

**NIKOLAI TILKIDJIEV, Ed., VALENTINA MILENKOVA,  
KAMELIA PETKOVA AND NATASHA MILEVA, *Roma  
Dropouts*, Open Society Institute, Sofia, 2009**

The book *Roma Dropouts* is a result from the research project *Towards Desegregation of the Bulgarian School: Educational Policies and Social Technologies for Overcoming the Dropping Out of Roma*, based on a contract with the Scientific Research Fund of the Ministry of Education in Bulgaria (2005–2008). It responds to a circle of serious issues related to the mass-scale dropping out of Roma children from the educational system in Bulgaria. From 1990 to 2007, each year, between 10 000 and 33 000 children have been dropping out from school, most of them of Roma origin. This has produced a formidable and dramatically increasing contingency of young uneducated people, unprepared for the conditions of the present labour market, potentially unemployed, poor and marginalized.

Roma are the social group on the lowest educational level in Bulgaria. Qualitative data show that in 2008 **46.2%** of the Roma children at the age of 15 or more have completed upper primary school. **7.2%** of the Roma at the age of 14–18 have graduated high school in Bulgaria. **2%** are the young Roma, who have been enrolled in University or colleges at the age of 18–22; however, only **0.2%** of them obtained a degree.

The phenomenon *Roma dropouts* has been analyzed through a set of qualitative and quantitative methods and from the viewpoints of various stakeholders within the framework of the project. The authors have defined basic concepts and indicators for observation of the problem across its different stages. Also, methodological grounding for scrutinizing and developing specific policies for permanent limitation of the dropout trend among the Roma has been proposed. On the basis of data from different surveys conducted in the framework of the project (including field research in two regions – Montana and Pazardjik – with a considerable presence of Roma dropouts), the authors have formulated basic conclusions and recommendations for overcoming this issue.

The Introductory part of the book states that the target groups of the research are: *Roma pupils* of age 12–16, which is the mandatory age for schooling under the Bulgarian law; *teachers* working in schools with dominant presence of Roma and also in “integrated” schools, where the share of Roma pupils is under 50%; *parents* of Roma children; *governmental experts* in educational and other state institutions (MoES, NCCEDI, regional educational inspectorates, school principals), *community leaders* of local NGOs, local *businessmen*, as well as *municipal representatives*. The book is based on a series of rigorous surveys which have been conducted in the period 2001–2005. Also, the following number of focus groups have been conducted under the research project: – six focus groups with parents and teachers in the towns of Pazardzhik, Ihtiman and Sofia (in the district of Fakulteta); two focus groups with parents and two focus groups with pupils in mandatory school age in Sofia districts of Filipovtsi and Fakulteta.

Chapter 2 “The Approach and the *Roma Dropout* Phenomenon” presents systematic data on the percentage of Roma students from the total number of Bulgarian pupils and their distribution in schools, in different territorial districts. The authors reach the conclusion that the dropout trend depends on the economic and cultural state of society and it is an outcome from the social environment, the weak family interest in education and the cultural capital of the low-status social stratum. Dropping out is a function of state educational policies and school organization (p. 32–34). Substituting social policies with “ethnic” policies, which is the current practice, is not profitable for any ethnic group in society, the writers believe. Another core rationale of the paper is that attracting children with no will for studies is what makes sense in mandatory schooling process, because it would form a nominal level of knowledge, literacy and training among the population. The introduced series of measures to keep pupils in schools must be viewed as a necessity, not as powerlessness, is the authors’ highlight.

Chapter 3 “Educational-pedagogic causes for Roma dropouts” clarifies two major complexes of reasons for dropping out: – 1) educational, and/or 2) institutional and organizational. An educational reason is Roma pupils’ failure to learn educational content, seen as a consequence from the *insufficient command of the official (Bulgarian) language*. A survey reveals that 95.5% of the teachers from schools in 16 settlements in two territorial districts of the country believe that Roma children encounter difficulties in learning certain subjects, chiefly due to *school curriculum and manuals*. The research also discloses that Roma pupils face hardship in learning mathematics and natural sciences. According to 68.5% of the respondents, Roma children are not interested to participate in class exercises, while 80% of the questioned believe that Roma pupils are not concentrated in class at all. The researchers suppose that avoiding such situation requires introduction of mandatory preparatory class, including more official language lessons to enrich the vocabulary (p. 58).

Monitoring the quality of education in the target schools, it has been generalized that 95.7% of the parents of the Roma pupils tolerate professional profiling at school. It appears that 90% of the teachers think that training the children in a particular occupation will encourage the interest of Roma parents in their children’s education.

Another serious educational reason for dropping out is *the personality of the teacher*. According to 61.8% of the teachers-respondents, a possible expansion in intercultural competences in a multicultural environment will certainly activate the interest of Roma pupils in school. The figure of the “favourite teacher” is an essential requirement for educational activity, according to 68.8 percents of the respondents. “The favourite teacher” is described in the following way: “behaves friendly”, “understands children and shows interests in their problems”, etc. In a way, she/he fills up the emotional deficiency in children’s families, the writers speculate. However, there is a large fluctuation of teachers in schools with predominant number of Roma pupils, the data show.

The institutional and organizational issues are another complex of reasons for altering learning attitudes and habits among Roma schoolchildren. As a result from the series of in-depth interviews and focus groups, conducted with teachers and school principals, it became clear that Roma pupils prefer using computers to reading books. Launching computer labs is a prerequisite for development of the capacities of those children, the researchers discovered. As said by 79.8% of the teachers, an *improved technical base* in school, as well as the provision of food and clothes is an opportunity to encourage the interest of Roma children.

The “*boarding school*” is a full-time engagement for children when they spend the bigger part of the day in “the common space” together with the educators and teachers, therefore pupils are detached from the ghetto influence. The “boarding school” educational structure is a better way for accumulating social knowledge, stimulating educational activity among Roma pupils and forming of values and attitudes in line with 62.9% of the respondent-teachers. In addition to it, 74.4 % of the teachers consider that extracurricular and out-of-class activities spur to a great extent pupil’s attention and serve as an anti-toxin against dropping out (p. 63).

Another reason under the “institutional and organizational” complex is the complicated adaptation of Roma pupils in school and the *lack of acceptance* by their non-Roma coevals and non-Roma parents. These all lead to ethnic capsulation of the Roma schoolchildren from their Bulgarian classmates (p. 65). Those observations are viewed by the desegregation projects, aiming at incorporating Roma pupils to the ethnic majority environment. Those projects have been related to the role of the “teaching assistants”. Few alumni from the recently introduced University specialty “Lower-primary and preschool pedagogy – Roma language” have succeeded to find jobs as teaching assistants with Roma language. Instead, the MoES and the NGOs recapitulated that the governmental efforts must be re-directed towards preparation of teaching mediators with University degree in pedagogy who would have intense knowledge in pedagogical, psychological disciplines and intercultural education.

Chapter four copes with ethnic and social preconditions for dropping out. As aforementioned, the influential factors for dropping out from school are the economic and cultural state of society, the weak family interest in schooling and parental deficiency of educative style. Yet, the influence of the environment or the cultural capital, alongside with creation of traditions, lifestyle, linguistic maturity

and talents, supplemented with the dimensions of family capital could bring about a positive attitude towards school world.

Among the ethno-cultural factors for dropping out, visualized by the research team, are the *family reasons* – the educational status of parents and the fact that education is not a community value. An extra reason is the weak financial status of the family, family troubles and psychological discomfort, tensions, conflicts and even violence. A further considerable issue is assigning Roma children in school age to take care of their younger siblings and/or grandparents, or to participate in family activities for subsistence. Therefore, the authors' conclusion, based on the answers of 87% of the respondents, is that educative work with Roma parents would be of great importance in enhancing the interest of their offspring in school.

Lack of textbooks, notebooks, food and clothes to attend school are among the most frequently encountered problems, identified by the researchers as outcomes from *poverty*. Poverty has become a huge economic reason, leading to dropping out from educational framework. The social and political preconditions for that is the systematic dependence on “social aids”, which generates the so-called “poverty culture” (Murray, 1984). The abyss of poverty unambiguously causes the so-called vicious circle: the low incomes and the lack of living space forces Roma adults to seek for seasonable jobs. The frequent migrations of Roma parents have taught Roma in school age to take care of their younger siblings and to work for subsistence. Due to the number of domestic responsibilities and the lack of clothes to attend school, those young Roma drop out and remain illiterate or unschooled. Thus, they have no other opportunity but marry. On the other hand, illiteracy leads to inability to qualify on the labour market in active work age, which itself leads to criminalization, participation in the “grey” economy, pliability to money-lending services, etc. *Personal and psychological issues* are also taken into account for dropping out from school and those are constant restraints; negative I-image, attitudes and expectations; sense of failure and alienation from the cumulated school experience so far, etc.

“*The specific Roma culture*”, leaning on oral tradition, in the context of which school is perceived as an institution, destabilizing socialization and family relations, is also a major ethno-cultural factor for the disastrous tendency for dropping out. 72% of the consulted teachers in the survey support the notion that early marriages is the core motive for dropping out in 5<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> grade; early marriages as activities, deriving from kin tradition and division of gender roles.

In adjunct to it, *bilingualism* of Roma children is seen by the scientists as one more obstacle which brings about difficulties in speaking the official language and also in the further affiliation with national institutions. Roma language must be volunteer and supplementary language, not a substituting tongue because the latter would turn it into a factor of segregation, the researchers believe.

Chapter five gives a thorough insight on poverty issue among Roma dropouts by presenting a survey in the regions of Montana (in North-Western Bulgaria) and Pazardjik (in Central Bulgaria). The survey just proves that there is a considerable connection between dropping out from school system and poverty in predominant part of Roma household in these two regions. The reasons are twofold: at one hand, education demands more household expenses; on the other hand, education deprives the household from children's labour (p. 109).

In chapter six, titled “The institutions and Roma dropouts: policies and practices”, the analyzers provide readers with a resourceful study on documents and decisive political programs and actions aiming at integrating Roma in education and in society, in general. The objective of the presented political actions is to neutralize the impact of the factors (either economic or social, ethnocultural, personal or administrative) leading to dropping out from school. Nevertheless, the review of those governmental documents demonstrates that none of them announced a definition of „educational integration”. The authors also indicate the inefficiently used resource of local actors, mainly municipalities, in combating the dropout trend. That is why the research-team gave opportunity to teachers, representing the functional level “below” to assess the implemented state policies from their point of view.

Chapter seven “Roma dropouts from school: the other experience” exposes the stances of experts in educational integration of Roma minority and also of scholars, exploring Roma topic, such as Ilona Tomova (Centre for Population Studies), Yosif Nunev (Ministry of Education and Science) and Maya Grekova (Department of Sociology, Sofia University). The chapter releases their standpoints on some of the following issues:

- Is there an organization which has completed a thorough and accessible archive about Roma dropouts?
- When, for the first time, the issue of Roma dropout is seen as dramatic and in which regions of Bulgaria that problem is in a striking phase?
- At what age Roma pupils most frequently drop out and in what type of schools (specialized for pupils with disabilities, boarding schools or integrated school with Roma quota)?

The experts also answer to the next research inquiries:

- To what extent the value system of various Roma subgroups has exercised an impact on dropping out?
- Which way Bulgarian counterparts could become aware of the necessity for educational integration of Roma in school and in class?
- Which municipalities have shown positive outcomes in that direction?
- Which way the vicious practice of enrolling Roma children in specialized schools for pupils with mental disabilities could be ceased?

The consulted experts and scholars are also asked to give insight on the concept of the “vicious circle” of Roma destiny, which reveals how low qualification causes unemployment leading to poverty, and thus to criminality. The insights of the experts are grounded on research experience, surveys and projects they have participated in. Tomova, Grekova and Nunev share their views on the new practice to involve the parents of Roma children in the schooling process and on the ways to motivate them to send their children regularly to classes. In the same chapter seven the authors offer an assessment of diverse positive practices and initiatives, referring to educational integration in Eastern Europe and USA.

The conclusive section eight “Roma dropouts: more conclusions and recommendations” puts forward a remedy – measures and policies – to tackle the dropout issue. Some of the proposed measures are: gaining command of the official language of the country; compliance with curriculum, accentuating with awareness on Roma pupils’ specific interests (such as music, dances, sports and early occupational profiling); extracurricular and out-of-class activities (the idea has been supported by 57.3% of the consulted teachers in schools with a sufficient number of Roma kids); supplementary qualification of teachers in intercultural education; involvement of Roma parents in the schooling process; distributing aids to Roma children, such as educational kits, clothes, snacks, provision of transport; child allowances, social aid and involvement of the Roma parents in NGO activities.

The entire text contains of brand-new information on the discussed matters and particular opinions, voiced by respondents during the field research, are inserted. The positions of various municipalities on the dropout issue, collected by university students, have been cited. At the end, the full set of research tools of the project, together with a number of useful supplements and an abundant list of literature in the field are presented.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### **Datasets on Internet:**

International Comparative Data Set on Roma Education – 2008 for the countries under the Decade of Roma inclusion

### **Reports of various organizations:**

„European Institute – Romani Baxt – Centre for modernizing of policies”, Sofia: 2007,  
„Defining indicators for current monitoring for evaluation”

**List of abbreviations and clarifications:**

MoES – Ministry of Education and Science  
NCCEDI – National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues at the Council of Ministers  
Fakulteta and Filipovtsi – neighbourhoods in Sofia, largely populated with Roma people

Svetlana Hristova

**ION CHELCEA, *Agricultura la români de la origine până la jumătatea secolului XX*, Editura Universității din Pitești, 2010, 322 p.**

Cartea profesorului Ion Chelcea (1902–1991) *Agricultura la români de la origini și până la jumătatea secolului XX* reprezintă sinteza muncii de mai multe decenii a autorului în zona etnografiei satului și lumii agrare românești. Cartea constituie o lucrare magistrală care depășește barierele unei abordări unidimensionale, constituind o strălucită sinteză de informații etnografice, istorice și economice, bazate pe o documentare îndelungată și susținută (în text sunt prezente peste 700 de trimiteri bibliografice), care dă măsura unei preocupări continue în cercetarea satului românesc și a evoluției sale de-a lungul istoriei.

Volumul de față, publicat la aproape trei decenii de la consolidarea primei sale forme, se înscrie în categoria cărților-mărturie despre viața poporului român, adevărate documente sociale, prin prisma sintezei realizate și a surselor care au stat la baza acesteia. Autorul ilustrează evoluția practicilor și obiceiurilor agricole de pe actualul teritoriu al României, plecând de la perioada preistorică și până la deceniile cinci și șase ale secolului al XX-lea, punând accentul pe perioada de după tratatul de pace de la Adrianopol (1829), care, prin impunerea *Regulamentului Organic* în Țara Românească (1831) și Moldova (1832), a dus la modificarea radicală a realităților agrare.

Apariția acestui volum a fost posibilă prin implicarea prof. univ. dr. Septimiu Chelcea și a conf. univ. dr. Iancu Filipescu, ce au îngrijit această ediție, semnând totodată și postfața cărții, precum și a conf. univ. dr. Cornel Constantinescu, ce a facilitat publicarea lucrării la Editura Universității din Pitești.

Cartea este structurată în opt capitole tematice, precedate de o *introducere*, care prezintă sintetic contribuțiile unor nume sonore ca Ion Ionescu de la Brad (1818–1821), Bogdan Petriceicu-Hașdeu (1836–1907), C. S. Nicolaescu-Plopșor (1900–1968) și H. H. Stahl (1901–1991) la studiul agriculturii și al vieții țăranilor. Tot în introducere, profesorul Ion Chelcea propune și o schemă de periodicizare a evoluției agriculturii: *agricultura primitivă* (bazată pe folosirea plugurilor cu brăzdar de corn de animal), *agricultura realizată cu ajutorul plugului cu brăzdar de fier de tip preistoric* (450 î.Hr.–300 d.Hr), *agricultura feudală* (folosirea pe scară largă a plugului cu brăzdar de fier asimetric), *agricultura bazată pe plugul de fabrică în întregime din fier* (1865–1944), *agricultura mecanizată*.

Primul capitol al cărții (*De la culesul în natură la plugul cu brăzdar de fier*) prezintă trecerea de la activitățile de preagricole (cules, vânatoare, pescuit) la primele forme de agricultură primitivă. „Formele agricole incipiente se practicau pe suprafețe cu totul reduse, pe lângă casă și cu unelte rudimentare. Femeia era cea care făcea *agricultura*, ea fiind prin natura ei mai sedentară. Ea întreținea focul, îngrijea copiii și tot ea era cea care culegea semințele și spicele unor plante. Aduse în locuință, semințele căzute întâmplător vor încolți și astfel se va îndeplini *miracolul* a ceea ce mai târziu se va numi *agricultură* [...]. Mult simplificat aceștia ar fi primii pași în lucrarea pământului”<sup>1</sup>. Primele

<sup>1</sup> Ion Chelcea, *Agricultura la români de la origini până la jumătatea secolului XX*, Editura Universității din Pitești, 2010, p. 28.