ECRI recent country monitoring reports occasionally bring up the issue of racial or ethnic bullying; for instance, it recommended Swedish authorities to step up their efforts to prevent and combat racial harassment and bullying at school (ECRI, 2012, p.8); it recommended authorities in the United Kingdom increase efforts to combat bullying directed against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, and drew attention to the importance both of training teachers in the history and culture of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (ECRI, 2010, p.45); it highlighted that, in Romania, in addition to socio-economic factors, discrimination by teachers and other pupils remains a disincentive for Roma children to complete their studies, and that ECRI had become aware of reports of Roma children being placed in the back of classrooms, of teachers ignoring Roma pupils, and of bullying by other school children (ECRI, 2014, p.34).

While it is certainly important that this issue was highlighted in several reports, there is no mention of school bullying of Roma in many of the states monitored by ECRI. Given the fact that there is emerging evidence of this issue in many other countries, and that there are comparatively higher rates of Roma school dropouts across Europe, it is regrettable that ECRI chose not to focus on bullying of Roma pupils in schools.

Conversely, the issue of school segregation of Roma pupils is highlighted more often; a sign that this topic is viewed as a higher priority.

Concerning national policies, many European states do not have legal requirements on schools to prevent violence or bullying in schools. Most national education ministries will have some kind of requirement for schools to have "an environment of respect for others", while only a limited number of countries have legal requirements on violence, more specifically Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Sweden, and the UK (Smith, 2003). Currently, to the author's knowledge, no European country has instituted a legal requirement combatting specifically school violence and / or bullying against Roma children. For instance, Romania and Bulgaria, two of the countries with both evidence of school violence generally, and evidence of bullying of Roma children in schools, have instituted neither general legislation to combat violence in schools, nor specific measures to combat bullying of Roma children in schools. In the case of Romania, as shown in the interview excerpts above, there is direct evidence of bullying and microaggressions against Roma children on grounds of their ethnicity and / or social status; in Bulgaria, a 2017 survey suggests that 60% of the children in Bulgaria do not feel safe at school (Novinite, 2017), and as in the case of Romania, reports mention instances of bullying of Roma children by their non-Roma classmates in schools (Tanaka, 2001), including reports of teachers' bullying of Roma children in

kindergarten (ERRC, 2004). This situation notwithstanding, neither Romania or Bulgaria have adopted a specific policy for the prevention of violence in schools, and neither country has set up policies to specifically combat ethnically motivated bullying and microaggressions. In the case of Romania, the Ministry of Education has put together a set of guidelines to combat violence in schools (2011), while the Bulgarian government approved in 2017 a National Program and a Mechanism for Counteraction against violence concerning children. The programme envisages the reform of the relevant legislation, the strengthening of mechanisms to report violence and abuse, and undertaking data collection (UN Children's Fund, 2017).

Conclusions

As this working paper attempted to demonstrate, school bullying and microaggressions against Roma across Europe represent a significant problem, whose scope however is as yet unknown, with research and policy action on this topic being woefully inadequate.

Academic research into the effects of bullying and microaggressions has found that oftentimes victims suffer from psychological distress, leading to academic underperformance and school avoidance. As outlined above, there is limited research on the extent and the effects of bullying on Roma children. However, the limited empirical evidence available, whether in the form of statistical evidence or interviews carried out in schools with significant numbers of Roma pupils, appears to confirm that the problem is significant and with direct effects on school attendance and academic performance.

Likely this apparent lack of interest on the part of both researchers and policy-makers has multiple causes. An important one is probably related to the fact that although policy-makers are aware of the problem, they consider it to be of low-priority. In 2014 Michaël Guet, Secretary of the Council of Europe Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM) addressed the European Parliament on the topic of bullying and discrimination of Roma children at school. While the presentation is an appeal for further action in this respect, it is telling that Mr Guet starts by emphasising the need to address "in many member states and localities the access to education of Roma (and Traveller) children", before even addressing bullying and discrimination at school for Roma children (Guet, 2014). Indeed, improved access to education and for that matter combatting segregation in education are fundamental issues to be addressed; however, the mounting evidence of the effects of bullying on Roma children indicates that a comprehensive effort is needed to combat this phenomenon.

A further probable reason for this lack of interest concerning the bullying of Roma pupils lies in the definitional confusion surrounding school violence, bullying, and microaggressions. Many countries have adopted legislation combatting violence in schools, and it is understood that such legislation targets all forms of school violence and all potential victims, regardless

of their backgrounds, are protected. It may also be that "light" forms of school violence, such as microaggressions or verbal bullying, are perceived as less important and therefore have lower priority in policy-making or, for that matter, on research agendas. The evidence outlined above stands witness however both to the failings of existing policies and to the fact that "light" forms of school violence can have lasting and significant impacts on Roma pupils.

Finally, there may be a deeper reason why the issue has up to now received so little attention, and it may have to do with the fact that schools claim to be – and are perceived as such, mostly by ethnic majorities – as neutral places, free from ethnic, racial or any other bias or prejudices. It is then the individual child's responsibility to perform well at school, and his/her personal failure when things go wrong. Most often than not, blame for Roma pupils' underperformance is assigned variously to their culture (with girls' early marriages as a cause for dropping out of school being a famous but academically refuted trope), to Roma parents' supposed disinterest in their children's education, or - surprisingly often—to Roma children's presumed lower intellectual capabilities.

This working paper has attempted to highlight the need for giving a much higher priority to combatting bullying and microaggressions against Roma pupils. This would entail systematic, large-scale data collection, which together with qualitative research would allow for a better understanding of both the scope and the characteristics of the problem. Meaningful, effective policy-making cannot be undertaken in the absence of solid academic research, and until such policy action is instituted, Roma children will continue to suffer the effects of learning in unfriendly, even hostile environments – while being blamed for their underperformance.

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